



**Healthwatch Kent** - September 2018

If you had dementia, how easy would it be to attend a hospital appointment in Darent Valley Hospital?



# Foreword

**Attending a hospital appointment can be daunting. If you struggle to read, hear, understand or communicate these worries can be extreme. We regularly hear from patients who have major concerns before attending an appointment. They are worried that they might not find their appointment, or that they won't be able to read and understand the information, or that they won't be able to communicate with the Doctor and make themselves understood.**

Since August 2016, all NHS organisations (and local authorities) must make it possible for anybody and everybody to be able to communicate and to be understood. This is called the Accessible Information Standard and it is a legal requirement. You can find more information about the Standard and what it involves, here [www.england.nhs.uk/publication/accessible-information-standard-overview-20172018](http://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/accessible-information-standard-overview-20172018)

In Kent we know that organisations have been working to ensure they meet the Standard and that every patient can access information. We published a report earlier this year summarising what each organisation told us they were doing. You can read the report on our website.

We wanted to test these assumptions for ourselves and understand how a patient with dementia would access an appointment at Darent Valley Hospital. We worked in partnership with Alzheimer's & Dementia Support Services in Gravesend to visit the hospital and see for ourselves what is in place to support someone with dementia. On this occasion we visited the main reception and Outpatients and we have made several recommendations for Darent Valley Hospital.

We have already met with them to share our findings and discuss our recommendations. We also shared our feedback directly with staff on the day of our visits. We will continue to work with the hospital to ensure they improve their support for patients.

We are currently planning to test NHS services in North Kent and Kent County Council services.

Do tell us your thoughts and share your own experiences with us. Contact us anytime for free on **0808 801 0102** or email [info@healthwatchkent.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchkent.co.uk)

**Steve Inett**  
Chief Executive, Healthwatch Kent



# What were we trying to achieve

**We wanted to see for ourselves how a patient with dementia would experience an NHS hospital appointment.**

## **How did we go about it?**

Working in partnership with Alzheimer's & Dementia Support Services, we visited Darent Valley Hospital. One of the volunteers had Dementia and together we went to main reception and to Outpatients reception to see how a patient with dementia would be supported by the Trust to attend their appointment. Would they be able to find their appointment and understand the information provided to them?

We had informed Darent Valley Hospital prior to our visit.

After our visit, we gave verbal feedback to the staff on duty. We have since met with the Safeguarding Nurse to share our findings and discuss our recommendations.





# What did we find? What did we see?

## In Summary

- Navigating around the hospital was confusing for many people. The information available was not clear or consistent. The signs on the ground floor suggest that all services are upstairs which is not the case.
- Several areas of the hospital are dark, especially the corridors and by the lifts, making it harder to read signage and appointment letters.
- The large sign showing the location of all hospital departments, wards and facilities is complicated and was confusing not only to our volunteer, but to the rest of us as well. The floor plan by the lifts was not understood by anyone in our team. The layout of floors is misleading and the writing is too small for people to read.
- By contrast the signage in outpatients is clear, properly sized and with strong contrasting colours, which is helpful to Dementia patients as well as others.
- All staff in Outpatients wore clear name badges with contrasting colours making it easy for patients to read.
- Toilets are still predominantly white, but consideration is being given to coloured/black seats which would help many patients.
- Information leaflets are specific to each clinic and we did not have the time to examine these in great detail. A quick glance suggested that they had not been designed in a way to support people with additional needs such as our volunteer who has dementia. We did see the new patient information leaflet which looked to be much better.
- We did not find any information that was specific for Dementia patients or their families. Neither did we find a clear, simple leaflet that could have helped people with additional needs during their visit.
- The Safeguarding Nurse explained that the patient record system flags up if a patient has a particular condition, such as Dementia and indicates that they may need additional help with their appointment. This would be apparent when the patient checks in and would be recorded on what is known as the patient passport. This was demonstrated to us by reception staff who also showed us a copy of the Communication Resource Handbook which is used by staff during these situations.



# What did we find? What did we see? Continued

- We heard about the support available for patients with dementia who are staying overnight at the hospital. A specialist Dementia Nurse and volunteer Dementia Buddies are on site but do not cover Outpatients or main reception. We did note that a Learning Disability Nurse was available in Outpatients.
- Although we didn't witness this happening, we were told that staff will go out of their way to help patients who may be confused or concerned. Examples given to us were of staff finding taxis, providing refreshments, rescheduling appointments and sorting out parking.
- We heard from a Carer about the challenge they face when bringing a patient with dementia to a hospital appointment. They talked about long waiting times and extreme anxiety plus difficulties using the automatic check in system which was not easy for Dementia patients.







# What have we recommended?

- Produce new signage in the main reception making it clear what services are available on each floor including the ground floor.
- Redesign the guide to wards, departments and facilities outside of the main outpatients. Any new materials should be tested with patients during development including people who have additional communication needs.
- Produce a clear and simple leaflet which summarises the layout of the hospital and test it with patients beforehand
- Trial using a Dementia buddy in reception/ main outpatients to see if there is demand for it.
- Examine the role of the Specialist Dementia Nurse to see if their support could be extended to include Outpatients and reflect the provision already in place for patients with learning disabilities.
- Consider offering fast track appointments for patients with dementia and their carers (and possibly others with disabilities). This would reduce the added stress and anxiety caused by waiting times.
- Introduce contrasting colours in toilets to support patients.
- Improve lighting in the corridors especially outside Outpatients, and the lifts.
- Produce an information leaflet for people living with dementia and their carers, on what special assistance is available to enable them to access hospital services. Any leaflet should be tested with Dementia patients and their Carers first.
- Learn from other hospitals about how they have implemented the Accessible Information Standard and how they are actively supporting patients who may need additional help. Include their best practice at Darent Valley Hospital.
- Ensure the Healthwatch Kent Help Cards are readily available for patients to indicate that they may need help and ensure all reception staff know how to respond.

**We will be reviewing these recommendations with the Trust and will publish an Impact report in 6 months detailing the progress.**



# Healthwatch Kent

**Healthwatch Kent is the independent voice for local people in Kent.**

We gather and represent people's views about any health and social care service in Kent.

Our role is to understand what matters most to people and to use that information to influence providers and commissioners to change the way services are designed and developed.

Our **FREE** Information and Signposting service can help you navigate Kent's complicated health and social care system to ensure you can find and access the services that are available for you. Call us on 0808 801 0102 or email [info@healthwatchkent.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchkent.co.uk)



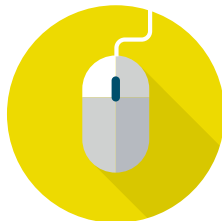
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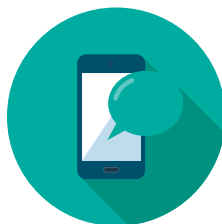


**By Post:** Write to us or fill in and send a Speak out form. **Freepost RTLG-UBZB-JUZA**  
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**Face to Face:**

Call 0808 801 01 02 to arrange a visit



**By Text:** Text us on **07525 861 639**.

By texting 'NEED BSL', Healthwatch's British Sign Language interpreter will make contact and arrange a time to meet face to face.