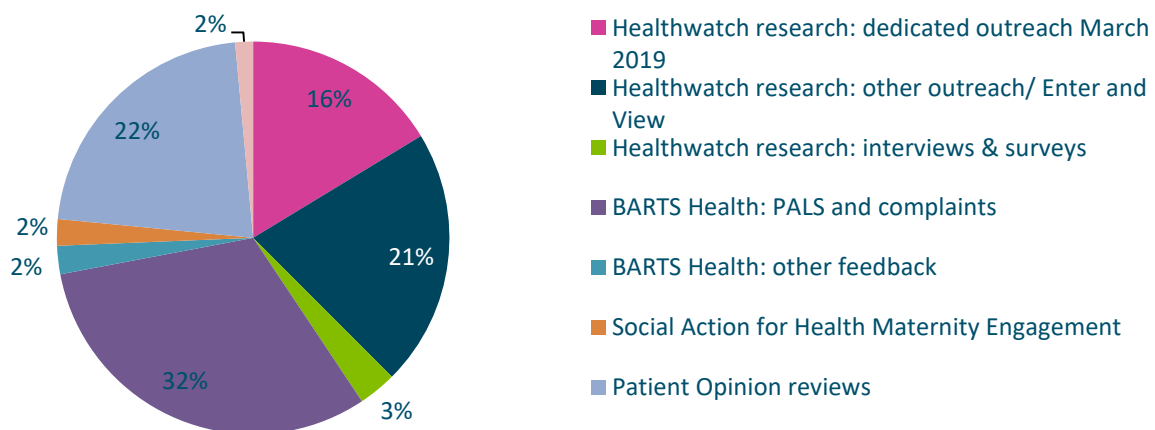


Royal London Hospital Outpatient Services Community Insights Briefing May 2019

Between May 2018 and May 2019 Healthwatch Tower Hamlets analysed the experience of **553 outpatients at the Royal London Hospital**, identifying a total of **1971 issues**. To engage with outpatients in more depth, we carried out five outreach sessions at the Fracture Clinic in the Hospital in March 2019, asking specific questions around appointment letters, information received pre-appointment and admin systems. We also received information through other outreach activities, Barts Health PALS & Complaints, reviews on dedicated websites, social media, and partner organisations.

Key insights and recommendations



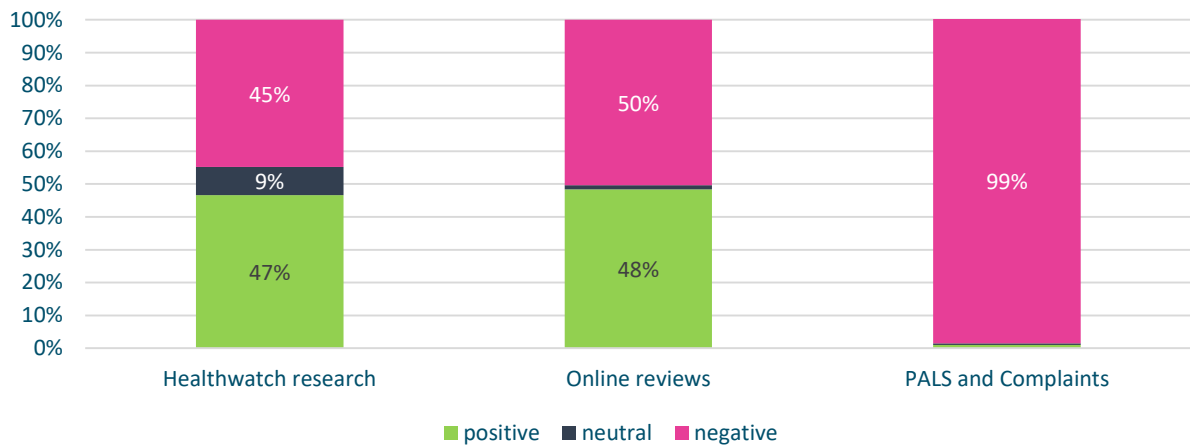
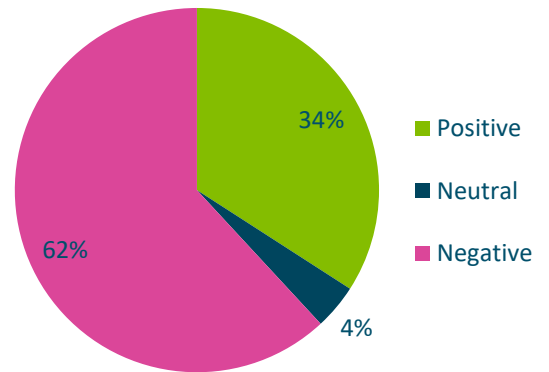
- Opinion of Royal London Hospital outpatient services is **leaning negative**.
- Patients feel that they are receiving a **high standard of medical care** and are happy with the attitude of staff members. They also feel that they are receiving good explanations of treatment from both doctors and nurses.
- **Appointment letters and text messages** are seen as useful and informative; **SMS alerts** should be available for all appointments.
- Patients believe they **wait too long** for consultant appointments.
- Appointments are often **delayed or cancelled**.
- Communication around **waiting list, delays and cancellations** is poor. **Greater transparency** is needed; when longer waits are unavoidable, patients want to be informed on why they happen and what to expect.
- Responsiveness **by telephone** needs to improve: patients complain of calls not being answered or of being transferred to the wrong department.

- **Admin issues** continue to negatively impact patient experience and communication. This includes loss of test results or test samples, failure to send appointment letters and errors in patient records

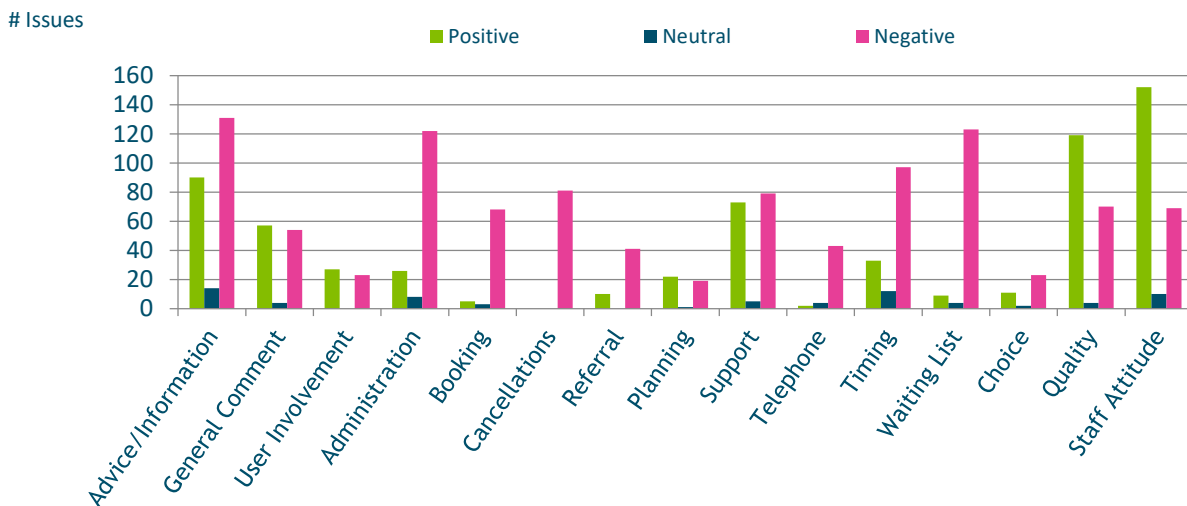
What we have learned

Overall, the experience of Royal London Hospital is **leaning negative**.

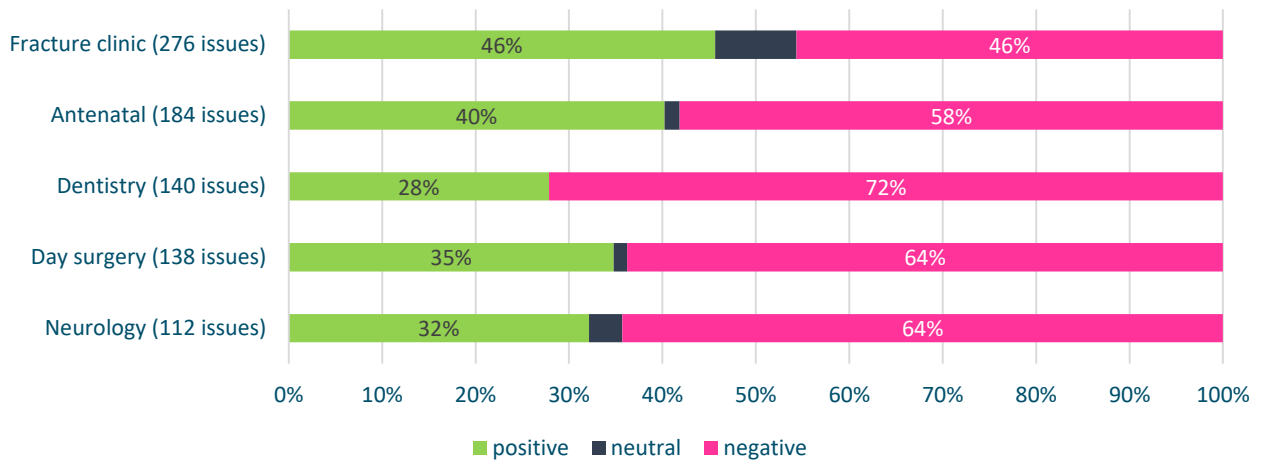
Understandably, patients who talked to Healthwatch directly and those who reviewed the service online had a more positive experience than those who spoke to the PALS and Complaints department.



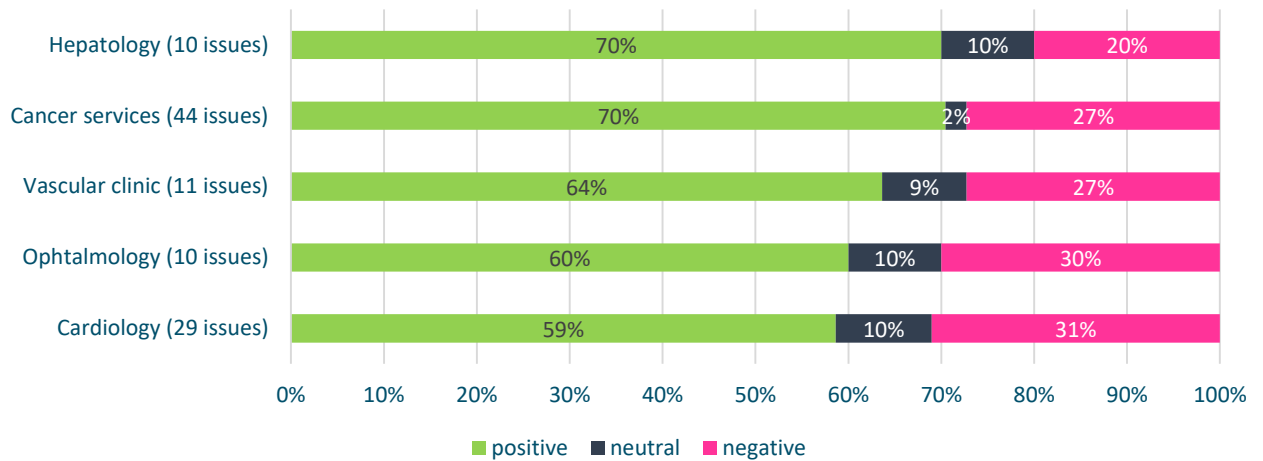
Overall, patients are happy with the quality of the treatment they receive and with the attitude of most staff members. Most complaints are around *admin issues, waiting for appointments, delays in appointment times, appointment cancellations and poor communication*.



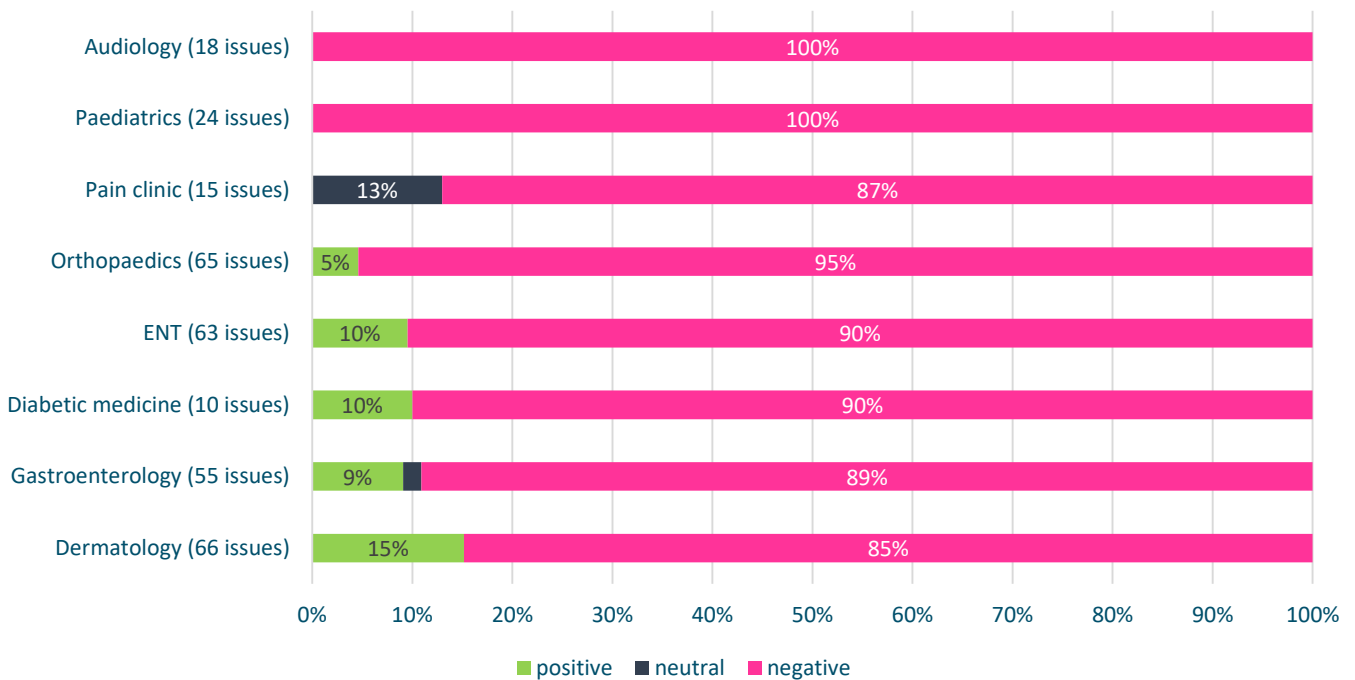
Most discussed departments



Most praised departments



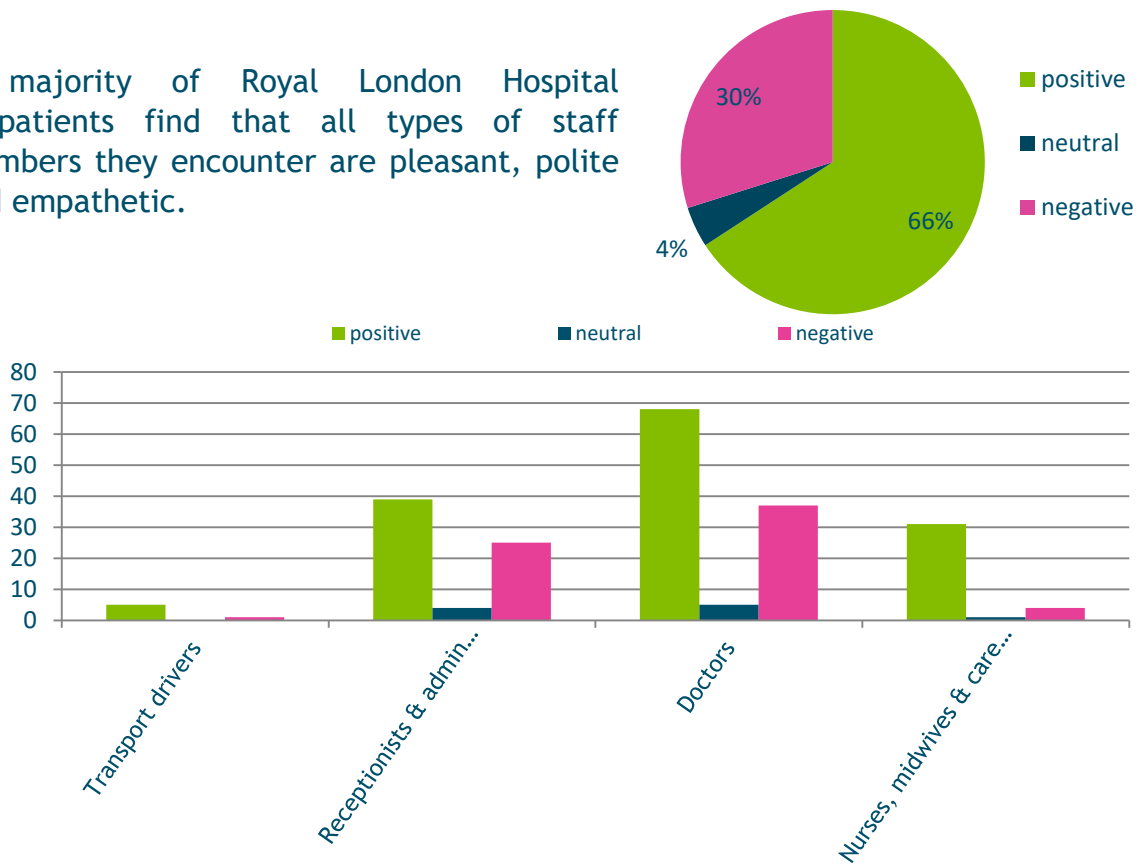
Most criticised departments



What works well

Staff attitude

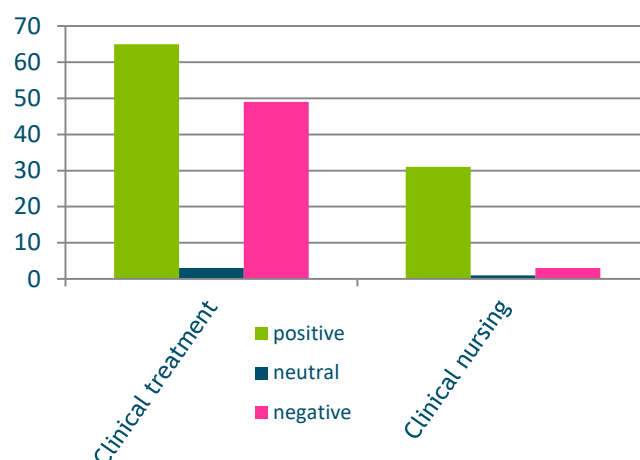
A majority of Royal London Hospital outpatients find that all types of staff members they encounter are pleasant, polite and empathetic.



- I was dreading the journey, it was in the late afternoon and with multiple problems and needing a PET Scan, but we had the kindest nicest [ambulance driver] you could wish to meet and as a bonus she brought us home. This is a lovely young woman so if you happen to have the good fortune to have her as your driver please thank her again from me.*
- I had a surgical abortion at the Barts Health - The London Royal Hospital when I was 7 weeks pregnant .This was a very difficult time for me full of guilt and pain but the staff made me feel so comfortable and at ease. Everyone - from the reception desk in the waiting area on level 3 through to the all of the nurses under the Sister in the admissions ward, right through to the anaesthesiologist, the lady who took me to get changed into the gown and slippers and the surgeon were great. The women in the operating room were also amazing. When I got distressed they held my hand and talked to me the whole time to calm me down.*
- My husband and I took our 8yr old daughter to the allergy clinic last week. We were so impressed by the friendliness of the staff and their professionalism; from the front desk staff to the doctors and nurses. We were so impressed. Particular mention to one particular doctor (very funny) and one particular nurse who tested my daughter - she had a wonderful way with children.*

Quality of clinical nursing and treatment

The vast majority of outpatients commented positively on the standard of care that they received from nurses, midwives and HCA's in the hospital. A majority of patients also believed that they received a high standard of clinical treatment from competent, trustworthy doctors.

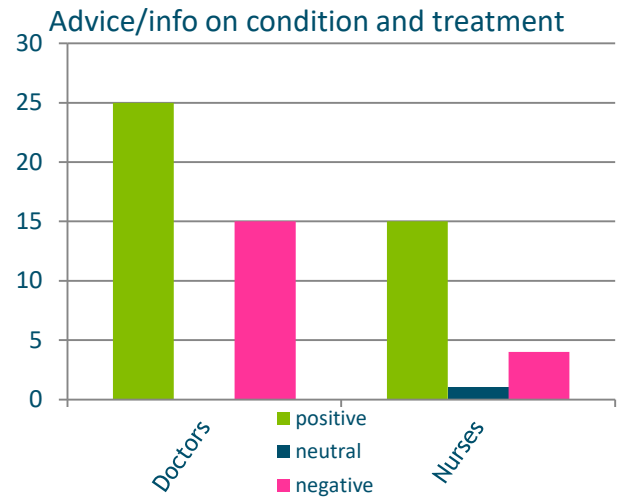


- We have visited this hospital on several occasions recently for treatment for my mum's skin cancer. She is an older lady, partially deaf and she has received nothing but excellent care and kindness from this team. Her consultant has been outstanding. Patient, understanding and incredibly helpful and managed to make Mum feel safe and in excellent hands whilst having treatment. The nurses have been excellent too, answering questions and calling back when we had queries. I cannot fault the service we have received from this excellent facility.*
- I have found all aspects of my antenatal care of extremely high quality. I was lucky as I was regularly able to see the same midwife - [Name] - who was excellent, as the system allows you to request a midwife. So I felt that I got to know her, and she got to know me, and I didn't need to keep explaining things. I found everyone from the staff on the front desk to the sonographers, to the midwives, to the midwives in MFAU and on the urgent care ward, to the consultant extremely knowledgeable and efficient. I felt I was always in safe hands, and fully informed.*
- Thank you... X and Y from Dental. Patient thanked you both and from the bottom of her heart for your helpful and speedy manner in which this case has been dealt with.*
- The doctors that I went to were good and I was listened to and cared for.*
- I have absolutely no complaints regarding my treatment (a colposcopy), appointment waiting times and follow up treatment. The staff, nurses and specialist were extremely lovely and put me at ease. Thank you for the amazing work that you do.*

Advice on diagnosis and treatment

Patients find that they receive a good level of explanation about their medical diagnosis, their condition, how to manage it and their treatment options, from *both doctors and nurses*.

This helps reassure them, contributes to establishing trust between patients and medical professionals, and empowers patients to make informed decisions about their care.



- I am currently 15 weeks pregnant and have been extremely impressed with the care I have received so far. I had early blood screenings at nine weeks, saw a wonderful nurse who was kind and considerate of my needle phobia. I have had three appointments (including a promptly arranged specialist appointment) and each time have been seen on time, have had all my questions answered and the staff have been very professional and caring.*
- Excellent consultant with friendly, considered and informed decision-making providing clear direction of travel for future management and care. Delighted to have transferred care and highly recommend the service. Thank you.*
- When I fell pregnant [my GP who was aware of my struggles with depression] referred me to the Gateway midwives and ***** was my midwife and she was very good, kind, supportive, professional and informative.(I also had a fantastic student midwife)*
- The referral process was great, they kept us informed step by step, and the whole team is really good. They always made sure that I felt involved in my care plan, taking a great amount of efforts in keeping me involved using an interpreter. I have the nurses' number so I am able to ask questions and contact them whenever I want. I come every six months and I am fully aware of what will happen at the next appointment. They are a great team.*

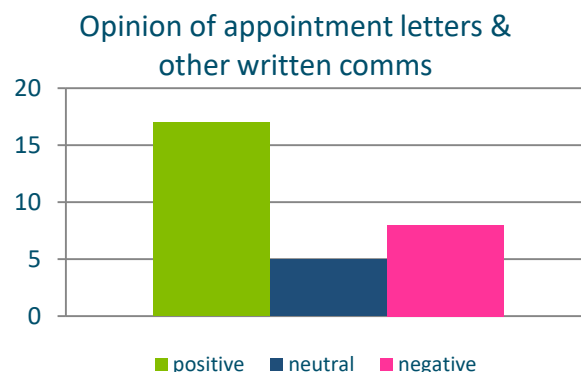
Appointment letters

Providing that they are received promptly and that they are not subject to admin errors, the appointment letters that patients received are informative, easy to understand and helpful.

Patients also found communications by SMS to be useful in reminding them of their appointments and communicating any other relevant information efficiently and succinctly.

Furthermore, when admin errors do occur and patients fail to receive appointment letters, text messages represent and added “safety net” to ensure that patients are aware of their appointments.

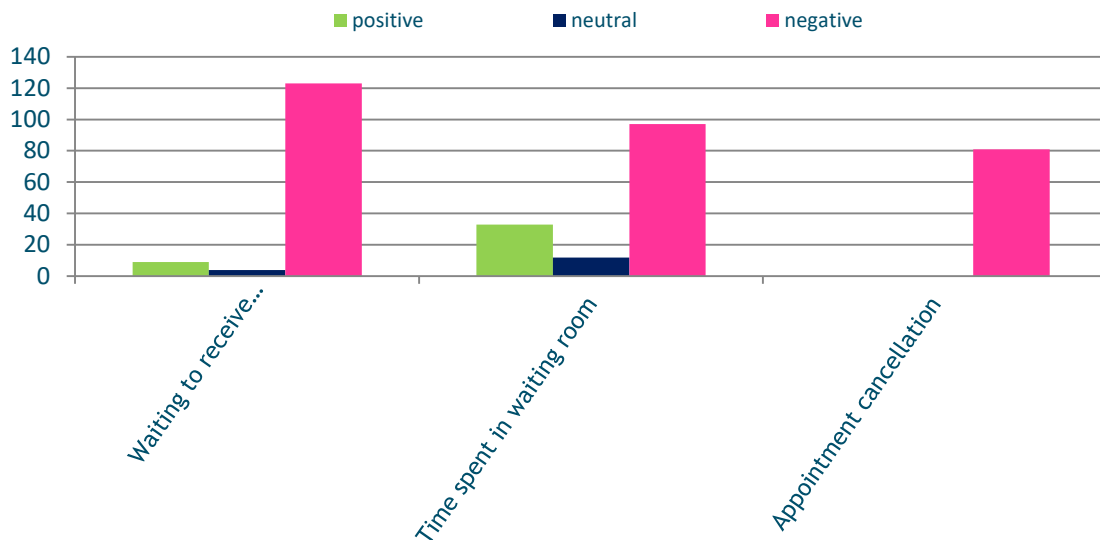
- ☛ *I came here only 2 times but every time I come here is has been okay. I know who I will see today as it was on the letter.*
- ☛ *I've seen the consultant in January and I am having another appointment today. I like the fact that I receive texts to remind me of my appointments. The staff treat me very well and help me around the building. I am very happy with the services.*
- ☛ *I haven't had any appointments which have been cancelled or re-arranged and I receive a text reminder of my appointments. At least two reminders. Today there are no delays to the clinic but previously I have been informed id clinic is running late.*
- ☛ *I feel confident about my appointment. Didn't need any other information on the letter. Happy because there was fast organisation for the appointment.*
- ☛ *I have a check-up today. I think the appointment letter and texts are very useful. I am treated very well here.*
- ☛ *The appointment letter contained all the information that I needed. I have received text messages for appointments I was not aware of, I didn't receive letters but texts. Appointments are frequently cancelled. I do receive letters for cancelled appointments, but he wait is long for the next appointment.*
- ☛ *I did receive a letter for the appointment and it did contain all the information I needed. I don't know what will happen at the appointment, as this was not said in the letter. I do know who I will be seeing as the receptionist told me and it was also mentioned in the letter.*



What needs improvement

Waiting list, delays and cancellations

Patients feel that they wait an unreasonable amount of time for appointments; the issue is compounded by the fact that appointments are often cancelled. Once in the hospital, clinics are often delayed; some patients wait for hours after their appointment time until they are actually seen. The surgical clinic is particularly affected by delays and cancellations.



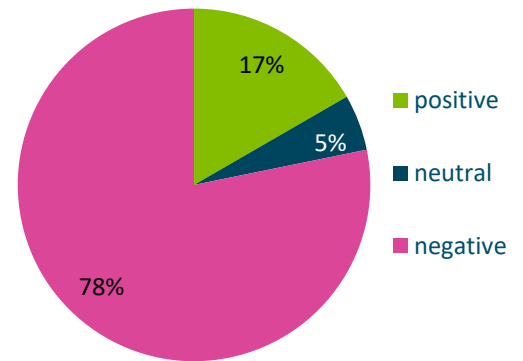
- ❶ *After experiencing tiredness, weight loss and severe stomach issues for a year, I was referred to the Royal London Hospital. My appointment was cancelled four days before it was scheduled. As my symptoms were becoming more severe and I had already been suffering for a year, I tried to see if I can move my appointments earlier. They said that's not possible; they advised that my GP should contact AIRS to explain why I should be prioritised. I'm not sure why my GP and not the specialist in the hospital. I was also told I can try calling every day and checking for cancellations, but there's no system in place for notifying me otherwise.*
- ❷ *I recently have been experiencing severe pain in my lower abdomen- so I was referred to this hospital and sent for an MRI. It took a month to get the appointment for the MRI- on March 15. On the 20th April I went to see the gynaecologist who looked at me and apologised. "I'm sorry we don't have the results of your MRI". I asked her what happens now as the pain is unbearable and she repeated that there is nothing she can do until they get my results. She said she would chase the results and call me. It's been two weeks and I've heard nothing. Did I mention how extreme the pain is?*
- ❸ *It is an unacceptable, a patient with appendicitis waiting more than 30 hours for the surgery, without information. The doctor visited us only once.*

On the 4 occasions I have attended the clinic I have never been seen within an hour of my appointment time. I have never seen the same consultant twice and the 'consultation' feels like a box ticking exercise.

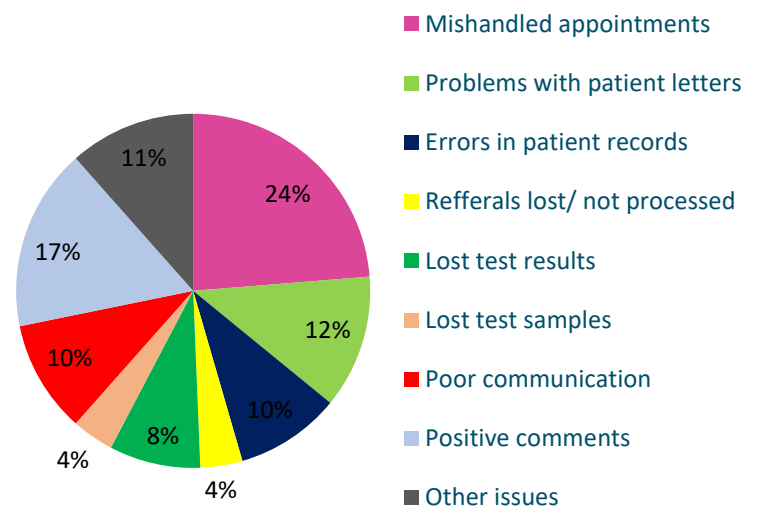
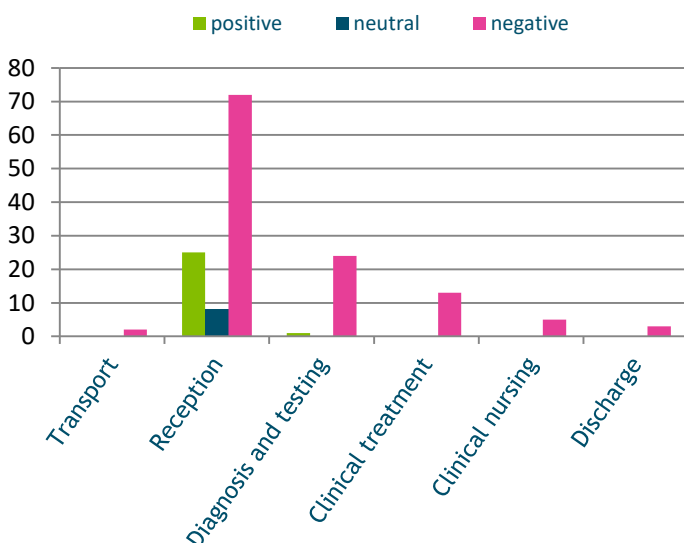
Admin issues

Nearly 80% of those who gave feedback on administrative issues complained about them.

Admin issues experienced by hospital outpatients affect primarily their experience with reception services and with diagnosis and testing. The most reported admin issues are:



- **Mishandling of appointments**, including booking appointments for the wrong dates (ex: when consultant not available), failing to notify patients of booking or cancelling appointments, failing to update the system if patients cancel or reschedule.
- **Issues with patient letters**, including wrong information, insufficient information or letters sent at the wrong address.
- **Errors in patient records**
- **Loss, delay or failure to process referrals**
- **Loss or delay of test results**
- **Loss of test samples**
- **Issues around communication**, including failure to be reachable by telephone.



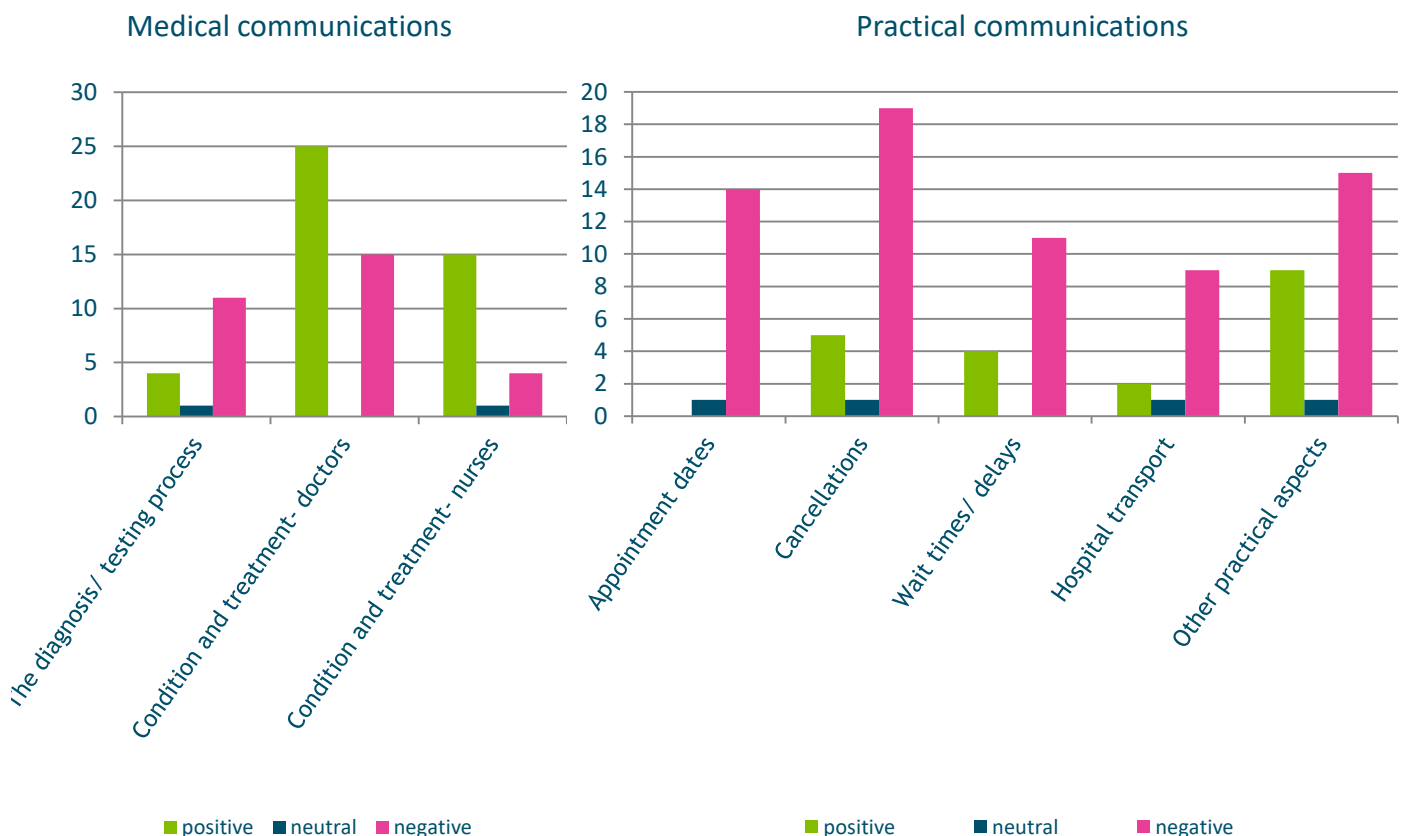
- ❶ *The management of this unit is beyond poor, I do my part and call to cancel an appointment I could not attend, left 3 messages no response, had to go into the unit in person to find out they don't bother to listen to their messages or answer their phone (why bother having the number at all if it is never is never answered and messages never listened to) they had discharged me. I ask for the physiotherapist to call me to arrange another appointment, 3 weeks later still nothing. It has now been 6 weeks since the original appointment and I have not seen the therapist and no one has contacted me at all.*
- ❷ *Went for an x ray, should have taken 20 to 30 minutes, after an hour I ask what's happening, they hadn't even put me on the system, even though I gave them the form when I arrived, 4 receptionists to busy talking to each other to do their job properly, where are the managers?*
- ❸ *Awful. My last appointment, about 6 months ago I waited over 3 hours. When I booked in I was not made aware of such a significant delay, I had to ask. They said everyone was double booked, mistake was made with booking. When I see the doctor I am in and out in 10 minutes.*
- ❹ *Patient informed that a letter was sent to his home address marked as confidential however, there was nothing to link the envelope to him at his home address. As he lived in a shared household, one of the resident opened the letter to see who it was addressed to, thus creating a breach of confidentiality.*
- ❺ *Patient raised concerns about her medical records. She informed that a letter was sent to her to forward to her doctor containing notes from another patient's appt. The letter had her NHS/ DOB and address correct however the letter refer to a different patient. She believes this is a breach of patient confidentiality and is extremely upset.*
- ❻ *Our midwife forgot to send the blood / urine samples for the required tests. We are now having to get these done by our local GP, who was astounded the midwife had not done them.*
- ❼ *Three months ago I was told that the Gastroenterology team would review the blood test which I had at my GP practice and then send a clinic letter to my GP practice. I called recently and the person who was on the other end of the line said that they couldn't find my blood test results. I then told them about my blood test at the GP practice again, and with further searching she found my blood test results. I eventually received a clinic letter to my address after that person told me that the results would be reviewed. I worry that my waiting time for investigations may have been delayed by months because of this.*

Communication issues

While medical professionals communicate effectively with patients in relation to **diagnosis and treatment options**, many patients have found communication to be lacking in regards to more practical aspects, such as appointment dates and times, delays, cancellations or what to expect from appointments. When delays or cancellations do occur, patients often don't receive any explanation as to why this is happening.

Patients often spend a long time on waiting lists before getting an appointment, without being informed of how long they will have to wait for their appointments. There are situations in which appointments are being made and not communicated to patients. They also report not always being informed of *when and why appointments are running late*, or of *appointments being cancelled*.

Communication issues are closely related to admin issues. For instance, because test results are lost or improperly recorded, they are not communicated to patients in due course. Because of admin errors such as sending letters to the wrong address, patients are not informed of when they need to attend their appointments.

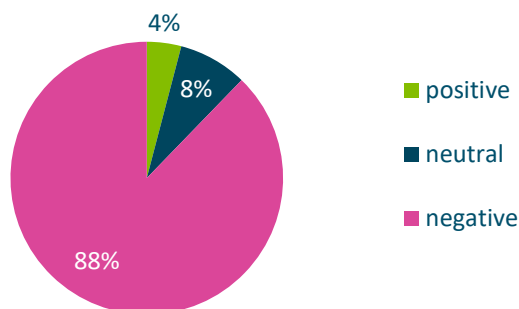


- ❁ *Complaint regarding delays in processing referral and lack of communication to patient on when she is likely to be seen- gynaecology outpatients.*
- ❁ *Patient complained about the delay in the care he has been receiving from a doctor in the dental hospital. He informed that since his last treatment in July, he has been sending e-mails to the doctor enquiring about his next appointment, which have been subsequently ignored. The doctor has not made any attempt to contact him. His treatment, which was meant to take 5yrs to complete, has extended to 9 years.*
- ❁ *We took our 10 year old daughter today for her ENT surgery at royal London hospital. We arrived at 7am in the morning as the appointment was at 7:30am. Waited for 6 and half hours for the surgery and not one of the nurses could update us or tell us what was happening. I went up to the reception desk every hour after 11am only to be told we would be called when they are ready for us in the theatre. 13.30 I had to demand an update, 2pm they came to us and told us the surgery was cancelled due to an emergency. Now my child hadn't eaten or drank anything for 17 hours! I am diabetic and hadn't eaten and they couldn't even be bothered to keep us informed or updated all morning? It was like they had forgotten about us. My husband and I had to take a day off work to attend this appointment and my daughter missed her school especially now when her SATS are coming up and for the NHS to mess us around is totally unacceptable. We had to wait months for an appointment and now to be told that we will put back on the waiting list again? Is this why we pay tax?*
- ❁ *I waited 6 weeks for this appointment as it was cancelled 3 times. I was not given reasons for the cancellations. I did receive 2 letters and 1 phone call regarding the cancellations.*
- ❁ *Patient's mother is concerned about their experience accessing Paediatric ENT appointments. Firstly their appointment was moved without their permission and then cancelled on the day when they were already at the hospital.*
- ❁ *I feel that they rely on the patients to tell their story over and over. I had a crash injury which affected my forearm and the reason I'm here today is because I don't actually know what surgery I've had. I received two conflicting reports from the surgery and I'm not sure why. Every discharge letter has the wrong information on it. Initial treatment was good but consultation since then have been a waste of time. I have no idea about the end game here.*
- ❁ *When I arrived at the hospital I wasn't sure where to go. Information desk sent me to the wrong place. Maybe it was just a misunderstanding.*
- ❁ *I am seen every three weeks at the heart clinic. My appointment is already delayed by 30 minutes. I have been reading the board. The receptionists didn't know of any delays to the clinic, I did ask.*

Telephone

Patients have complained that it is difficult to reach the hospital by telephone.

The antenatal clinic is particularly affected by this issue.



- ☛ The care from the antenatal department is shocking. I cannot believe they get away with this. You can never get through to them on the phone and it just isn't feasible to go there in person every time you need to speak to someone, especially if you work full-time, 9am-5pm. They provide contact numbers that no one answers and when you go for an appointment there, you will never be seen on time and will be kept waiting for hours on end.*
- ☛ I've had the most frustrating and stressful time every time I have tried to contact the antenatal clinic or go to the hospital for an appointment. Although this is my first pregnancy, I'm pretty sure every experience at your maternity unit shouldn't be this stressful! I can never get through to the clinic as no one answers the phone, they have failed to book appointments for me as planned and when I do attend appointments, I'm often kept waiting for ages.*
- ☛ I have been calling this department for weeks, regarding an upcoming surgery. It's been 3 weeks, i have not been able to get through. When I did get through to someone 2 weeks ago, i was promised a call back to speak to the Surgeon but that did not happen. It is worrying as now I am uncertain as to if I would.eben get the required help if I go on with this surgery.*
- ☛ I have tried to phone about an appointment, it was a complete nightmare trying to get through to the right department, speak to the right person to speak with the right consultant.*
- ☛ It is very difficult to contact the clinic via telephone because they keep you waiting or connect you to the wrong department.*
- ☛ I have been waiting for half an hour, I tried reaching the hospital via phone but I couldn't get through. I don't really know who I am seeing. Improvements can be made like having faster service.*
- ☛ I have been finding it very difficult calling the hospital (antenatal ward), since people don't answer the phone. If I have to change my appointment for some reason, I have to physically come to the hospital to do so, which is quite inconvenient. Generally the appointments with the midwives have been good and the reception team has been nice too. They have all been polite and gave me the information I needed.*