

## July 2023

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### About us

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Royal Borough of Greenwich. We're here to make sure that those running services, put people at the heart of care.



Clover Health Centre is closing at the end of September. Our volunteer, Glory supporting patients to register with alternative GP practices.

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### What did we hear in July?

We heard from 266 people<sup>1</sup> about their experience of health and care services in Greenwich.

**“Very helpful, kind and supportive people at every stage. I even got a sandwich and coffee after the endoscopy, which was much needed after fasting for 24 hours**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

**“Appalling service, staff rude... Trying to get an appointment on the phone**  
GP Practice

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<sup>1</sup> Feedback collected through calls and emails to us, meetings between us and local groups or advocates, outreach and engagement events, conversations on social media and online reviews.

## In this report

About us .....	1
What did we hear in July? .....	1
Primary care.....	2
Registering with a GP.....	2
GP services – booking appointments. ....	3
Ava's Experience.....	5
Queen Elizabeth Hospital.....	7
Maternity Care .....	7
Outpatient Departments .....	8
Christophers' Experience.....	10
Next Steps.....	12
Contact Us.....	12

## Primary care

### Registering with a GP

As the Clover Health Centre prepares to close its doors at the end of September, Healthwatch Greenwich have been supporting service users in registering at alternative GP practices. While the process should be straightforward, the requirement to register online and provide an email address creates a barrier for those who lack access to technology or digital skills. The implications of this process are far-reaching for those who are digitally excluded. Those who possess the necessary digital skills and access to technology can complete the registration process, however, those without internet access or digital literacy are left at a disadvantage, risking their ability to access GP services and exacerbating existing health inequalities. This, in turn, can place an additional burden on the healthcare system as a whole as people use alternative resources, such as hospital emergency departments or urgent care centres, when seeking medical help and support.

## GP services – booking appointments

Getting a GP appointment is a struggle and waiting for days and even weeks is not unusual.

**“ Called up the medical centre, waited on the phone line until 8:45am from 8am. There were 9 callers waiting in the phone line in front of me. By the time it reaches me and I speak with the receptionist, I’m told I can’t book an GP appointment because I didn’t call at 8am. Well, if you do quick maths – 9 people in front of me and each take approx 5 mins on the call, of course I won’t be able to get through at 8am because I’ve been waiting 45mins to get through!**

GP Practice

**“ I went [in person] to book an appointment and they said I have to call - like what difference does it make?**

GP Practice

**“ You are told to call at 8am, you're on hold sometimes for over 30min only to be told no appointments and to call back the next day... it's like no one cares... people are calling because they are sick and need a doctor not because they are bored at home and dying to be put on hold for the joy of it... their answer is “call back at 8am”... and if you get through, BIG IF, answer is “sorry no appointments”.**

GP Practice

**“ Struggle to get an appointment, even after queuing at 8am.**

GP Practice

**“ Three weeks ago, I was feeling very unwell. I tried filling in their online questionnaire which promptly terminated due to the presumed seriousness of my ailment. I was advised to ring the surgery or 111. I rang the surgery and after about 2 mins, I got through to the receptionist who booked a callback appointment for me with a doctor. The doctor advised me to go into the hospital A&E for a blood test which I did the next day. I was informed [by the hospital] that the GP would get back to me. I am still waiting, and even after calling again because the pains are getting worse, I couldn't get an appointment to speak to a doctor, let alone see one. To make matters worse, my out-patients appointment [at the hospital] has been cancelled and rescheduled for 2 months time.**

GP Practice

**“ ...The only way to get an appointment is to call at 8am along with everyone else. Just try and see if you get through. Maybe go there at 8am and line up with everyone else...the sick and the desperate. Do they not realise the anxiety and distress they are causing to people who just want help....eConsult is not working, but their website says please do not visit the Practice!**

GP Practice

Many of you have positive experiences with clinical and administrative staff, but you said front desk staff are not always helpful or friendly.

**“ ... the doctor I saw couldn't have been more helpful or sympathetic. She asked all the right questions and even phoned me at home later with an appointment... Wonderful service from the doctors and receptionists.**

GP Practice

**“ I'm treated with respect and the staff are very attentive and answer all my questions.**

GP Practice

**“ I called to inquire about my Neurology referral, I was utterly shocked how rude the receptionist was on the phone.**

GP Practice

**“ The app you're forced into using doesn't link your NHS account to their surgery and when told [by reception staff] you'll receive a text with your records you don't.**

GP Practice

**“ After trying to register my newborn child here they lost all my registration forms so after not hearing from them for three weeks I called to check and was told they couldn't find me! They then told me to re fill the form online – the form did not work – so failing that I went to the surgery and filled in yet another form to then be told [by phone] 5 mins after I leave the surgery that they can't take my newborn as my address has changed – after I had already explained all this over the phone to them previously and was told they would be able to as its emergency accommodation. So now I have a newborn baby needing immunisations and I need a check-up after my C-section and I have to find a new doctor.**

GP Practice

## **Ava's experience: “She needs help to walk down the road, how can that be too much to ask...”**

Mr Carter contacted us, concerned about his 83-year-old mother, Ava. Ava used to be active and outgoing spending hours gardening and always out and about in the community, but medical complications have affected her mobility. ***“She is a very strong woman, very independent. She never liked other people doing things for her. Now, I'm really worried; she's been feeling so down, stuck at home all the time and lonely.”***

Ava lives alone in Plumstead and although she can walk, needs help to do so. Her carers come in every day but say they don't have enough time to help Ava to go out. As a result, Ava hasn't been out of her home for years. ***“Now her daily routine is to be hoisted from the bed to a recliner chair and then put back to bed, and that's all that happens, day in day out.”*** Mr Carter says his mum keeps

asking for help to go out and mobilise more. ***"It breaks my heart to see her sitting in that chair all day. She just wants to go out, but her carers don't seem to have time for it. That's not life. She needs help to walk down the road, how can that be too much to ask..."***

On top of that, Ava hasn't had a proper bath because she needs help to get in and out of the bath. When asked, her carers say they don't have the time and can only offer showers and bed-baths. ***"My mum hasn't had a proper bath in three years. It's not right. She deserves better care and attention than this."***

Despite reaching out to social services and occupational therapy for help, three months later, he's still waiting for a review of his mum's care.

### **Provider Response:**

#### **Response from Adult Social Care Team, Royal Borough of Greenwich**

"The Royal Borough of Greenwich is committed to ensuring that all residents receive care and support that meets their assessed needs and outcomes in their care and support plans. Care Assessors, Social Work teams and reviewing teams are trained to assess and review people's needs and care and support plans utilising a strengths-based approach and focusing the person's well-being and outcomes. Ava's mum may benefit from making contact with those who oversee her care and support in Royal Borough of Greenwich to see if a review or reassessment of her needs and care and support arrangements is required. This usually happens annually, it may support in determining what additional support, including via local community resources may be available or other support which is required to fully meet her assessed needs and outcomes which are important to her. This in turn may lead to more up to date information being shared with the Care Provider who visits Ava at home and enable them to ensure Ava receives personalised and enabling care and support"

#### **Response from Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust**

We were sorry to hear that Ava had difficulty accessing an Occupational therapy assessment to support with bathing. We would advise contacting your GP who can make a referral to the Oxleas Community Rehabilitation and short-term assessment team. The Occupational Therapists within the team are able to assess for and provide bathing equipment. They can also refer onwards to Social services Occupational Therapy if more complex adaptations are required.

## Queen Elizabeth Hospital

### Maternity Care

**“ I went into labour and went to QE. The contractions are the worst pain I have felt in my life. On arrival to Maternity Triage I was not given any pain relief or seen by a midwife until I provided a urine sample - have you tried peeing into a tiny sample pot whilst crippling, unimaginably painful contractions are coming every few minutes... When I was finally offered pain relief, they only gave me oral paracetamol and codeine, they refused me intravenous pain relief. Once on the delivery suite I had to repeatedly ask for pethidine which took ages to set up as the midwife kept disappearing for long periods and realised, she forgot - yet another thing - outside the room. The pethidine wasn't effective, and I requested an epidural and yet again went through the same struggle with everything taking ages to set up all whilst having the most painful contractions every couple of minutes. Finally, I was told I could not have the epidural as it was time to push. I really wish I was given effective pain relief. I'm completely traumatised. I've been put off ever going through labour again, the memories of the event are etched forever in my mind... Thankfully my child is healthy, and the delivery was otherwise uncomplicated which I will forever be grateful for - but small mistakes and delays have had a major consequence on me and just thinking of it all makes me so angry.**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

## Provider Response:

### Response from Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

Thank you so much for sharing your experience with us. I am pleased to hear that your child is healthy and doing well. I am, however, very sorry to learn that you were not given adequate pain relief when you attended in labour. This should not have been the case. I can see from your account that this experience has greatly unsettled and traumatised you. Our Professional Midwifery Advocate team offer appointments to women/birthing people who wish to discuss and explore their pregnancy, birth and early postnatal period and I would gladly arrange such an appointment for you; should you think it helpful. We would welcome an opportunity to explore your experience with you in more detail. The maternity team is keen to learn and use any new information to improve our services. If you would like me to arrange this appointment for you, please get in touch via the Healthwatch team.

—Sue Chatterley, Associate Director of Midwifery & Neonatal services  
Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

## Outpatient Departments

You praised outpatient departments but told us parking can be an issue.

**“Very helpful, kind and supportive people at every stage. I even got a sandwich and coffee after the endoscopy, which was much needed after fasting for 24 hours**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

**I had No problems, less than 5min waiting**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

**“I went to this hospital to take one of my residents for her appointment. The staff couldn't of been more helpful, we got seen to quite early and the receptionist was very helpful with contacting the transport company to take us home.**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

**“ I was charged £80 for dropping of a patient. I only stopped for about 4 minutes to accompany a vulnerable patient. PALS is ridiculous and do not respond to emails.**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

**“ Went to have a blood test done and the phlebotomy department decided to pack away their equipment before the end of their shift. I’m a nurse and they really thought they could fob me off and tell me to come back another day because they packed up early! What nonsense...**

Eltham Community Hospital

### **Provider Response:**

Response from Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

“We’re a patient-focused NHS Trust working hard to improve the experience of our users, which is at the heart of everything we do. We really welcome feedback that allows us to reflect on progress made and opportunities to drive further improvements.

“We’re very sorry to hear that we didn’t get it right for some patients this month, especially in maternity where we know that personalised care and pain relief is essential during labour. Being known for being a caring and supportive Trust is important to us, so it is great to hear that coming through in other departments and we thank all the patients who have taken the time to share their experiences this month.

“We encourage all patients to come to us directly with any feedback they have on our services so that we can share and investigate as necessary. Greenwich patients can reach us on 020 8836 4592 or [pals.geht@nhs.net](mailto:pals.geht@nhs.net).”

—Louise Crosby, Chief Nurse at Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

## **Christopher's experience: "I work and I look after my wife... I had to leave my wife alone for almost for a whole day"**

Christopher lives in Greenwich with his wife and son. The family have learning disabilities and his wife, Wendy, has additional mobility issues. Wendy's commode pot needed replacing and a new one was ordered from NRS Healthcare in late May. Christopher told us **"Wendy ordered a new commode pot online, she's used NRS healthcare before so we thought that it would come on time, especially because it's essential, something she needs to use everyday."** A delivery was arranged for June. **"I was waiting in for the whole day, I had to take the day off from work and cancel my plans, but no one came or called me to say why they hadn't come."**

Christopher repeatedly called NRS to find out what had happened and to arrange another delivery date. Two more deliveries were arranged in June - but no delivery arrived. **"I waited at home for three days for deliveries across three weeks. I called NRS and confirmed my address, but they said I had refused the item - but I hadn't - there was no delivery. The next time they said they hadn't been given an address - but they had my address - I told them my address every time I spoke to them. It was very confusing for me, they never explained to me what had happened, and I never would have known if I hadn't called. It's ridiculous. I lost three days' worth of wages waiting in for the delivery and I am the only one with a job so my wages are really important for us."**

Christopher, found it stressful trying to communicate with NRS staff, and said he had to keep telling them the same information over and over again. He said making multiple phone calls and repeating information was hard with his learning disability. In July, worried about what his wife would do without a working commode pot he went and collected it himself. The depot is not local to his home. **"I had to travel for an hour each way, when I got to the depot the manager said it had to do with stock issues and they didn't know why the deliveries had failed. I work and I look after my wife. I lost money, time and I had to leave my wife alone for almost for a whole day. Luckily, she was OK, but I wasn't there and anything could have happened."**

**Provider Response:**

**Response from NHS South East London ICB and Royal Borough of Greenwich**

“We are very sorry to hear of the difficulties Christopher and Wendy have had with the service provided by NRS. We have previously been alerted to this case by Healthwatch, and raised the issue with NRS so that they may learn from Christopher and Wendy’s experiences and prevent this from happening to other residents in similar circumstances. Since highlighting this issue, NRS have clarified some of their customer services practices and continue to work on bettering their communication with residents as well as those working in health and care who support them to access community equipment services. NRS also have a system in place to record any additional needs and support required by residents, in order to enable them to better support them with communication and resolving queries. The Community Equipment service being provided by NRS is a new arrangement that went into place earlier this year from April 2023. It is a large service provided across health and care needs and there have been challenges during the early days of the new service which we are aware of. These have resulted in some unforeseen difficulties that have unfortunately affected cases such as this one. The Royal Borough of Greenwich and Integrated Care Board acknowledges that there is learning to be found in the experiences of our residents, and we are committed to working with NRS to make improvements going forward and meet their needs.”

## Next Steps

We follow up on all concerns or issues raised.

We work with commissioners, providers, regulators, and service users to understand where services are working well and where further development is needed.

## Contact Us

For more information on our feedback report, or to request it in large print or easy read format, contact:

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