

Access to health and social care service in Sheffield

Key issues from August 2022

In August 2022 we received 80 pieces of feedback related to health and social care services in Sheffield. We continued to hear about experiences in relation to difficulty accessing GP appointments, mental health services and NHS dentistry. Feedback has been shared about hospital care and accessible information- including not receiving written formats to meet individual needs. We continue to provide advice and information to people regarding the NHS complaints process.

GPs

In July 2022 we received 27 pieces of feedback relating to at least 17 different GP practices across Sheffield.

32% of feedback shared was positive, describing staff as thorough, professional and reassuring. Patients told us they felt pleased that they had a trusted GP they could access, had received good levels of care and were satisfied with referrals made.

A large percentage of comments continued to describe the difficulties trying to get through to GPs on the phone and struggling to access appointments. We heard reports that some GPs are not booking non-urgent appointments in advance meaning patients needed to ring as soon as the surgery opened. Several people told us the service was inaccessible and they had given up trying to get through. One individual stated they had waited in a queue for 30 minutes which led to a call charge costing over £5.

Another patient reported after agreeing to have their medication adjusted they experienced negative side effects as a result. Initially, they were led to believe they could call and get the dose adjusted back quickly but then had to wait another two weeks for an appointment.



"I felt reassured that I was being thoroughly checked and genuinely cared about"

I've tried several times to book an appointment, every time the same issue, they don't have available appointments. They told me to call next day at 8 a.m.'



Hospitals –barriers accessing information

18 patients shared their experiences of hospital care with a large proportion – 67% describing positive experiences. Highlights related to receiving exceptional care and effective treatment from a range of different departments, from A&E to hepatology. Comments included praise for friendly, professional and kind staff.

We also heard about people’s experiences of accessible information, which varied throughout departments. Some patient letters were described as being ‘difficult to understand and very wordy’. When one patient asked for a letter to be resent in a large print format they received a new letter, which had their details, date and time of the appointment amended, the rest of the content remained in the same size font. In addition, people described difficulties with small print on medication instructions. When a patient contacted the hospital pharmacy for a written format suitable to meet individual need this was not provided, they had to ask for a friend to read the instructions for them.

“What a wonderful set of staff. They were caring and made me feel like a human being and not a nuisance. The care and understanding I received was second to none”



Mental Health Services

Six people shared their views around mental health services. Key themes linked to long waiting lists and individuals left unaware of how long access to much needed treatment would take.

Feedback also related to experiences when contacting the Crisis Team. Some individuals who were in distress told us that they felt that communication was ineffective, leaving them feeling unsupported, and worse. In addition, we heard one person phoned in a crisis but had to repeat their story multiple times due to being passed on to different members of the team. Some were told they would receive a call back but never did. Early discharge was another key topic, patients expressed they did not feel ready or well enough to be at this stage but were left with no alternative options.

I was trying to explain my distress wasn’t aimed at them, but they wouldn’t even take care to understand that. It was patronising and made me feel worse.

One organisation told us that they felt they had seen increasing numbers of autistic adults being admitted to general mental health wards, which was not the right care pathway for them and was not meeting their individual care needs.

People still continue to struggle to access NHS dentistry

12 people contacted us in August stating they were struggling to access NHS dentistry; a large proportion of these people were experiencing pain. Challenges continue linked to long waiting lists, lengthy waiting times for treatment, lack of clarity around NHS capacity, struggles to access urgent dental care when experiencing pain and NHS dentists transitioning to private work only. We heard from an increasing number of people that were offered prompt private treatment (which they can't afford) but would have to wait a long time to receive NHS care.

One patient told us they had called 111 on a Sunday to be told there was no emergency dental care available in Sheffield. They had to wait until Monday morning to access any provision. Following this we contacted NHS commissioners who told us there are urgent 111 appointments available limited to 9am – 1pm at the weekend.

NHS England have taken steps to ensure better dental support for people with complex problems and improve the information for those trying to find an NHS dentist.

What action has been taken?

NHS England has announced several changes to the contract with dentists who provide NHS care, including:

- Increasing the payments for dentists when treating patients with complex needs, for example, people needing work done on three or more teeth.
- Requiring dental practices to regularly update the national directory on www.nhs.net to clarify if they are taking on NHS patients.
- Moving resources from dental practices that are underperforming.



“I have just moved to the city and I am struggling to find any NHS dentists here. I have phoned so many and they all have a waiting list of at least 2yrs. This is unacceptable, what year are we living in?”

“I am struggling with jaw pain, sensitive teeth and ear issues which is impacting me daily. My GP has told me to see a dentist but I can't”

Please visit the link below for more information.:

<https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/response/2022-07-19/nhs-acts-your-feedback-improve-dental-care>

NHS complaints processes

We have heard from 7 individuals in August who felt unsure about the NHS complaints process and needed advice. The complaints related to mental health services, hospital and GP experiences and linked to a range of different issues such as poor communication, unsatisfactory care and treatment and lack of referral when needed.

One person told us they felt worried making a complaint about their GP as they believed they would be treated differently as a result. Another individual told us they had complained to PALS but felt as though they were not getting anywhere in the process and needed information of what to do to escalate this to the next stage.



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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