

Access to Health and Social Care Services in Sheffield

Key issues from December- January 2024

During December and January 2024, we gathered insights from individuals accessing health and care services in Sheffield and heard 215 pieces of feedback. A large proportion of responses focused on mental health services, highlighting various concerns and issues. Additionally, views were shared about the lack of information relating to Right to Choose ADHD and autism diagnostic services. We also heard how British Sign Language users are finding it increasingly difficult to find an optician who would provide them with an interpreter.

Accessing GP services

Over the past two months, we heard from 74 patients registered at 29 different GP practices across the city. 38 individuals provided positive feedback, noting that despite their practices being busy, they still received excellent care and support.

We heard numerous examples of friendly, helpful staff but there were instances where individuals reported unprofessional interactions, especially when they were trying to access urgent care appointments.

Eight patients reported difficulties using online systems. Some individuals contacted their surgery by phone to request an appointment but were instructed to complete an online triage form. Despite expressing their challenges, they didn't receive any assistance or support to complete the form. Some of these patients said it was easier to go into the surgery to request an appointment whilst others reported they had opted to use NHS 111 or waited to phone the out of hours service.

Lengthy service waiting times and limited information available about the Right to Choose

People continue to express ongoing concerns about the waiting times for various services, including assessments for ADHD and autism. Individuals pointed out that the Sheffield Health and Social



"The doctor was very thorough, with a caring yet professional manner."

"Rang today and they wouldn't book me in. Told to use the website which I can't use."

"You have a better chance of winning the Lottery than getting an appointment to see a doctor."



Care Trust website had not updated waiting times for these services since September 2023, which they didn't find helpful. People also suggested it would be beneficial if Sheffield Health and Social Care Trust could publish approximate waiting times for other services on their website.



Views were shared about right to choose and how some GPs did not seem to understand the process for autism and ADHD assessments. We heard that information and advice given to patients was often limited and confusing. Some patients were asked to review ADHD and autism diagnostic Right to Choose providers independently, but discovered there was limited information available online. Some did not use the internet so sought assistance from their GP to select a service but were refused. It was also noted some GPs were uncertain of the process if a patient was already on a service waiting list but wanted to change to a different provider. People stated it would be helpful if GPs could provide them with a printed list of Right to Choose providers and would welcome more information being published on websites such as the NHS, South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board and Sheffield Health and Social Care Trust.

"I find right to choose confusing and I don't know where to begin looking for information, I needed support."

Barriers accessing mental health services

A large proportion of feedback received this period related to mental health services, and came from patients, carers and staff at different services. One of the key issues raised was related to the lack of service flexibility. Staff informed us a lack of outreach options limited individuals to fixed appointments in clinical settings, which proved unsuitable for some. Those impacted experienced removal from waiting lists due to missed appointments or periods of 'non-engagement', when they may have much preferred a visit at their home



"I was on the waiting list but they said I've already had treatment and I can't have anymore because I'll be using it to soothe myself."

We heard some people supported by the Homeless Assessment and Support Team (HAST) at [Changing Futures](#) will need to find mental health support elsewhere when their wider support from the Changing Futures programme finishes at the end of March. Some people getting support with HAST do not fit the criteria to access this service outside of the programme because they are not homeless. It is hoped that some people may have referrals accepted by the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) or Assertive Outreach Team (AOT) if they are unable to continue accessing HAST.

We heard of cases where people had been discharged from mental health services and were left with no other support. This was for varying reasons such as being 'too unwell' or being 'not ready' or 'not suitable', for instance, they were drinking alcohol or using substances, or had already undertaken CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) or IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) and could not access treatment again.

Views were shared relating to how reasonable adjustments were not being provided and there were insufficient support packages in place that did not combine autism, physical and mental health needs. We heard of one particular case where an individual was passed back and forth between two different services because their support needs were not getting met.

We also heard of examples where people thought they had been referred to mental health services but later discovered they were not actually on a waiting list, resulting in longer wait periods to access support.

Concerns were shared about the lack of communication between different mental health teams, patients, and the services supporting them. For instance, when people were discharged from inpatient wards, no plans or handovers appeared to be in place with the Community Mental Health Teams. We also heard patients and services struggled to contact care coordinators, when leaving messages there was often no response.

We heard some people felt unsupported by recovery services and other mental health teams. Some sought assistance elsewhere, for example at A&E or with external services. Issues were also raised relating to requesting welfare checks. Staff at one service told us they had tried contacting SPA (Single Point of Access), 101 and ambulance services but were unsuccessful in obtaining a check for an individual they were concerned about. Staff at a different service noted safeguarding reports made relating to mental health never seemed to be actioned and were often closed.

A problem with the SPA phonenumber was also reported when a service was trying to make a referral. The connection dropped following redirection from the switchboard. We heard of a similar issue in March 2023 which we raised with Sheffield Health and Social Care Trust.



"You ask for help in a crisis, you get told there is none. You ask to speak to your person, they're never there."



"There needs to be proper plans set in place and good communication from the wards with the community services."



Care in hospital

We heard mixed feedback from 40 individuals relating to their experiences of hospital services. 18 people shared positive sentiments, praising staff for the professional, friendly, and high quality care they had received at areas such as the hand clinic, stroke unit, Chesterman, gastroenterology, radiology, ward 11, orthopaedics and A&E. One particularly positive example of feedback came from a patient who was referred for tests by their GP but attended before the referral had been processed. Due to prompt communication between hospital staff and the GP practice, they swiftly acquired the patient's records, enabling them to conduct the tests on the same day.

Less favourable feedback primarily centred around the quality of care provided. These individuals sought guidance for raising concerns or initiating a formal complaint. A small number of these patients reported they had attended A&E with physical health issues but felt that they were not taken seriously because they had previously sought care at A&E for their mental health.

Some patients and their carers got in touch to report when they had obtained department contact numbers from the hospital website they found the numbers were unavailable or not working. Other people reported they were unable to find the patient booking hub contact number online. We also heard when some people had called the booking hub they had experienced long delays trying to get through.

Opticians – BSL interpreter support

We were told that Deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL) are finding it increasingly difficult to find an optician that would provide them with an interpreter. We know from local Healthwatch colleagues that this is an issue in other parts of South Yorkshire too. We 'mystery shopped' 2 city centre opticians who we know had previously offered this service, and confirmed they no longer did. We believe there are opticians who will provide interpreters, but they are limited, and there is a lack of information to help people know where they can go.

Additionally, we heard the NHS optician voucher scheme frequently fell short of covering the expenses associated with optical prescriptions. For instance, one individual found their regular prescribed lenses too heavy and uncomfortable to wear but could not afford to pay the additional costs for alternative lens options.



"From receptionist to nurses, porters, xray staff, to Dr's, I can't thank you all enough for the care I received."

"The majority of numbers on their website are not working, a lot of information on there is out of date."



A spotlight on complaints handling

We heard South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board was taking approximately six months or more to respond to continuing healthcare (CHC) complaints, and when responses were made not all points raised were addressed. As well as being slow, we heard the process can often be very formal and off-putting for some. Those who experienced poor complaints handling stated they would be reluctant to raise further issues this way in the future.



We heard of a positive example of a complaint that was dealt with by Sheffield Health and Social Care Trust's Community Learning Disability Team. The individual making the complaint received a prompt response, and staff visited them at their home for a face to face discussion. Additionally, the team followed up on any further questions or concerns raised. The individual stated they felt listened to and understood throughout the process.

Access to NHS dentistry

Enquiries related to dentistry this period have been varied, four people got in touch to request help to find a dentist for themselves or their children. Others were concerned about the quality of treatment received so wanted advice about how to make a complaint. One individual got in touch as they were confused due to receiving a quote for private work which they felt should have been included as part of NHS treatment.



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. After we called round in January, we discovered just 1 out of 51 practices across the city was able to offer appointments to new NHS patients.

"I have rung so many dentists but I can't find any accepting NHS patients. I give up! "

Issues with pharmacy prescriptions

People informed us about delays with prescriptions, frequently occurring when patients went to collect their medications to find them unprepared. This left patients uncertain whether the issue lay with the pharmacy or their GP surgery. There were also reports of pharmacies encountering problems with Spine the NHS digital messaging system used by GPs to send electronic prescription requests. This led to delays in some patients receiving their medication on time.





Impact from our last briefing (Oct- Nov 2023)

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

Response from Sheffield Teaching Hospitals

Issues were raised in our last briefing relating to the need for more disabled parking bays and the environmental impact of emissions from vehicles struggling to park. This was raised with the patient information team who will update the Northern General and Royal Hallamshire site maps as they do not currently show all disabled parking spaces. These new maps are expected to be available in April 2024. The issues with car parking and increased emissions are continuously reviewed by the Sustainable Travel Team who are attending the [Health and Care Partnership Forum](#) to discuss transport in more detail.

Issues were raised about limited, infrequent and unreliable public transport impacting patient access to hospital services. We have recently engaged with the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority with regard to public transport. Our plans are in the early stage of development and we will use the information provided about the challenges faced by our patients and visitors to inform these.

Response from Sheffield Health and Social Care Trust

Issues were raised relating to lengthy waiting times for the Memory Service. Our Improvement plans include:

- A pilot support programme developed with the input of service users and their supporters who are on the waiting list focussing on, living well with a memory problem, coping strategies, support and signposting and collaborative working with our stakeholders i.e., Age UK
- Waiting list letters which include the contact details of the Dementia Advice Service which can refer to People Keeping Well, Social Prescribing, Community Support Workers, the Alzheimer's society, and many other services.
- G.P.'s are now making referrals to Dementia Advice Service at the time of referral to Memory Service
- Reminding GPs to refer to Radiology for head scans which reduces the wait for an appointment.
- Building a network with GP neighbourhoods to ensure that there is a clear communication pathway between Memory Service and GP's

Feedback was shared relating to travel reimbursement: In response to details of how to claim back travel reimbursement, we understand that this is important, especially in the current financial climate. Currently details of how to claim travel expenses are automatically detailed on clinic letter but not included on general letters - Will review this approach to ensure reimbursement processes are clearer.

Members of the public shared mixed views about their experiences of different services: North Adult Community Mental Health Team were really pleased with the positive feedback, and this was shared with teams.

We were very sorry to hear that some people were unsure about how to raise a concern or make a complaint. Information can be found on our website [Complaints | Sheffield Health and Social Care \(shsc.nhs.uk\)](https://www.shsc.nhs.uk) and the details are below.

There are three ways someone can make a complaint to us:

By writing to us: Complaints Team, Sheffield Health and Social Care NHS Foundation Trust, Centre Court, Atlas Way, Sheffield, S4 7QQ. By emailing complaints@shsc.nhs.uk
By calling 0114 2718956

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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