

Access to health and social care services in Sheffield – Key issues from October 2021

What are we hearing?

In October, we heard about 71 different health and social care services. A lot of this was related to GPs and hospitals, where we've heard lots of mixed feedback. We've also got snippets of feedback on social prescribing, community mental health services and dentists. Whilst a lot of this feedback is positive, these stories do show some areas for improvement.

GPs

We heard an exceptionally high number of stories in October about GPs – 50 experiences regarding 34 different GP surgeries. A few people also contacted us for clear information about how to register with a GP, how to change GP practices, or how GP catchment areas work.

Many stories were positive feedback about patients' experiences with their GP. Some patients told us that their practices are busy, but they are still getting the right support, and that staff are friendly and helpful. Lots of people commented on the staff being professional and kind, and that they received good treatment from their GP. One person told us that they had an issue, but the clerical staff dealt with this really well.

Some people have told us that they have requested repeat prescriptions through their GP, however the GP does not order it to the pharmacy on time. This means that the patients travel to the pharmacy to pick up the medication, and the prescriptions are not there, and then they have to go without.

We also heard from a number of people who were not happy with their GP surgery - most of these poor experiences were about the systems in place to contact the surgery and book appointments. Many patients have told us that that haven't been able to get an appointment at their GP, and that they couldn't get through on the phone line. Some say that they are waiting in long queues from 45 minutes to up to 2 hours, or even that after they wait on the phone for a certain amount of time, the call cuts out.

“Nothing has been too much trouble, timely referrals have been made & face to face appointments made when needed”

“My husband was put totally at ease. I cannot express my thanks and appreciation enough”



Experiences of disabled people at the GP

People have been telling us that reception and clerical staff at various GP practices would benefit from more training on how to support people with different types of disabilities. They felt that more training in these areas would mean staff could better understand patients who have these needs, and would be able to provide more suitable support.

One person told us that the answering service on the phone line at their GP is not accessible. Their relative, who is blind, cannot choose a number option on the answering service, because they can't see the numbers. Therefore, they can't get through to anyone or make an appointment.



Having been made aware of accessibility issues for blind and visually impaired patients, we know that the practice concerned is responding by talking to the person directly about practical solutions. We will continue to liaise with those affected by the changes and raise further issues if needed.

Care in hospital

We've had a lot of mixed feedback about the hospitals in Sheffield. People have reported that staff in the Northern General Hospital and Royal Hallamshire Hospital are professional, caring, warm and welcoming. Someone told us that the Emergency Department at the Northern General Hospital was really busy but they felt cared for and supported. Another person told us that adjustments were made for their blind relative, who was recently an inpatient. Their needs were met, and the adjustments made them feel more comfortable.

Some people have talked about the impact of delayed appointments following covid, including very long waits for scans. One person told us about a scan which was cancelled after they'd been waiting some time - this scan was then rescheduled to take place in 30 weeks, which they felt was too long. They raised a complaint with NHS England about this, but they felt it wasn't being taken seriously.

Another person told us that they had tried to raise a complaint with the Patient Advice and Liaison Service about their relative's treatment in the hospital, however they found the complaints process difficult to navigate.

"Despite how busy the department was, I felt well cared for and helped. The advice I received was incredibly helpful and despite such a

"There are no appointments and a 30 week wait"

Community mental health services

We heard 4 stories about community mental health services this month. People have been finding it hard to get through to the teams, as they cannot reach them on the phone. One person talked about their care coordinator being more supportive than previous allocated workers, but felt that the support offered was still too limited by the system they work in. They also told us that they had previously been discharged by the Home Treatment Team after a very short time, which had a negative impact on them.

Someone else reported that their relative is receiving treatment from community mental health team, but the team did not keep up with their relative's changing

"To use the term discharge is not helpful as it has very negative impact and because of this my mental health has been made worse."

needs, and would not carry out a review when they needed it. They had to request this review from their GP instead, delaying the process.

Social prescribing

In October we heard a really positive piece of feedback on social prescribing, and how it was working really well for one individual. The social prescriber has really motivated them to take steps to improve their own health, and that they are now aware of other services available which can support them.



Dentists

We're still hearing from people who can't access a dentist for a routine appointment. One piece of dental feedback was from a mother who wanted to find her daughter a regular dentist. She was concerned that her children would not be able to get the check-ups they need, and that their oral health would start to deteriorate.

We've also continued to hear from people who aren't clear on what is classed as urgent dental treatment, and what is considered routine treatment. People are still telling us that they want better communication about what treatment they should be able to access. We have been able to help people who contact us to understand current dental restrictions, but current public messaging still does not seem to be reaching people.



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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