

Access to Health and Social Care Services In Sheffield

Key issues from March 2023

In March 2023 we received 182 pieces of feedback and have been hearing about a wide range of views from those who have accessed health and care services in Sheffield. Particular highlights have included patient experiences when attending GP practices and various hospital services. Less positive experiences came from people who are currently using mental health services or have been waiting to access mental health support. In addition, people have shared their views in relation to poor treatment received at community dental practices.

GP services

In March 116 pieces of feedback were received relating to 26 different GP practices across Sheffield. Over two-thirds of those we heard from reported positive feedback with a significant number of patients praising Wincobank and Sloan Medical Centres. Patients at these practices described staff as going above and beyond, had experienced on-time appointments, as well as smooth referral processes. The health information provided to them during their appointment and afterwards was also highly rated.

Less positive feedback largely focussed on themes we have reported on for some months now. This is linked to difficulties trying to get through to GP practices on the phone and issues when trying to book appointments. For example, one patient told us they had tried 172 times to get through to their practice, when finally succeeding, no appointments were available and they were advised to try again the next day. Another individual tried booking an appointment for their friend but were told to complete an online booking form. They explained their friend had no internet access so staff asked if the individual could complete the form instead on their behalf. They commented this was a highly unsatisfactory situation and this system was no good for those without internet access.

We heard that some patients felt unhappy disclosing their health information to reception staff and didn't feel comfortable with them making decisions



"The doctors and staff are very professional, helpful and caring."

"She was very informative and sent supporting information to my phone."



when allocating GP appointments. Some said they didn't feel this should be the responsibility of reception staff and were worried that some patients with greater care needs were being missed.

Finally, we heard of one person's experience when speaking with their GP on the phone. During the conversation, the GP asked to speak to the patient's carer and proceeded to ask them health questions about the individual. The patient told us they couldn't understand why this happened, felt upset and very disappointed.

"(...) how do the receptionist know if my problem is serious or not"



Treatment in hospital

We heard from 21 individuals about their experiences of hospital services and 14 of these people provided praise for the care and treatment received. Positive feedback related to many various areas including breast screening, young person's rheumatology, A&E, radiography, dermatology, physio and The Hand Centre. Patients using these services described staff as being kind, patient and professional with comments also related to receiving thorough explanations of treatment being carried out.



Two people shared their views after recently visiting hospital. They thought generally the hospital signage could be improved due to struggling to locate the different departments they were visiting. One person commented that there were no longer many meet and greet volunteers at hospital entrances to help with directions as they found the volunteers extremely helpful. The same person also stated when attending their appointments, they were continuously stopped by various staff members for not wearing a mask but were frustrated by this as on all occasions their exemption lanyard was clearly visible.

"Each person who dealt with me did so with kindness and patience."

Patient transport

Feedback was shared relating to confusion with eligibility for patient transport, for example, one person told us they were eligible for transport for their journey to the hospital but not on the way back. They couldn't understand the reasoning behind this and told us they had to pay a considerable amount for a taxi for the journey home each time they visited. Other feedback included transport arriving late resulting in patients feeling their appointments would be missed and would not be able to go ahead.



Communication issues with mental health services

Seven people shared their experiences of Sheffield Health and Social Care Trust with main themes linked to issues with communication and long delays when accessing services. Two people told us they had given up on the service and had opted to pay for private treatment instead, one person said this was something they couldn't really afford. A further two people stated the lengthy waiting times in place to access the service was severely impacting their wellbeing and mental health.

We heard about calls going unanswered or requests for call-backs not being followed through, people said they felt forgotten about or left. For example, one person contacted the service by phone 46 times to try and reschedule an appointment. Two people told us they felt that their medication was not helping them but had struggled to make contact with the service to make staff aware.

Dentists

We are continuing to hear from people about NHS dentistry and 12 people contacted us this month. We heard of one positive story linked to treatment at Charles Clifford Dental Hospital- this individual said their child had received excellent care and they were really impressed with the whole process.

Two patients raised concerns about their community dental experiences. Both had received poor dental treatment leading to significant dental complications -one said their self-esteem and mental health had been majorly impacted as a result. One of these patients stated they were promptly offered private treatment to remedy the situation.

This month we heard from six people who were seeking information and advice about accessing NHS dental care. All of the people who contacted us had struggled to find any dentists in Sheffield accepting new patients. Two people were needing urgent care and treatment due to severe dental issues.

"I'm under the SPA team, can I tell you I find their service very poor"



"I feel like this is an absolute sham of a service, it has actually been a great disservice to my mental health."



"I daren't smile anymore (...) I have become a recluse."

"Until I asked how much it might be to go private. Suddenly it could be done and in the next two weeks."

Sheffield Community Champions insights

The cost of living continues to be a dominant theme in many conversations and support actions undertaken by the Community Champions across the city. This is causing anxiety and worry, with mental health impacts on the rise as the situation continues. The use of food banks across the city is an increasingly vital resource for many families.

One Community Champion spoke with an individual who was struggling with the cost of living and mental health. They identified that the food pantry may be a good support for them and were able to get support in place for 6 weeks whilst benefits and pension issues were resolved. Following this, the client also expressed an interest in volunteering, the Champion helped them start volunteering with a project that provides cooked meals for people.

An individual with pre-diabetes was given advice by another Champion on diet and exercise. They have started eating more healthily and have booked into a weight loss fitness class to do more exercise.

Another person has been attending the coffee morning run by the Champions for 5 weeks now. They have been enjoying the conversations around health and are loving the budgeting tips and advice that the group share with each other. They even got a flu vaccination because of the positive conversations they had with the other people in the group.

“I am only just managing, I just can't wait until the spring so I don't have anxiety around the temperature dropping”

“This is life changing for me to improve my future health, thank you for encouraging me to attend the GP and sharing recipes”

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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