

# Access to Health and Social Care Services In Sheffield

## Key issues from May 2023

In May 2023 we received 117 pieces of feedback. This month, we have heard about positive experiences of GP practices but have also heard from those who have encountered various barriers when trying to access GP appointments. We have received feedback about experiences of hospital care and treatment and have given advice to those who were struggling to access an NHS dentist. We visited a care home to hear residents' views of what is important to them about their health and well-being and heard from people who have experienced difficulties when accessing taxis to and from healthcare appointments. Finally, views were shared relating to community pharmacies and mental health services.

### Getting support from a GP

In April, 74 pieces of feedback were received relating to 21 different GP practices across Sheffield. 43 of these stories were positive, with people stating the care they had received was efficient and supportive. These experiences included 5 people who said they had been allocated timely appointment slots when contacting their GP practice.

21 people shared less positive stories, with key themes linked to patients experiencing a wide range of difficulties when trying to obtain appointments. For example, one patient told us they had tried to get through on the phone to their practice over 100 times to book an appointment. In the end, they gave up and said they would just put up with the pain. Another patient called their practice at 8am, after being on hold for 30 minutes, they were told no appointments were available that day due to the King's Coronation taking place. They couldn't understand why, as this was being held the following day. People also told us they found cancelling appointments difficult due to lengthy phone queues in place. One person said they had made an appointment for their children and wanted to cancel, however when realising they were number 17 in the queue gave up trying to get through.



"I really felt the Dr took the time to listen to my issues, she was sympathetic and caring."

"Getting an appointment is nigh on impossible."

"This practice used to be good, and I think it no longer is."

A different patient stated they were asked to fill out an online form to describe their symptoms so triage could take place. Due to English not being their first language, they explained they would have difficulty, but the staff member persisted and said 'everything needed to be done online'.

We continue to hear mixed perspectives on telephone appointments. Some patients like the flexibility, whilst others like to choose for themselves. For instance, one person said they understood face-to-face appointments may not always be necessary but would like to be given an option as lack of privacy at home restricted what they could say to their GP.

## Patient experiences of hospital

We heard from 10 individuals who shared their experiences of hospital services. Five of these people provided positive feedback and praise relating to A&E, Same Day Emergency Care, hearing services and gynaecology. One patient said that staff were extremely caring during their stay and had listened to them; the patient also felt reassured with the aftercare and treatment plan in place for them.

An autistic patient contacted us for advice as they find it extremely difficult when waiting to be seen for urgent care. The last time they were at A&E they had to wait a number of hours before they could be seen. They were shown to a quiet area but stated they felt forgotten about and did not know when it was their time to be seen which made them feel anxious.

## Community pharmacies

Four patients told us they had encountered difficulties when obtaining prescriptions. One of these people was told their medication could take up to a week to be ready for collection instead of the usual 2-3 days. Another person told us their pharmacy was very short staffed leading to different opening and closing times and delays in obtaining medication. Some people shared views relating to access at the Wicker Pharmacy. We heard the pharmacy car park was small and the entrance at the rear of the building was not wheelchair accessible. We also heard that one-way systems in place on the roads nearby were causing traffic issues and difficulties accessing the pharmacy by car. People said that recent construction works nearby had led

"Phoned 3 times this morning, started off at number 19, got down to number 2 only to be cut off each time."

"(...) the whole time I was there I've never been cared for or looked after like that in my life. They were amazing."



to a decrease in footfall, making people feel less safe. Access to the pharmacy via telephone was seen more positively, with one person telling us they could always get through on the phone and that there had not been any issues with their medication supplies.

## Experiences of using taxis for people with accessibility needs

We have heard from several disabled people about difficulties getting taxis. One person said they felt some taxi drivers do not offer assistance to passengers who have physical mobility needs, and felt this had generally declined since the Covid 19 pandemic. For instance, not offering to open the door or not offering to help when they are exiting the vehicle.



Another individual told us the initial automated interaction with taxi companies over the phone can make communicating their needs difficult. It was also noted that some taxi companies don't always communicate if the vehicle is on its way or if it has arrived. People stated they had experienced issues when booking journeys outside of the central areas of Sheffield, especially in more rural locations. Furthermore, we heard wheelchair users sometimes experience significant delays for taxis due to a general shortage of wheelchair-accessible vehicles within the city.

“As someone who uses taxis, I want to know whether the taxi will arrive or not.”

## What's important to care home residents' health and wellbeing?

This month, we have supported the ICB to help ensure people have their say to help shape and inform their joint forward plan. This sets out how the NHS in South Yorkshire will work over the coming years. As part of this work, we visited a local care home to listen to residents' views about what mattered to them about their health and wellbeing. Residents spoke about the importance of being active, engaging in physical and social activities and playing games. They liked to help others and do activities outside, as well as enjoy more passive activities such as watching TV and listening to music. Residents also said they valued having good food, helpful proactive staff, and support when they needed it both in the home, and from the GP who was based close by.



“I like cleaning, knitting, sewing; I do plenty. I'm never still really.”

## Mental health services

This month 8 people contacted us to share their experiences of mental health services. One person told us their relative's care coordinator had left but they had not received a replacement and hadn't been given a timeframe of how long they would be waiting. A different person was allocated a new care coordinator, but when the initial visit took place, the care coordinator asked questions that implied the individual had not experienced mental ill health before which they found really inappropriate.

Feedback was given by one person that when their key worker left, they received a letter stating the service was too short-staffed to issue a replacement and they would be put on a waiting list. They also thought community mental health respite care was inaccessible due to the lack of availability of beds, and noted they had struggled to access short-term mental health assisted living, due to the restrictive criteria in place.

We heard from someone who had to wait a significant period of time to access specialist support, however, when their turn finally arrived, they were only allocated a few sessions which they felt was not enough.

Views were shared that within the service short intervention, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) seemed to be a "one size fits all" approach. One person had a bad experience with CBT offered through the service so paid privately instead to obtain the support they needed.

Finally, one person commented mental health services do not communicate effectively with other healthcare services they were accessing and that a joined-up approach was most needed. The same person said they had to wait a significant period of time to be prescribed ADHD medication when they moved to Sheffield, despite having a formal diagnosis in place.

## Dentists

This month we heard from thirteen people who gave feedback related to NHS dentistry. 11 of these people were requiring advice of how to get an appointment for either urgent or non-urgent care. One person had contacted 10 dentists without any luck, they had not seen a dentist for 5 years. Another individual resorted in paying for a private check-up but was told they needed four fillings. They couldn't afford to pay for this so were unable to receive the treatment needed. Positive comments were shared

"Mental health respite care is dire."



"I need help desperately but the help offered just isn't working."



"When I've called dental practices they're only putting people on waiting lists."

relating to Charles Clifford Dental Hospital. One person stated “I have suffered from a fear of dentists for many, many years but I don’t have a problem here. The students and tutors are fantastic and put me at ease.”



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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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