

Access to health and social care services in Sheffield – key issues from November 2020

What are we hearing?

This month we continue to hear about access to primary care, including seasonal flu clinics. We have also heard more about inpatient mental health care, where the feeling of not being listened to is becoming an ongoing theme. We have spoken to another Deaf person who found it difficult to communicate with hospital staff, and have taken a closer look at the local variance in care home visiting policies. We found that many people still aren't able to interact with their relatives in care homes in a meaningful way, which can cause a great deal of distress for both residents and their loved ones.


GPs

We've heard a mixture of experiences from people who've visited their GP this month. Over a dozen people spoke about how impressed they were with the treatment they received and the attitude of the staff. Almost as many people reported an issue, though.

Where people had problems, they mostly related to communication and technology. One person told us about an appointment booking line which cut out so you couldn't speak to anyone, while others told us about waiting over an hour on the phone to make appointments. One person felt that a face to face appointment was the only appropriate option for them but they weren't offered this, and someone else couldn't access the online prescription ordering system, leaving them without their medication.

Carers

Another issue related to GPs came from a carer, who had complex health issues of her own. Through multiple referrals and tests, she wasn't able to see the same GP and she felt this lack of continuity made her experience much more difficult.

 This month we published our report into the experiences of carers accessing GP services. The experience above echoes the story of many other carers across the city. We've made recommendations to help local services improve. [Read the report.](#)



"Always get great treatment here. Staff are friendly"

"Each time I call practice it takes 45 to 60 min for them to answer"



"Carers [...] really do need continuity with a GP who knows them & their health problems well"

Flu jabs

We've heard mostly positive stories about going for flu jabs, with 9 people talking about Covid-secure GP practices, short waiting times, and even one flu jab administered in a car so the person didn't have to enter the waiting room. We did also hear from one person who has been shielding – they haven't yet been offered a flu jab, and their GP told them there were too many people on the eligibility list.



“Staff were all wearing PPE. The actual immunisation took seconds and the staff were lovely”

Dentists

We continue to hear from people who are having difficulty accessing dentistry. We heard from 4 people about this in November. One of the key questions is which dental problems are considered urgent and should be treated, and which cannot for the time being.



“Been trying to get an appointment for over a year, but can't get one”

One person with gum disease who needs regular check ups said they haven't been seen for over a year, but was told their condition wasn't urgent. Someone whose dentures had broken had been told this wasn't urgent either, but they were struggling to eat without them. This person did phone several local dentists for advice but were not triaged by any of the practices, despite Local Dental Network guidance.

“Called NHS 111, but the answering machine said that issues regarding dentures do not count as an emergency”

Each of these individuals considered their issue to be urgent so they were confused that they were unable to be treated. Clearer public communications about what dentists can and cannot offer during the pandemic could help them.

Maternity services

We were contacted by a community sector partner, who raised concerns that there may be a gap in maternity services. They told us that the current provision of maternity support does not always work for women from BAME communities. We hope to explore this further.



Access to services for Deaf people

One person told us that staff they interacted with at the Teaching Hospitals didn't seem aware of how to access a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter when they needed one, and didn't seem to know about video interpreting. They also told us that the information that was given to them when they were discharged was not accessible to Deaf people, as it was full of medical jargon. This is just one piece of feedback but relates to ongoing issues we've shared about access to BSL interpreters and accessible information.



Inpatient mental health

We have heard about 2 experiences this month. For one person who spent time in an inpatient mental health ward, they did feel like the inpatient setting helped them to get well enough to go home, but they think that home treatment from the beginning would have worked better for them.

The other person spoke about a range of issues - they said they weren't able to see any consultants or doctors for over a week, and that decisions about their care were being made without their involvement. They also felt that staff didn't listen to their concerns or take them seriously.



"They have [decided on a treatment plan] without informing me and have not assessed me properly [...I am] very frustrated as I feel trapped and not listened to."



A closer look at: Care home visiting

Last month we reported that visiting guidance in care homes across the city varied, and that we hoped the new local guidance would support care homes to enable residents to see their loved ones in a meaningful way.

This month we supported a [John's Campaign](#) survey which asked people across the country whether they'd been able to visit their relatives in care homes.

Through this survey, we have heard from **23 people about 18 care homes** across Sheffield.

Key findings include:

- There were concerns about a lack of clear information about visiting, with just under half of respondents saying a visiting policy had been shared with them.
- Only 1 respondent said that they had been involved in an individual visiting risk assessment.
- 10 respondents said the homes were allowing no visiting at all during this period.
- 5 respondents said they received regular updates from the home about their relative – 11 received none, and 7 said the updates were variable.
- Use of technology is variable; lack of time, and access to equipment is having a negative impact on some individuals.
- Some respondents felt that without their visits, their relative wasn't getting the care they needed.

For more findings, and to read about people's experiences in greater detail, [read the briefing](#).

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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