

Access to health and social care services in Sheffield – key issues from March 2021

What are we hearing?

In March 2021, we heard a greater range of experiences than normal. Rather than identifying trends where people have faced similar issues, this roundup shows a more divided picture of either very positive or negative experiences. It is unclear whether this is due to varying quality levels across the city's services, or if it is simply indicative of the fact that a service which works well for one person may not be the most appropriate type of support for another.

GPs

This month we've heard over 30 stories about people who visited their GP in Sheffield, for reasons other than receiving a Covid-19 vaccine. Most experiences (around 25) were extremely positive, with people praising caring doctors, and efficient administrative procedures.

For the people who had a less positive experience, this was mostly about getting an appointment in the first place. 3 people told us they're finding it impossible to get through on the phone – the line just keeps ringing. Another 3 said when they did get through, they felt the reception staff treated them unkindly and would not make them an appointment.

Additional issues we heard about GPs include 1 person who told us that when they registered with a new GP, the form asked a lot of seemingly unnecessary questions about immigration status. As well as being potentially off-putting to some people who need treatment, it was unclear who had to answer these questions. We also heard that front line staff at one GP practice weren't aware of the procedures around Shared Care Records when changing practice.

- Front line staff are not always aware of what information is needed for someone to register with a GP. For some people, for instance those without a permanent address, this can make it hard to access care. To support patients and staff to be more aware of people's rights, we are working to support the rollout of [Groundswell's 'My Right to Healthcare' cards](#) locally.
- Healthwatch England have produced a new report about [GP access during Covid-19](#). Many issues we've raised through these monthly roundups are examined in more detail there.



"Excellent the doctors really listen and help and understand when you are not too good at explaining things."



"over 200 calls now and still no joy."

Mental health services

We have heard hugely varied experiences of mental health services this month. Of 3 people who spoke about the Single Point of Access (SPA) service, 1 said the service had really helped them to access help and support, while 2 said they didn't feel heard of understood.

"Someone who understood, listened, gave advice"

One person shared a negative experience of the Recovery Team, saying that they had to repeat their medical history as well as their communication difficulties with each new person they saw. A different person shared a great experience across their entire mental health system, including that specific team.



We have previously reported that a respite bed at Wainwright Crescent has been closed during the pandemic, and the people who use it have not felt that this change has been communicated clearly to them. This month we have been asked again about whether the decision to close this bed is permanent or if it will reopen once Covid-19 restrictions ease.

"emails ignored and questions not answered"

We are in conversation with Sheffield Health and Social Care Trust and Sheffield City Council about mental health respite provision in the city, We are currently awaiting an update from SHSC on the plan for the future of the bed at Wainwright, as well as discussions about other respite options.



Communication and involvement has also been an issue for another family. A person who had very positive experiences of inpatient care was discharged quite suddenly without any consultation with their family carer. Their mental health is now deteriorating as other services do not seem suitable for them, and their carer says that staff will not listen to them about what could help improve things.

"been continually left out of conversations about his care"

Experiences of making a complaint

This month people have been sharing their experiences of making a complaint. One person told us they had heard nothing from their GP since making a complaint, and felt discouraged by the lack of communication.

Two people told us about their complaints about Sheffield Health and Social Care Trust. One said they have submitted a complaint but communication around this has been very slow, even with the help of an advocate who is regularly chasing it up. Another person has had an outstanding complaint for many months now, and said they have needed to prompt the service at every stage to reply.



Covid vaccine

We continue to hear good news about the local rollout of Covid-19 vaccines. 10 positive stories came our way this month, praising friendly staff and volunteers, and the efficiency of the service. We also heard one positive experience of someone who needed a home visit for the vaccine, and were pleased when the team could come to their house to administer the jab.



We heard about 3 issues people had experienced. 1 person said they were unhappy with social distancing measures at their GP when they went for their vaccine. 2 others said they had been missed off the list for their first dose. One was aged in their 70s, and the other was receiving chemotherapy.

“All the people on duty [...] were a credit to themselves and the NHS.”

One person was overall happy with their experience, but shared some ideas of what could have improved it. They said that volunteers were friendly and helpful, but it was still a bit unclear about where they should go. They also said that some self-care information about how to manage side effects would have been helpful.

Hospitals

We heard some really positive experiences of hospital treatment this month. One person praised the staff at the Northern General Hospital during their procedure. We also heard about 4 people who were treated at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital. The radiology department was especially highlighted as a place where staff went above and beyond to ensure patient comfort.

“I was treated with dignity, respect and sensitivity throughout my visit.”

Urgent care

Some people who needed urgent treatment this month received conflicting information when they tried to seek help. Two people who had paid for private medical treatment had worrying symptoms afterwards, and received conflicting advice about whether they could access NHS treatment for this or would need to return to their private provider.



Another person contacted 111 for an urgent problem, and were directed to the Walk-In Centre for help. However, the Walk-In Centre said they could not help and sent them away – the individual said this meant a difficult and expensive journey which got them no closer to receiving treatment.

“I contact 111 and they say you need A-E but you go and they say contact thornbury or your consultant”

Dentistry

We continue to hear from a lot of people each month who are unable to access NHS dentistry. One person shared that they are unable to get their relative, who has complex health needs, the treatment required at Charles Clifford Dental Hospital and may have to pay for private treatment.

We have also heard from 13 other people who were trying to access care at a dental practice. They had a mixture of urgent and routine needs, but found it impossible to get an appointment. Those with urgent needs often said they were not triaged for care despite phoning many dentists. Many also said that practices were often willing to offer them a private appointment, but not an NHS one.

We are speaking directly to regional commissioners about this issue, and continue to highlight where dental practices are not triaging patients with urgent needs.

"I have contacted around 30 with only one offering to put me on a waiting list"



Sensory impairments

Many of our recent reports have highlighted issues facing people with sensory impairments – especially Deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL). This month we have been especially pleased to hear some positive stories from individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or visually impaired.

A person who described themselves as “extremely hard of hearing” said they had a good experience at the Charles Clifford Dental Hospital – staff changed their face coverings to transparent visors so that the patient could lip read.

Another story shared with us highlighted some good practice at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals – a deaf person who used BSL was going to receive inpatient treatment in hospital. Before they were admitted, the hospital staff made sure to book daily appointments with an interpreter for the duration of their stay.

We heard also heard some positive feedback about Sheffield City Council’s sensory impairment team. This individual has received fairly regular calls to check in, and one of the social workers gave them a mobile number to use if they needed support, so they didn’t have to go through the First Contact team.

"the staff became extremely helpful, one of them got a visor for my wife, and one for herself which made things much better"



Learning Disabilities

This month we spoke to several people with a Learning Disability about their experiences. One person said they have not felt supported by services throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and that accessing information they could understand has been a major issue.

Another person said they hadn't been given clear information about aftercare following a procedure. They got an infection and didn't know who to phone, which made the infection worse. They would like information to be written down for them, or given one phone number they could ring.

"The information given has definitely been very confusing over the whole pandemic [...] People with learning disabilities have been forgotten about"

Test and Trace

We have received feedback from one individual about the Test and Trace service. They told us that they weren't able to get through on the 119 telephone line – there was an automated message, but instead of getting through to speak to a person it hung up. They tried to phone many times with the same result.

They also told us that the home sampling kit isn't easy for some people to use as the booklet that comes with it is not in an accessible format. They did think this would be less of an issue if there was someone you could easily speak to if you had questions.



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

Want to share your own experience? Get in touch

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