

Access to Health and Social Care Services In Sheffield

Key issues from August and September 2023

In August and September 2023, we received 258 pieces of feedback from people who have accessed health and care services in Sheffield. People have shared positive examples of the care and treatment received when attending GP appointments and particularly praised the flu vaccine process. Less positive experiences came from those who have used mental health services, and from autistic people who have not been able to access follow on care post diagnosis.

Accessing GP services

Over the past two months, we heard from 142 patients registered at 36 different GP practices across the city. 65 people praised their surgeries stating they had experienced a good standard of care and an efficient service. A large proportion of patients shared positive examples of when having their flu jab. They were happy with the practice's organisation of the vaccines and experienced little to no wait times when attending. Patients said they were made to feel at ease and received good advice about potential side effects to look out for.

Where people shared less positive stories, access was a key issue. 34 people got in touch to say they had experienced difficulties either trying to get through to their practice on the phone or had struggled to get an appointment. After being triaged, some patients told us they had been offered an appointment but had to wait up to six weeks before they could see someone.

A group of women raised concerns about the limited availability of female GPs at their practices as it was mostly male doctors employed there. Some were able to access appointments with female doctors at partner surgeries but said they had to catch two buses to enable them to get there.

15 people said they were unhappy with the quality of care they had experienced. Patients said they didn't feel supported by their GP and in some



"I have repeatedly received speedy and appropriate attention from this surgery."

"I came for a flu jab, it was efficient, fast and friendly."

"I have not been able to make an appointment with my own regular doctor this year at all."

instances the relationship had broken down. Views were also shared relating to continuity of care. These patients were continuously seeing practice locums and said it was difficult to explain their health concerns if the GP didn't know their past history. They often found themselves having to repeat the same information. Accessing referrals was also raised, in some cases, people had to visit their surgeries more than once before they were taken seriously.



Views were shared about 10-minute appointment slots. Patients felt this did not give them enough time to explain their health problems effectively and they often felt rushed, not listened to, and had little or no time to ask questions.

"I felt the GP was really rushing like they didn't have time to talk or answer my questions."

Ordering repeat prescriptions became an issue for some patients as they found they were no longer able to phone the surgery. Instead, all patients except those who were housebound were instructed to use an online ordering system or go into the practice. One patient didn't know what to do as they didn't use the internet and were a full-time carer, they were not able to go into the practice to place their prescription order.



Care in hospital

We heard from 37 individuals who shared experiences of hospital services. 19 of these people provided praise for the care and treatment they were given at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals including Endoscopy, Neurology, Allergy Unit, Brearley, Surgery, Jessops, Renal Unit and the Surgical Assessment Centre.

"The care I received from everyone was fantastic."

A common theme we have been hearing about is patient discharge. This was related to a number of issues such as people experiencing delays when waiting for medication and patients feeling pressured to leave hospital when not feeling ready. We also heard of an example of a patient being discharged without an adequate care package in place.

"I don't feel I should have been discharged."

Patients have experienced long wait times and delays in accessing treatment across a number of services. A&E has been very busy, some people have waited over six hours to see someone and a few people said it was overly warm in the department which wasn't helping how they were feeling. We also heard from those waiting to see a consultant or waiting for surgery but due to the delays were experiencing significant pain.

"I have been waiting for a hearing aid since February."

Poor signage was a key issue that was raised by members of the public across all hospital sites but in particular the Northern General. Patients and their relatives said they often got lost when trying to find different departments internally and external signage does not clearly indicate the safest, accessible pedestrian routes.



Access to dentists

The majority of people who got in touch about dentistry during this period were all in need of a regular dentist for themselves or their children. A large proportion of people made reference to the 'NHS find a dentist' website and said it wasn't helpful. Some said it was giving them 'false hope' as dentists were stating they are 'accepting patients' but when contacting practices people were informed of at least 2-3 years waiting lists in place. We regularly contact dentists across Sheffield to get an accurate picture of which practices are accepting new NHS patients so we can signpost people to them. We currently know of only a few in the city accepting children, and one accepting adults.

"I have called so many dentists and can't get one as they all have long waits."



Lack of support available for autistic people

Five people wanted to share their experiences of SAANS (Sheffield Adult Autism and Neurodevelopmental Service). Some expressed concerns about the lack of help and support available for individuals post-autism diagnosis. These people turned to other health professionals to try and seek help such as their GP or social worker but were left with no solution as they offered to refer them back to SAANS.

"I was promptly discharged with no other way to seek help."

Mental health services

11 people got in touch to share their experiences of accessing mental health services, most of the issues we heard about linked to communication. There was a lack of timely response when people contacted Single Point of Access (SPA) in a crisis when feeling suicidal or at risk of harm. For some people, the phone wasn't answered, whilst others were promised a call back which they didn't receive. Another main concern people raised was when making a formal complaint, some people were not kept up to date or not informed of any progress. These people contacted the complaints team who said someone would be in touch but reported they didn't hear anything from them.



"The answering machine says they'll call you back... no one called me back."

Feedback from children and young people

In August we attended the International Youth Day Event at EIS (English Institute of Sport) to hear children and young people's views of Sheffield healthcare services. Most examples of praise related to instances when children and young people had particularly felt well cared for and a large majority of positive feedback linked to the Children's Hospital. A leading theme that arose from the day was around difficulties accessing services. For example, some children and young people spoke of not being able to get a GP appointment when needed, long delays for CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) and the lack of interim support available when waiting for the service. For those who had accessed CAMHS, some did not find the service very helpful and didn't feel their mental health had improved as a result. Some said they were discharged from the service too quickly and would have benefitted from long-term support.



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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