

June 2022 Monthly Feedback report



The feedback presented in this report represents 156 responses from the following:

- Calls and emails to Healthwatch Greenwich from Greenwich residents and service users
- Meetings between Healthwatch Greenwich and groups of Greenwich service users or advocates
- Outreach and engagement events by Healthwatch Greenwich
- Conversations as seen on social media, and on community and neighbourhood sites
- Online reviews of services

GP Services

Digital Access

We heard mixed feedback from service users about digital access this month. Some praise the efficiency of apps and digital platforms:

“[Babylon app] once got me a video call with a GP within 10 minutes and gave the prescription I wanted. You can book physical appointments [using the app] in many [NHS] clinics across London”

While some say apps and digital platforms don't meet their needs.

“GP’s[should] get back to seeing patients face to face. Disgraceful dereliction of duty. “Send me a WhatsApp picture” are you kidding?”

More options to describe symptoms in eConsult could improve service user experience:

“Drs and nurses are nice, and the building is clean and airy. However, the booking system is close to impossible! When I went through eConsult it told me to call the practice.... I was on the phone for an hour and 20 minutes only to be told that a doctor will call me back today...And as for eConsult, it didn't have drop down options for the symptoms my daughter is experiencing. ...nothing against the people and I understand the pressures they're currently under (I'm a nurse myself) but their system is ineffectual”

“The eConsult is the best way to book your appointments and health review. Thank God it is up and running. The surgery could include more options [on the form] which would be helpful”

Getting an appointment

This month, we heard positive feedback about some GP practices:

“I can always get an appointment when I want one”

“I've been there for years – it's a lovely GP surgery”

When service users want an appointment within 24 or 48 hours, many will phone at 8am (often at the request of the practice) to try and book. Unable to get a timely appointment, some service users will resort to hospital services:

“There is no way to book an appointment with the surgery through phone - after trying to phone 8am everyday- that's the only time you

can call. The pressure of getting an appointment is more than the sickness itself. Very poor management. Been to emergency [department] twice because of their poor service”

“I had an eye issue few days ago [and was] sent to Plumstead Health Centre -was a total nightmare. [I] told them I'd go urgent care. [I] did [and] was seen within 2 hrs”

“This practice has grown too large and is woefully badly managed, it loses prescription requests, ignores phone calls - waiting over 1 hour, get cut off by their phone provider, no appointments for 2+ weeks, [they] won't make appointments for longer than two out - see the catch-22 scenario here?, and being told to call back in 1 week to book an appointment 2 weeks in the future from the time of calling”

Communication with service users

We continue to hear mixed feedback from service users about the communication style of front desk staff. Those with positive experience say the patience and empathy they experienced made a big difference at a difficult time for them. A calm and reassuring manner gave them confidence and helped to manage their anxiety.

“Receptionist [was] extremely empathetic and helpful. Really uplifted my spirits”

“[The receptionist] is always very helpful whenever I call the practice. I have spoken to her so many times and I must commend her efforts. She is very patient and listens to everything I have to say. She has a good tone of speaking, and always ensures my requests are met. It is always a pleasure speaking with [her]. Thank you for all your good work”

“[Receptionists] are incredible and make me feel welcomed. It was like talking to my sisters – both [receptionists] were so friendly and comforting and made me feel at ease. They are both very patient and listen to everything I have to say”

Not all have a positive experience, suggesting communication is, at times, forgetful, abrupt or evasive.

“Waited 4 weeks for an appointment with doctor. I arrived 10 mins early [and] was told by [the] receptionist to take a seat through [the] doors in [the] waiting area (from where you cannot be seen by receptionist) after waiting 50 mins [I] went back to reception to enquire as to how much longer I would have wait to be seen only to be told the doctor had gone home. The receptionist had forgotten to book me in. Since the surgeries merger the service has become a bit of a shambles”

“Incompetent and rude reception staff – of which surgeries seem to have a surfeit”

“They are accepting NHS money and not providing any service except rude receptionists who are “new” and cannot even book an appointment”

“Some of the reception staff aim to resolve issues (thank you) but the majority hide behind the “I can only tell you what I have been told to say” or “I am new here” line, which is pretty poor”

Poor communication can have a significant impact on service users.

“Utterly fed up. No matter how many times I’ve asked/told this surgery to call first on my landline NOT my mobile, they call the mobile and when I’m at home, I just get a ‘you missed a call’ text on the mobile. So I managed to get signal, called them back and the doctor is due to call the landline for my appointment. 3 hours later I’m still waiting! This is shocking. My time off is wasted. I have a break from caring duties for a few days to sort out my life and a whole morning is chucked away”

“Appalling. The surgery is closed for staff training – and [I] can’t wait till surgery opens[and] number is wrong on their answerphone. Appalling”

“The receptionists are beginning to have attitude now... Everyone is fighting a battle no one knows about and please don’t add to my health issues thank you”

Doug's experience with breast cancer

Doug, a Plumstead resident, was featured in Breast Cancer Now¹ highlighting his experience as a man with breast cancer. Doug comments on the high quality of care received at his GP surgery.

“At the end of 2011, I noticed what I thought was a cyst on my left breast. I kept moaning about it, and eventually my wife told me to go and see the GP. So, I booked myself an appointment for two days before Christmas.

It started off fine – I was laughing and joking with the doctor but, as soon as I took my top off, he became quite serious. The next thing I know, he's tapping away on his computer and telling me I need to go to hospital to get it checked out.

When I asked if it could be cancer, he told me that he couldn't rule it out.

At that point, I didn't know that men could get breast cancer. I've got a couple of mates who are nurses, so I asked them about it. They told me it was possible but assured me that it was very rare.

However, three days before my 50th birthday, I found out it was breast cancer. I really didn't think they were going to say that – and not because I'm optimistic (I'm really not!), but because I'd looked it up on Google and seen how few men actually get it.

“I was lucky to have a doctor who took my symptoms seriously, otherwise I might have ignored the lump”

¹ https://breastcancernow.org/about-us/news-personal-stories/i-was-lucky-have-doctor-who-took-my-symptoms-seriously-otherwise-i-might-have-ignored-lump?utm_source=facebooko&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=services&utm_content=160622DougBlog&fs=e&s=cl&fbclid=IwAR0DQj_X7qKpWzKT-qu6qXPtE7ny0Giy2HQHfmPQEBWRVCmy9_KJdtuTVXs

Feedback opportunities

GP practices have a variety of ways of collecting feedback from patients including – patient participation groups (PPG)², opportunities to leave comments on practice websites, reviews left on NHS and other sites, speaking direct to practice staff, or leaving a comment in a suggestion box on reception. All GP practices carry out the Friends and Families Test (FFT)³, asking patients: *‘How likely are you to recommend our service to friends and family if they needed similar care or treatment?’*

A small number of practices publish monthly results of the FFT on their website, and an even smaller number respond to reviews left by service users on NHS and other sites. In June, we estimate 7% of reviews or comments made by Greenwich service users⁴ were responded to by Greenwich GP practices.

When a practice publishes regular FFT results or responds to reviews it demonstrates an openness and a desire to listen to service user views. Comments and suggestions can also be helpful in continuing to develop services and identifying how and for who services could be more effective. Responding to negative reviews can open communication channels, allowing issues to be resolved before escalating into formal complaints. Below is a good example of how a practice reached out after receiving a poor review:

“Thank you for taking the time to review our services, we appreciate your time as we can only improve services by receiving feedback. We are sorry to hear that you are not happy with the level of service you

² <https://healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk/report/2020-09-25/supporting-patient-participation-groups>

³ The requirement to submit Friends and Family Test (FFT) data was suspended across the NHS in March 2020 and was reintroduced into the GP Contract from 1st April 2022. However, practices will only be required to submit data from Q2 in 22/23 onwards.

⁴ We counted the number of comments and the number of times the comments were responded to by GP practices, arriving at a 7% response rate

have received. If you would like us to look into this for you, please do contact us with more information. Many Thanks. Practice Manager”

Andriy’s experience with two different GP practices

After receiving support to change his GP practice, Andriy, a non-English speaking Ukrainian service user is very pleased with the quality of care, empathy, responsiveness, and access to translation services at his new GP practice. The registration process was quick and easy and exceeded his expectations:

“The new GP surgery doctors did a lot for me... I registered really easily. I returned the application form and they called the following day, offered services, although they said they would call me in a week time as I returned the form”

Andriy has been living with pain in his foot for two years. At his previous GP practice, Andriy said he was not provided with an interpreter and could not get the referrals he felt he needed and requested. He was positively surprised by his experience at his new GP practice.

“They provided me with a doctor and interpreter straight away... Made me an appointment with a therapist because of a constant foot pain - I struggle with walking for at least 2 years now. So I am very grateful, because my foot pulsates every night. Previous doctors knew about that, but just shrugged”

“I have got high blood pressure, anxiety and insomnia which has been made worse by the news of the war in my country. These [new] doctors referred me straight away to a psychiatrist as soon as they heard that I had been on a waiting list for 2 years. The previous doctors didn't care about my condition and didn't do anything”

“Now I feel much better mentally than I felt then... And now these doctors have done so much good for me, I can't describe this joy, I cried for joy and now crying and feeling joyful”

Dentistry

Access to NHS Dentists

Service users continue to tell us that they cannot find a dentist accepting NHS patients and do not find the 'find a dentist' NHS search tool useful, as it's not regularly updated⁵. We've highlighted this issue many times in our Monthly Feedback reports⁶. Our feedback is used by Healthwatch England⁷, campaigning for national action on NHS dentistry.

Dental treatment for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Going to the dentist for SEN children can be a difficult experience for them and their carers. We heard positive feedback on the dental experience for SEN children:

"[our dentist] is absolutely amazing with [my son], she has said any work that needs doing on him she would have to refer him to a SEN specialist but check up wise she is amazing

"Our dentist has been superb"

Oxleas NHS Trust

Mental health services

At Healthwatch Greenwich we've seen an increase in the number of mental health-related calls for help and support we receive. Many express their frustration at not being able to get adequate support, despite already being in contact with mental health services:

"Been trying to get mental health support and treatment for around 6/7 years . NHS GP give me different kinds of medication. Time to Talk telling they're not able to help me...And on, and on....Why they don't help but send people here and there?... I would like to get help to deal with my problems but it [has been] 7 years"

⁵ <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist>

⁶ <https://healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk/news-and-reports>

⁷ <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/news/2021-10-21/nhs-dentistry-we-have-co-signed-open-letter-chancellor-exchequer>

“I am still not feeling well [despite being in touch with the Community Mental Health team]... nothing has happened... I am depressed. I don't know who I should turn to”

“I am so depressed; I don't know what to do now”

Pharmacists

Medication supplies & health misinformation

Service users highlight difficulty in getting creams to treat chicken pox. Some suggest, anecdotally, this is the result of a higher than usual number of children with chickenpox in the borough and chemists are running out of chickenpox creams.

“My 13yr old finally has the chicken pox! I've heard it's literally impossible to get the Vira soothe or other creams to help with the itching as no chemists have any in stock”

Difficulty accessing certified chickenpox creams has led some service users to social media to ask others for unverified medical advice and information. Advice given on treating chickenpox includes bicarbonate of soda, porridge baths, and 'head and shoulders' shampoo.

NHS 111

NHS 111 helps people get the right advice and treatment when they urgently need it. NHS 111 clinicians and call advisors give patients advice, reducing the need to use other services. However, service users report long wait times for call backs from 111, with some waiting for 2 days:

“Called the NHS 111 helpline today about my daughter being sick [and] they said someone will call me back in the next 2 hours that was 7 hours ago. What a waste of taxpayer money setting up this stupid phone line”

“I rung them regarding my daughter's asthma few weeks ago, 4/5 phones calls later to ask how long etc.....2 days later!!!!!!”

“They [111] didn't ring till lunchtime the next day so it was over 19 hours later”

Despite the lag in call back response time for some, we heard that many benefited from the 111 service, in particular – reducing wait time in urgent care/emergency department with pre-booked appointments:

“When they finally rang back 9 hours later, [my son] was given an appointment at urgent care at Queen Elizabeth [hospital]. He went and thought he would have another 7–8 hours wait but was in and out within half hour”

“I have called 111 for my children and always got a call back but how long depends on the severity. In the case where my child was displaying some symptoms of meningitis (light sensitive and severe headaches) I was called back and sent to A&E within 10 minutes”

David and June’s experience

COVID booster vaccine for housebound and clinically vulnerable service user

David is the primary carer for his 94-year-old mum, June. After having her first booster at home, without any difficulty, David has been unable to get her second home visit booster arranged. He has been trying to get the second booster for over 8 weeks now.

“I have been trying to organise this, with no success so far – but, genuinely, with an awful lot of phone calls”

Both David and June are anxious about the increase in COVID cases and what it might mean if June caught COVID. David worries he might catch COVID and pass it on to his mum. As a result, David has stopped going out of the house unless essential – no social life, no physical contact with family or friends, and no break (outside the house) from his caring responsibilities. David is also worried that carers, who help to look after his mum, who are out and about in the community and visit other clinically vulnerable people might bring with it them.

David’s GP surgery say they have supply issues and NHS Vaccines don’t offer home visits:

“NHS Vaccines say home visits are nothing to do with them. My mum’s surgery, who have really tried, say they can arrange a home visit but have no vaccine. Apparently, that has to come from some other NHS institution”

Despite David trying to get the vaccine via the GP surgery for weeks, he was sent some NHS SMS communications which added to the frustration and confusion. One text did not acknowledge that David is a carer and not the recipient of the vaccine:

“They [the texts] were as if I was the person to be jabbed. I was sent a reminder text – the tone that I was ignoring this when I have been making so much effort was distressing”

Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust: Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Many service users thank NHS staff for high quality care at Queen Elizabeth:

“Can't thank children's A&E and the children's safari ward enough for taking care of my little boy enough , they were all amazing, thank you”

“Thank you to all the Doctors and nurses and all staff Day/Night shift of ward 16 for the great work you do. Thanks”

A&E

This month, we heard mixed comments. Some praise the compassion of staff and the efficiency of the service.

“Pleasantly surprised of how nice all the staff were. The support I got from the A&E team, and the overall experience I received from the people working there was exceptional. I didn't have to wait for hours to be seen (I had a broken finger), had an Xray done immediately, and was referred to a hand trauma specialist in a few short weeks. Really happy with the visit as I've had some very different experiences in other hospitals”

“Very good facilities, including A&E services. Though [the] average waiting time is quite high but [when] you are seen you will be given proper care”

“I was bleeding heavily due to a miscarriage and once seen by a nurse in A&E taken straight into a ward. This woman cried whilst seeing me I wish so much I knew her name because she was amazing”

Not all have such a positive experience:

“My dad in law had to wait 10 hours (all night – since ambulance took him to hospital) for them to come back with his blood test. After 10 hours

they said he's fine and can go home. No common sense or interest for the patient especially if you're foreign"

Communication

Difficulty getting through to departments and booking out-patient appointments causes frustration and anxiety:

"At QE you have to book an ECG on the day? It is a literal lottery. I phoned in the morning to do so. I was told there were no appointments. I was then told to phone at 12.00. The receptionist had a non-committal rude and dismissive attitude when I explained this was the second time I had attempted an appointment and that as a patient, this was a heart issue and people could die. Her response was 'I can't do much about that if we are short staffed'... Her advice should have been that I should go to A and E if I was concerned. My point being, that a less enlightened member of the public suffering a heart condition may hang on for the appointment and ultimately die"

"...no one answers the phone. We've been calling for over 30 min as we're running late and cannot get through to the imaging department or operator"

Return of hospital equipment

NHS trusts across the country spend tens of millions of pounds each year on replacing unreturned or broken hospital equipment such as crutches or walking sticks⁸. However, service users at Queen Elizabeth can't find clear information about how or where to return their hospital equipment⁹:

"I used some crutches a few weeks ago as I had in injury but I'm okay now. I don't even know where I return them to in the hospital? Reception?"

We searched the Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust website. Several searches for 'equipment return' and similar terms did not generate any results.

⁸ <https://thiis.co.uk/nhs-spends-millions-each-year-unnecessarily-on-walking-aids-new-figures-reveal/>

Next Steps

We follow up on all concerns or issues raised. We will work with commissioners, providers, and service users to understand where services are working well and where further development may be needed.

Contact Us

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