

Enter & View Queen's Hospital: Outpatients' Department - Fire Evacuation Procedure

1 October 2015

*One of a series of connected
Enter & View visits to Queen's Hospital in 2015*



What is Healthwatch Havering?

Healthwatch Havering is the local consumer champion for both health and social care. Our aim is to give local citizens and communities a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are provided for all individuals locally.

We are an independent organisation, established by the Health and Social Care Act 2012, and are able to employ our own staff and involve lay people/volunteers so that we can become the influential and effective voice of the public.

Healthwatch Havering is a Company Limited by Guarantee, managed by three part-time directors, including the Chairman and the Company Secretary, supported by two part-time staff and a number of volunteers, both from professional health and social care backgrounds and people who have an interest in health or social care issues.

Why is this important to you and your family and friends?

Following the public inquiry into the failings at Mid-Staffordshire Hospital, the Francis report reinforced the importance of the voices of patients and their relatives within the health and social care system.

Healthwatch England is the national organisation which enables the collective views of the people who use NHS and social services to influence national policy, advice and guidance.

Healthwatch Havering is your local organisation, enabling you on behalf of yourself, your family and your friends to ensure views and concerns about the local health and social services are understood.

Your contribution is vital in helping to build a picture of where services are doing well and where they need to be improved. This will help and support the Clinical Commissioning Groups and the Local Authority to make sure their services really are designed to meet citizens' needs.

***'You make a living by what you get,
but you make a life by what you give.'***
Winston Churchill

What is an Enter and View?

Under Section 221 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Healthwatch Havering has statutory powers to carry out Enter and View visits to publicly funded health and social care services in the borough, such as hospitals, GP practices, care homes and dental surgeries, to observe how a service is being run and make any necessary recommendations for improvement.

These visits can be prompted not only by Healthwatch Havering becoming aware of specific issues about the service or after investigation, but also because a service has a good reputation and we would like to know what it is that makes it special.

Enter & View visits are undertaken by representatives of Healthwatch Havering who have been duly authorised by the Board to carry out visits. Prior to authorisation, representatives receive training in Enter and View, Safeguarding Adults, the Mental Capacity Act and Deprivation of Liberties. They also undergo Disclosure Barring Service checks.

Background and purpose of the visit:

Healthwatch Havering (HH) is aiming to visit all health and social care facilities in the borough. This is a way of ensuring that all services delivered are acceptable and the safety of the resident is not compromised in any way.

This particular Enter & View visit was undertaken as part of a series of visits to out-patient, discharged in-patient and visitors' facilities at Queen's Hospital to enable Healthwatch Havering volunteers to view how patients and visitors were dealt with. This report should be read in conjunction with the reports on the Ambulance Waiting Area, Discharge Lounge and Pharmacy.

Fire Safety

Hospitals are, rightly, highly regarded as places of safety and security. Very few patients or visitors give much thought while they are in a hospital to the possibility of fire breaking out, nor should they need to; but their very nature means that hospitals are full of people who are very vulnerable and who, if there were a fire, would be at the highest levels of risk. So it is important that the highest levels of fire precautions are applied and that procedures for dealing with a fire and any evacuation of patients and visitors are thorough, comprehensive, robust and well-understood.

Healthwatch members are, of course, not expert in fire health and safety issues but it seemed important to gauge what sort of arrangements exist at Queen's Hospital from a lay perspective.

As part of the programme of Enter and View visits to Queen's Hospital, therefore, a team visited the Outpatients' Department and enquired about fire precautions.

The team was told that some 85% of staff are trained in Fire Safety. Their training is reviewed annually. Fire drills are held every 6 months, but more frequently in high risk areas, such the Accident & Emergency Department and the High Dependency Unit - such drills involve staff only and are carried out without affecting patients.

There are about 200 fire wardens, all listed on the hospital database. There are at least two on each ward and they undergo re-training every 2 years. Fire Wardens are issued with high visibility jackets.

When an evacuation is required, doctors carry on with operations, and until the seat of the fire is identified everything carries on as normal except that fire doors close, lifts return to the ground floor and stop, and the escalator stops. Evacuation chairs are available to help people who have restricted mobility, located in stairwells in remote areas.

Operational procedure is that staff are expected to tackle a small fire if an escape route is involved.

When the fire brigade comes to Queens they need to know where to go, so in corridors there is signage with LB and FB numbers to help them. This was put in on their instructions. Rather than call out the Fire Brigade every time an alarm is activated, the Fire Brigade are only called by a telephone operator when an emergency call (2222 in the hospital's internal telephone system) is made by staff.

When an alarm sounds, security staff check the system and reset it if all is confirmed as being normal.

Conclusions

From a lay perspective, the procedure seemed acceptable and effective, although how well it works can, by definition, only be thoroughly tested in the hopefully unlikely event of an actual fire breaking out. Although the number of staff trained in fire safety is commendably high, every permanent staff member should be thoroughly familiar with the action to be taken in an emergency, both for the specific area or ward in which they work and generally, though clearly there is no need for all to be trained to Fire Warden status. Such training should be repeated at least annually.

Moreover, whilst it is perfectly understandable that disruption of patient treatment and or hospital routines should be avoided during fire drills - not least to avoid inadvertently generating unnecessary anxiety among the more vulnerable - occasional full evacuation drills by staff using volunteers as "patients" would surely be a good way of testing the resilience of the evacuation procedures and identifying where improvement might be needed.

The team was unable to ask all of the questions that occurred to them and so, a further visit will be undertaken in due course to examine other points. However, it is pleasing to record that, subsequent to the visit, arrangements

are being made by the fire safety management team to train the hospital's volunteer staff in fire precautions as well as the paid employees.

The team would like to thank all staff and patients who were seen during the visit for their help and co-operation, which is much appreciated.

Disclaimer

This report relates to the visit on 1 October 2015 and is representative only of those patients and staff who participated. It does not seek to be representative of all service users and/or staff.

Participation in Healthwatch Havering

Local people who have time to spare are welcome to join us as volunteers. We need both people who work in health or social care services, and those who are simply interested in getting the best possible health and social care services for the people of Havering.

Our aim is to develop wide, comprehensive and inclusive involvement in Healthwatch Havering, to allow every individual and organisation of the Havering Community to have a role and a voice at a level they feel appropriate to their personal circumstances.

We are looking for:

Members

This is the key working role. For some, this role will provide an opportunity to help improve an area of health and social care where they, their families or friends have experienced problems or difficulties. Very often a life experience has encouraged people to think about giving something back to the local community or simply personal circumstances now allow individuals to have time to develop themselves. This role will enable people to extend their networks, and can help prepare for college, university or a change in the working life. There is no need for any prior experience in health or social care for this role.

The role provides the face to face contact with the community, listening, helping, signposting, providing advice. It also is part of ensuring the most isolated people within our community have a voice.

Some Members may wish to become **Specialists**, developing and using expertise in a particular area of social care or health services.

Supporters

Participation as a Supporter is open to every citizen and organisation that lives or operates within the London Borough of Havering. Supporters ensure that Healthwatch is rooted in the community and acts with a view to ensure that Healthwatch Havering represents and promotes community involvement in the commissioning, provision and scrutiny of health and social services.

Interested? Want to know more?

Call us on **01708 303 300**; or email
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