

Access to Health and Social Care Services in Sheffield

Key issues from February 2023

In February 2023 we received 104 pieces of feedback related to health and social care services in Sheffield. This month, key themes have linked to a variety of different issues with GP surgeries and appointments. We have received feedback related to hospital care and treatment and also mental health services. We have provided advice and information to those struggling to access NHS dentistry and to those who were in need of urgent dental care.

GPs

In February we received 39 pieces of feedback relating to 21 different GP practices in Sheffield. Roughly half of the people we heard from reported positive feedback. Key themes included excellent patient care, staff who had listened and were friendly and polite.

A large proportion of the less positive feedback we received related to issues with **telephone appointments**:

- Reasonable adjustments were not provided for one autistic patient when making a GP appointment. They were told by staff that the appointment could take place anytime between early afternoon and early evening. Their carer asked if it could be made for a specific time instead due to their needs, but the receptionist refused and said that this was all that they could do.
- Another patient stated their GP had asked to speak with them about their test results so booked in a telephone appointment. However, due to not being given a specific time by their GP, they missed the call. No attempt of a further call was made resulting in them having to make another appointment.
- A third patient booked a telephone appointment for a specific time with their GP, but they were unable to answer the call as it came 30 minutes before it was scheduled. They called the surgery at the time the appointment should have taken place, but were greeted with a recorded message stating the surgery was closed.



“I have had nothing but help from everyone in the practice, from reception to GPs. Always answer my questions fully and promptly.”



We also heard about some other issues. One individual received a call from their practice to inform them their booked face-to-face appointment would now need to be rearranged due to staff sickness. After the call, they were disappointed to receive a text message stating they had failed to turn up to the appointment with a copy of a Did Not Attend letter attached.

Finally, seven patients reported practice staff were impolite on the phone or face-to-face. One patient stated: "Extremely defensive reception team members that don't or can't listen or understand simple requests. Front line staff definitely need retraining. Poor service all round."

"I have found the staff to invariably be rude and unhelpful, my most recent experience being no exception."

Hospitals – unequal experiences

22 people shared their experiences of hospital inpatient and outpatient care. Thirteen people provided praise for the care and treatment they had received from staff including at Jessops, ENT, Colonoscopy and Brearly ward.



One carer shared concerns relating to the person they were supporting after they had received an invite to attend routine breast screening. When the carer called to book the appointment, they were told the patient could not attend due to being a wheelchair user, but was left feeling confused as they hadn't received a full explanation as to why. We contacted the breast screening team and a member of staff promptly contacted the carer. An appointment has now been booked for the individual to undertake a screening this month.

"What an amazing ward and team who work tirelessly each day and care for their patients in challenging situations."

One patient informed us that after misplacing a letter containing their appointment details they telephoned the hospital to ask for a replacement letter posting out. During the call, staff asked the patient to write the details of the appointment down instead. The patient explained this wasn't possible - they were blind and needed another letter resending but the staff member continued to ask them again to write the information down. A relative intervened and finally the staff member agreed to repost the letter.



Memory Clinic

A patient with dementia reported they were referred to the Memory Clinic by their GP last year, but were still on the waiting list. They expressed concerns that they felt completely alone and wanted the right medication so that they could maintain their independence for longer.

"More resources are desperately needed to help the ever growing number of people with dementia"

Mental Health Services

One person told us they were feeling disappointed due to the high levels of staff turnover they had experienced when accessing mental health support. They stated they had been seen by many different staff members resulting in a lack of consistency with care and treatment.

We also heard from several people who shared concerns about the level of **follow up communication** from mental health services:

- Feedback was shared by one individual whose medication had been changed a few weeks ago. They stated this was making them feel worse. They informed us a number of weeks had passed by but they still hadn't heard anything from their care coordinator or any other staff members to see how they were getting on.
- One carer also expressed concerns, stating their relative was not getting the support and care they needed. They were told they would be contacted shortly to follow up on the treatment plan in place and discuss next steps, but a number of weeks later they reported they still had not received a call.
- Another service user made a complaint but said nothing came of it. They had tried to contact the service manager on a few occasions and were told they would receive a call but never heard anything from them.

"I've been passed from pillar to post with different workers and trying to engage but how can I when there's no stability."



Dentists

This month we heard from seven people who were seeking information and advice about accessing NHS dental care. Four of these people had not seen a dentist for a significant period of time and had struggled to find any dentists who were accepting new patients.

Three of the people were needing urgent care and treatment due to severe dental issues. One breastfeeding mum told us she had not been able to access her free NHS treatment and was in need of urgent care. Another person had contacted over 10 local practices trying to seek help. They were needing treatment for cracked teeth and a broken denture which was affecting their ability to eat, but were not able to get the help they needed.

We continue to advise people if they are experiencing pain, ask to be triaged by any local dentist or alternatively phone NHS 111.

"I haven't seen a dentist for the past 7 years but was shocked when trying to get one as there is a 2-3yr waiting list in place."





Sheffield Community Champions share their insights

This month, Sheffield Community Champion volunteers heard how new arrivals in the country aren't always aware if they are eligible for free services. Our champions spoke with one woman who was new to England, who was not aware that children under 16 and pregnant women qualified for free prescription medication. She was very pleased and said she will go to her surgery for more information.

The Champions' latest monthly bulletin contained links and information regarding cancer screening schedules, and volunteers are spreading the message in the community. They held a group discussion at Zest about how it is important to have a routine cervical smear for women over 25. One of the women present was unsure about having a regular check, but after the conversation with the champions and explaining how important it is to prevent and detect early stage cancer, she agreed: "Now I understand why we have to do this test, I will contact GP to book an appointment to do my cervical smear test".

Champions are also continuing to hear about the impact of the cost of living crisis on people's wellbeing. They have had quite a few conversations about mental health this month and many were linked to the cost of living crisis and the impact it has having on people's mental health. For example, they spoke with one woman who is working 2 part time jobs and is still struggling to afford gas and electric top ups. She talked about her anxiety if we have anymore cold weather.

For more information about the Community Champions scheme, see [our last monthly briefing on our website](#).

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

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