

Access to Health and Social Care Services In Sheffield

Key issues from April 2023

In April 2023 we received 129 pieces of feedback and have been hearing about a range of views from those who have accessed health and care services in Sheffield. Particular highlights have included patient care and treatment received whilst attending GP appointments however, less positive experiences came from those who had been struggling to get through to their GP on the phone or had experienced difficulties when trying to book appointments. We have also heard from those who have accessed hospital care and treatment and experiences of dental care.

Accessing GP services

In April, 60 pieces of feedback were received relating to 21 different GP practices across Sheffield. Over half of those we heard from, reported positive feedback stating their care was efficient and supportive. For instance, one patient who had undergone a recent medication review described staff as being friendly and engaged, had listened, did not rush them and gave excellent advice.

Some people had a very different experience of their practice. Difficulties when trying to book appointments has still been an overarching theme; two people described the current booking systems as “not fit for purpose” and many others expressed feelings of frustration when trying to get through to their surgeries on the phone. One patient stated the current system of waiting in long queues does not support their mental health. When finally getting through to reception staff, five patients were advised to go to the walk-in centre as their practices were at full capacity and could not be offered urgent appointments. Three patients were told to book their appointments online but this method was not accessible for them. Furthermore, a deaf patient stated they used to be able to contact their practice via email but as this wasn’t offered anymore had to rely on their relative to phone on their behalf.



“The doctor made a home visit and actively listened to what I said. I felt listened to and respected.”



“I have been trying to get an appointment to see or speak to a GP for 3 weeks.”

Four patients told us they felt that they were not being listened to by their GP when trying to access a referral for mental health services. Two of these people felt that they had to be assertive in order to receive the referral they needed.



Another individual told us they were unhappy with the continuity of care for an ongoing health condition. They wanted to keep track of treatments and prognoses, and get their health headed in the right direction but felt that seeing different locums wasn't helping them.

Finally, we heard of one person's experience when registering with a new GP practice. Staff were insisting that they needed to present ID, but the patient explained to them that this wasn't the case. Staff were persistent, but finally agreed to register them without it.

"GP's need to understand that people don't have time for this - I work full time and cannot afford time to sit waiting for someone to answer."

Treatment in hospital

We heard from 24 individuals who shared their experiences of hospital services. Just under half of these people provided praise for the care and treatment they had received at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals. Positive feedback related to many various areas including Surgery, Neurology, Weston Park, Urology, and Chesterman I. One patient stated they were feeling overwhelmed by the care and professional attitude they had experienced and were made to feel very comfortable during their stay.



Two people told us there were delays to their planned surgery times. Both initially thought that the surgery would take place quite quickly, however one person was still waiting 12 months later and the other was told it could be up to an 18-month wait. One of these people stated they were experiencing significant daily pain as a result of the surgery not going ahead when planned.

"I was look after from start to finish with such compassion and care. Thank you very much for your support."

We have continued to provide advice to those who have contacted us because they have wanted to raise a concern or make a complaint. In total, we advised 5 people of the steps that they could take. Key themes mainly linked to their or their relative's experiences of care and treatment received.

One person reported the reception desk at Huntsman was now only open for a few hours each day. When it was closed, a telephone was put in place



for visitors to be able to contact staff if they needed any help. The relative stated that this wasn't accessible as they were hard of hearing. They could not see any posters displaying the reception opening and closing times which would have been helpful for them.



Dentists

This month we have seen a reduction in the number of enquiries we receive about dentistry. Three people got in touch to tell us they were struggling to access dental care. One person had been told there was a 2- 3 year waiting list at 5 different practices they had telephoned; they were also in need of a check-up for their 3 children. Another said they had looked on the NHS 'find a dentist' webpage, but said the information was inaccurate and very misleading. They had contacted three practices who all stated they were taking on new patients, but when they spoke with staff, they discovered this actually meant they were just added to their lengthy waiting lists.

"The NHS dentist website provides inaccurate information giving false hope!"



One patient praised their dentist when they experienced a dental emergency. The practice was quick to offer an emergency appointment to assess the situation and made another appointment later that day to provide urgent treatment.

"I can't believe how hard it is in this day and age to find an NHS dentist! I can't afford to pay privately."

After a visit to Charles Clifford Dental Hospital with their autistic child, one parent commented that they found the experience difficult. They stated it was totally unsuitable for autistic patients - staff didn't seem to understand what autistic people needed in order to access treatment and communication was poor.

Sheffield Community Champion Insights

Community Champions are continuing to hear about the impact of high food prices, rising rent, and rising debt on people's health and wellbeing. They are speaking to more people showing signs of depression or being unable to cope, and are increasingly signposting people to mental health services such as IAPT, as well as mental health charities.



Long Covid and diabetes are also becoming key concerns for some people, with more conversations focusing on these conditions and what services, treatments and preventative measures can help people.

Finally, conversations are revealing that people don't always know about the different professionals at a GP practice who might be able to help – such as pharmacists and nurse practitioners. More information about these roles could help people find the right route to access care"



This summary of key issues is a snapshot of what we are hearing about. We want to reflect the experiences of people who share their stories with us, and we hope that it can help services, and commissioners of services, by indicating potential areas of focus. It is based on:

- Experiences that members of the public share with us through our information and advice service
- Feedback shared by voluntary sector partners who support clients in Sheffield
- Stories shared through Care Opinion, who we've partnered with to provide a feedback-sharing platform
- Feedback shared from the Sheffield Community Champion Volunteers

Want to share your own experience? Get in touch

Online: healthwatchsheffield.co.uk

Phone: 0114 253 6688

Email: info@healthwatchsheffield.co.uk

Text: 07415 2496

