

February 2021 Feedback Report



The feedback presented in this report represents 390 responses from the following sources

- Calls and emails to Healthwatch Greenwich from Greenwich residents and service users
- Meetings between Healthwatch Greenwich community representatives or leaders
- Meetings between Healthwatch Greenwich and groups of Greenwich service user
- Conversations as seen on Twitter and local community Facebook groups
- Online reviews of services

COVID-19 Vaccination

Most report a very positive experience of getting vaccinated, with the process described as quick and hassle free. The staff at vaccination centres are described as “friendly”, “welcoming” and “professional”.

“Want to thank all the staff and volunteers for making this a smooth and efficient operation. The staff were so friendly and helpful, and pleasant to deal with.”

Since people are advised not to contact their GP surgeries regarding vaccination they do not know where to direct their queries regarding:

- Vaccination for home-bound patients and their carers
- Rearranging vaccination if appointment is missed
- Who to contact to book an appointment if in the priority cohort but haven’t been contacted

Some are concerned that the SMS they receive to book a vaccination slot could be a spam message and a few are afraid to use the link to book appointments. Some clinically vulnerable people are being asked to get vaccinated at hospitals and are apprehensive about both visiting large hospitals as well as using public transport to access these sites.

One service user said that both the GP surgery as well as the COVID-19 helpline in the borough were “clueless” as their loved one with multiple morbidities was not on the vaccination list.

As the vaccination programme progresses through different priority groups, a small number report side effects. For most these are very mild, similar to the flu vaccine, and disappear within 24/48 hrs.

GP services

Service users report positive experience with receptionists and clinicians and find the interaction to be “helpful”, “kind” and report they feel “listened” to. Conversely, service users who report negative experiences, describe their interactions with GPs and practice staff as involving “lack of empathy” and “rudeness”, with staff attitude being “acrimonious” and “unsupportive”, leaving one service user feeling they are “powerless to effect change”.

“Dealing with this doctor's surgery has been like a badly written Whitehall farce.”

Some service users report the attitude of GPs to be insensitive and indifferent.

“I have left in tears before when trying to explain something extremely difficult to one GP, who sat there typing without even looking at me. There was no empathy whatsoever, just complete disinterest as if I was an annoyance.”

GPs are often not willing to listen to more than one health concern in a single appointment and instead ask service users to book additional appointments at later dates to discuss their concerns. Service users see this incapacity to accommodate more than one health concern as a complete absence of patient-centred care, “unacceptable” and “not holistic”. One service user reports their GP did not let them discuss two health issues at a single appointment, instead advising them to *“Stop and think about what illness you want to tell me as I won't deal with two”*.

Telephone contact and booking appointments

Service users continue to report long waiting times on the telephone trying to get through to GP practices. Some, after waiting for prolonged periods, eventually just give up - as their calls are never picked up by reception staff.

“The website is not working and the receptionist will not pick up the call. I waited 30 minutes in agony unable to speak to the doctor because nobody picks up the calls.”

“I have been calling for 8 consecutive days in the morning and in the afternoon to book some tests I was asked to do. It is disappointing, unfortunate and inhumane”.

Service users also report they can't book appointments to see their GP in a timely manner, with many reporting having to wait 2-3 weeks to get a GP consultation.

“COVID is serious but it's also a serious matter if people start dying of other conditions because their doctors make it too hard to be seen.”

GP registrations

Some service users report difficulty registering as a new patient. One service user said that a GP surgery refused to register them as a temporary patient while another reported that they had been unable to register with a GP practice since November, as the GP practice website states that its “system is down.”

“They can print and post the forms if necessary but people around the neighbourhood should be able to access their services and register [in person or on-line]. We are in a pandemic and deserve health care.”

Another service user reports they were removed from their GP patient list, without discussion or notice. They only discovered this when trying to access treatment for an urgent health condition and were unable to do so.

Digital access

Some service users report positive experience of using services online and receiving a call a day after completing the *E-consult* form. Others report poorly on their experience with using services online. Service users are frustrated that while their telephone calls are not answered, they are also unable to navigate digital and online tools as they have limited digital skills, or lack in confidence.

One service user was exasperated at not being able to get a password and code to access online tools/forms even after contacting the surgery multiple times.

Repeat Prescriptions

Service users report issues getting repeat prescriptions, suggesting the process has become a “nightmare” with receptionists often forced to arrange repeat prescriptions only a day in advance of medication running out.

“I have to chase prescriptions for days on end as the incompetent reception staff go through a frustratingly familiar process of misplacing them, forgetting about them or indeed ignoring them altogether.”

One service user did not receive their prescription - a month after submitting a request, resulting in them travelling without required medication.

Tests

Service users report that scheduled blood tests are being repeatedly postponed. Others are finding it difficult to access test results and medical records despite making repeat requests. Service users also report that they don’t always receive follow-up calls to discuss test results.

“They failed to follow up on my blood test results which may have been instrumental in preventing a miscarriage I had a few months later. I sent at least three requests within two weeks. All were stated to have been received but I never received an answer. When I followed up with the hospital where the blood tests were done, they said only my GP could receive the results, so I was stuck. The hospital subsequently lost the blood results. I was failed across the system which started with the massive failure of my GP to act when it was most needed.”

Additionally, service users report instances in which non-medical practice staff provide clinical advice, inappropriately.

“I could easily have not talked to the doctor after being informed by the receptionist that my results were normal and not found out I have a heart issue. How do we ensure people are not given dangerously misleading information when getting test results? What do we do about this?”

Clinical treatment and referrals

Service users report facing barriers in getting referrals from GPs and having “to chase over many months” to get a referral.

“My partner had a carcinoma that needed removing, and the practice spent 6 months messing around before processing a referral. They are endangering people's lives with this amount of disorganisation.”

“The referral to the dental hospital fell through and the GP has not made another referral. Mother's teeth have fallen out! We even arranged a private GP to assess my mother. She [the private GP] also said in writing a referral needs to happen. But again, no word from the practice. Maybe all of her teeth will fall out. Who knows.”

Complaints

Awareness of how to make a complaint and the complaints process is low. Our briefing “[GP websites: A report on the quality and content of website information](#)” found that not all practice websites carry clear, easy to find, information on how to make a complaint, how the process works, and who can offer support (advocacy services) indeed - some simply say - speak to reception/practice manager. This is particularly difficult as (with COVID-19 restrictions) service users cannot freely enter practices and many report difficultly getting through on the telephone.

One service user, working with an advocacy organisation to help them access GP services, reports frustration with the delay in response from the GP surgery and thus a significant delay in accessing medical care.

For those who do make a formal complaint, not all are given a timeline within which their complaints will be processed and considered. They report delays in getting a response to their complaint and don't know what to do or who to turn to.

Physiotherapy

Service users of physiotherapy services report long waiting times. One service user, with a pelvic fracture, has been waiting over a year to access physiotherapy services. An advocacy organisation, supporting the service user, reports:

“She is mother of two children under the age of 8 and has responsibilities which have been difficult to upkeep given her current health. If she is left neglected for longer, we are worried for her personal safety and well-being. It is unacceptable to leave someone with a fracture for this long.”

Adult Social Care

A vulnerable adult with multiple needs reports undergoing a lengthy and insensitive assessment process and is still awaiting reassessment and support a year later:

“For 6 weeks [they] had different assessors in [their] home up to 3 times a day to watch [them] crawl into the bath, and to try to motivate her to do things for herself, things she simply is unable to do.”

Care Homes

Relatives of loved ones in a number of elderly care homes gave positive feedback in regard to the quality of care provided by staff, with staff being “kind”, “helpful” and “caring”.

“We have been kept regularly informed of the measures being taken and we have received regular updates on our relative’s health. On several occasions, they helped to contact us by phone and when possible, the home arranged distanced face to face visits in the garden.”

In some instances, relatives report care homes offer emotional support after bereavement, which has been particularly important as families are unable to support each other face-to-face - due to COVID-19 restrictions.

“The care home arranged phone calls between my mother and myself, they then sat with my mother to help her come to terms with what I had to tell her. They supported her through the process, they sat and talked to her and regularly checked on her to ensure that she was alright and coping with the sad news I had given her.”

However, in some elderly care homes, communication with relatives is poor. Calls and emails are not responded to in a timely way, newsletters are absent and digital meetings for relatives/families have not restarted.

Dental care

Service users who are able to access dental services report positive experiences. However, service users continue to report long wait times for non-emergency NHS appointments, (often despite contacting multiple dental practices) but not as private patients. In some cases, the same dentists who are unable to offer routine NHS appointments for months are offering routine appointments within days for private patients. One service user reported their appointment was cancelled multiple times by a dental hospital citing COVID-19 restrictions while dental practices in the borough continued to operate.

Contact Us

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