

Access to Health and Social Care Services In Sheffield

Key issues from October and November 2023

In October and November 2023, we received 351 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 whilst attending GP appointments and vaccination clinics. We heard mixed reviews about GP online patient systems with some finding them difficult to use and navigate whilst others praised the service for its convenience.

Accessing GP services

Over the past two months, we have heard from 196 patients registered at 35 different GP practices across the city. 157 people praised their GP service, sharing positive examples of the care they had received. A large proportion of patients commended staff and described them as being helpful, kind, respectful, attentive and professional. Positive stories were also shared relating to the delivery of the flu and COVID-19 booster vaccinations. Patients were pleased with the overall organisation of the clinics and were happy they were effectively “in and out.”

34 people were unhappy with their GP service, this was due to various reasons such as not receiving a good standard of care or issues with access. Some people wanted advice on how to raise a concern/complaint or how to move to a new GP practice.

We heard very mixed reviews when it came to GP online facilities. Where people shared less positive stories, access was a key issue. Some found the online system too difficult to navigate leaving them feeling stressed and worried. Others said they were not provided with an option to request urgent appointments which would have been helpful. For those wanting non-urgent appointments, people reported they often found slots were booked well in advance with some having to wait 5-6 weeks until they could see someone. Others were impressed with the online facilities and stated being able to raise queries with their surgery was a lot easier.



“Being able to use an online form to make requests with timely responses is a real game-changer.”

“My last 2 visits have been hugely let down by the reception staff.”



Other patients praised the call ring-back service which holds your place virtually in the queue, when you reach the front, it automatically calls you back. Comments were made about the overall convenience and people were relieved the service alleviated the need to have to wait on the phone. For those without access to ring-back, concerns were raised about call costs when held in lengthy queues. For example, one person waited over an hour in the queue and was worried about the associated cost. Another person said the queue wait time they had experienced had cost them £12 in call charges.

“Was treated with understanding, felt listened to and included in decision making about treatment options.”

A small number of patients told us their GP would not prescribe certain medications that could be bought over the counter. These people were entitled to free prescriptions, some were claiming Universal Credit and could not afford to purchase the items themselves.

Care in hospital

We heard from 31 individuals who shared experiences of hospital services. 20 of these people praised the staff and the high quality of care they had received at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals. This feedback related to areas such as Ear Nose and Throat, Gynaecology, Surgery, A&E, Breast Clinic, Minor Injuries and Ward II.



“I was called in on time by a very friendly and welcoming clinician.”

A common theme we have been hearing related to issues with parking. Some people said they would welcome more disabled parking bays as they often struggled to find a space. Others were concerned about the level of fuel emissions being produced by vehicles due to the length of time it was often taking people to find a free spot.

A continuous theme we have been hearing is from those living in certain parts of the city who have limited, infrequent, and unreliable public transport services which is impacting their access to hospital services.

“Thank you very much for the level of care and patience I received.”

Access to NHS dentistry

Over the last few months, we have seen a significant decrease in the number of people contacting us about NHS dentistry. The majority of people who did get in touch this period were all in need of a regular dentist. Some of these



people had called local providers but were told private care was their only option which was unaffordable for many. 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 recently discovered 4 out of 51 practices were offering appointments to new NHS patients within the next four months.

Issues with pharmacy prescriptions

People have been in touch about issues with prescriptions which was largely due to medication being out of stock. Some stated pharmacy staff often did not provide them with any guidance or options when in this situation, which would have been helpful. Other people reported they had not received their prescriptions on time. Some said they had to wait over a week for medication to be processed which led to some having to reduce the dose of their existing medication until they were able to collect their new prescriptions.

Feedback shared related to mental health services

Ten people shared their experiences of mental health services. Four people were happy with the care and treatment they had received from Northlands, Acute Mental Health Care Unit, Crisis Resolution Home Treatment Team, and the Perinatal Mental Health Service. These service users stated they had been supported well, and praised the staff who had taken care of them, stating they had been regularly contacted. One person shared a very detailed account and mixed reviews of their time as an inpatient. Other people got in touch wanting advice of how to raise a concern or make a complaint.

Feedback was shared related to travel reimbursement – some service users told us the letters they received no longer contained information about reimbursement. Previously the letters included some information about how to claim back travel expenses if you were eligible – for instance a reminder to bring along evidence of the benefits you receive. We heard that although this guidance could have been more detailed –e.g. telling people where to go for reimbursement or how it was paid – it had still been useful, and it was disappointing that this had been removed.



“I had to take one tablet instead of two because I didn’t have enough to last me.”

“During a recent episode of mental illness I found the team, from reception to consultant excellent.”



Services for people with dementia and their carers

A group of people told us about the substantial waiting times they are experiencing when trying to access the Memory Service. People and their carers told us they often didn't know what support was available to them in the meantime. Some people had asked GPs for advice but generally, they were unable to signpost them to any relevant support services.



Impact from our last briefing (Aug–Sept 2023)

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals have responded to our last briefing, outlining how they plan to address areas for improvement, and have made the following comments outlined in blue:

Issues were raised in our last briefing related to hospital discharge, including long waits for medication, and premature discharge/ discharge without an adequate care package in place. The Trust has been working on improving discharge, and this feedback has been shared with the discharge improvement project group who will discuss it at their next meeting.

Issues were raised relating to signage, particularly at the Northern General site. Feedback has been raised with the Estates Manager who will review the signage around the Northern General site to consider whether additional signage to support safe, accessible pedestrian routes around the site can be offered.

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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