

Access to Health and Social Care Services In Sheffield

Key issues from June 2023

In June 2023, we received 96 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 and hospital care and treatment. We have also heard from members of the public who shared feedback about Sheffield Adult Autism and Neurodevelopment Service (SAANS), mental health services and NHS dentistry.

Accessing GP services

In June, 47 pieces of feedback were received relating to 20 different GP practices across Sheffield. Roughly two-thirds of those we heard from reported positive experiences. Some patients told us their practices were busy but they were still getting the right support. Lots of people commented that staff had been professional and appointments were on time. Patients also noted they had received good advice and were referred to the appropriate services they needed.

Some patients had a very different experience of their practice and we have continued to hear about difficulties trying to get appointments and lengthy phone queues in place.

Five people also told us they didn't feel supported by their GP. One person had been to see their GP on numerous occasions due to health concerns but felt as though they were being 'fobbed off' and not listened to. Another patient raised concerns with their GP about the poor treatment they had experienced but felt that they were unconcerned and complacent about this feedback. Furthermore, we heard from someone who needed an urgent dental referral but their GP refused. They said they would have to try and seek help from another healthcare professional to get the treatment they needed.

After experiencing a bereavement, an autistic patient was told by their GP they would be provided with support but this didn't transpire. They said this had damaged their trust in the service and with healthcare staff.



"Fantastic advice and guidance and the support is above and beyond!"

"The GP was very clear and friendly"

"I have experienced new symptoms but they don't even bother to look at my notes."

A couple of people experienced issues with reception staff. For example, one person said they had requested to see a GP, but discovered they had been booked in to see a nurse instead; they said this was not appropriate. Another stated the poor communication they experienced made them feel very uncomfortable and anxious.



“Why have information displayed for patients that is irrelevant and out of date?”

Finally, a member of the public contacted us as the patient intercom system was not being used by their practice. Staff were calling patients instead, but as the individual was hard of hearing, they didn't know when it was their turn to be seen. The same person also stated some information on the patient notice board was out of date. A large proportion of information related to expired COVID-19 procedures.

Feedback related to hospital care

We heard from 14 individuals who shared their experiences of hospital services this month. Eight of these people provided praise for the care and treatment they had received at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals. Positive feedback shared related to Endoscopy, A&E and Same Day Emergency Care.



Praise was also provided to Outpatient Phlebotomy. The patient said they arrived as soon as the department opened and although they were number 17 in the queue, they were seen very quickly. The staff member they spoke to was friendly and made them feel at ease.

“Staff are amazing and caring beyond reproach.”

A local disability group contacted us as they had received feedback from a service user about booking patient transport. The patient was unable to book transport themselves but had been refused support from department staff. We contacted the hospital who told us their policy encourages patients to book their own transport as this ensures their needs will be fully met and understood by the provider however, clerical staff will book transport for patients on their behalf if they are unable to so.

One person said when experiencing a long wait in A&E, they were grateful to be offered a drink and something to eat. They asked for a gluten-free option but staff said there were only sandwiches available. After explaining the situation to a different staff member, they were finally provided with some gluten-free soup.



A blind patient contacted us to provide feedback related to the 'My Pathway' app. They were struggling to know when their appointments were scheduled as the only information they had was on the app. The patient stated they would much prefer to have this information communicated over the phone which would prevent them from having to rely on a relative for support.

"I don't like the app, its not very good for people with disabilities."

Comments were made by a group of people about emailed password-protected letters – they had experienced difficulties trying to access them causing a lot of frustration. People also said it was also frustrating if they missed a hospital call and no message was left. When they tried to call the number back, it went through to the main switchboard so they were unsure which department had called.



Dentists

This month 8 people got in touch to ask for advice or to provide feedback about NHS dentistry. 4 people who contacted us, were experiencing significant pain due to broken and cracked teeth, abscesses and mouth swelling. As they did not have a regular dentist, they were unsure of what to do.

"I am in so much pain , but I don't know what to do."

One family told us their dentist was no longer treating NHS patients due to undertaking private work. Eventually, they found a new dentist but discovered it was two bus journeys away. They said they couldn't afford the cost of the fares to attend.



Another parent told us their child needed braces but was informed they were not eligible for NHS treatment and would need to pay privately, which they could not afford .

Sheffield Adult Autism and Neurodevelopment Service (SAANS)

We heard from four people who wanted to share their experiences of SAANS. One individual with an autism diagnosis was referred to SAANS by their GP for some support. After attending their appointment, they received a letter stating they would be discharged from the service as they were well-spoken during their visit and did not require any support. They said they had been

"Take ages to give you an appointment and they will leave you for years with nothing."

misunderstood and said the service really needed to offer more support to people.

Another person stated they didn't feel listened to and said staff were not very understanding. They also said they didn't like attending and wished there were other services in Sheffield available instead.

One person on the waiting list for an autism assessment, said there was a significant amount of paperwork they needed to complete, including different questionnaires and pre-assessments. They said this was incredibly overwhelming and may put people off from accessing the service.

Another individual provided praise for a reception staff member who had provided clear communication over the phone, was polite and friendly, and went above and beyond to help with an issue.



"The receptionist I spoke with was super polite and friendly. We need more receptionist like that!"

Mental health services

This month, four people shared their experiences of accessing mental health services. One individual said their appointment with recovery services made them feel 'disempowered, not listened to, and a worthless burden'. They also said staff had not demonstrated any empathy or compassion.

Another member of the public shared a very detailed account of the issues they had experienced over a number of years. For example, when they contacted Single Point of Access (SPA) in a mental health crisis, they were asked to leave a message and did not receive contact until 14 hours later. They also said they waited months for support but did not hear anything so contacted the service again; they were told they had been 'lost in the system'. They also stated on one occasion when attending an appointment, the clinician would not accept their childhood experiences were not the root cause of their mental health illness leading to further stress.



"Instead of hearing me, they continued to push the narrative that there was something I was hiding about my childhood."

Community pharmacies and medication

We have heard about medication shortages resulting in people having to phone around other pharmacies to try and locate stock. People also said it is unhelpful that pharmacies do not understand each other's stock levels as they were unable to direct people to alternative supplies.



Comments were also made about medication packaging – people told us the same type of medication can look visually different due to differences in manufacturer’s branding. We heard this can cause confusion, for example, if people do not read, they may recognise their medications based on how the packaging looks rather than what it says. It would be helpful if doctors or pharmacists could tell patients that the brand had been changed when people collect their prescriptions.



Sheffield Community Champion Insights

The Community Champions are continuing to hear about the impact of high food prices, rising rent, and debt and how this is affecting people’s health and wellbeing. They are speaking to more people who are struggling to make ends meet and have been signposting people to services for help, such as the Household Support Fund, mental health services, various charities, and benefit and employment support.

“I found the support was a great help just as I was starting to despair.”

During a recent women’s session, the Champions heard from one member who had not attended a cervical screening before due to feeling nervous and not understanding the process. The Champions talked through the stages and what to expect at a screening, this enabled the individual to make an informed decision to attend. As a result of this conversation, the Champions are now in the process of organising a cancer awareness session to go through the importance of early cancer detection and what signs and symptoms to look out for.



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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