

## Access to health and social care services in Sheffield – Key issues from May 2021

### What are we hearing?

In May we heard a range of experiences from people who've accessed health and care services in Sheffield. Particular highlights come from people who've attended hospital, people who've been visited by a District Nurse, and people who lip read who've had staff adapt their communication style for them. Less positive experiences come from people who've used mental health services this month, as well as some people who've had difficulty accessing a dentist, a GP, or a Covid-19 vaccine. It's important to note that what works for some people isn't right for others, and different services across the city may vary, which explains why we're seeing a more mixed picture in some areas of care.

### Accessing GP services

In May we heard around 25 experiences of attending nearly 20 different GP practices. Around half of the people we heard from shared positive stories – friendly staff, prompt call backs, and one particularly positive story of a receptionist at Nethergreen Surgery. She was very sensitive to the needs of a patient who wanted to see their regular GP for an appointment about their mental health – she checked that they would be okay over the weekend, and reassured them that they could be seen sooner if anything changed.

Where people had less positive stories to tell, communication was a key issue. For example, one person said they used to have good continuity of care with one regular GP, but now they have to see someone new each time. They told us it's harder to explain what's wrong when a doctor doesn't know your history, especially when you have problems with your memory. Someone else told us that their GP practice doesn't get in touch about changes to their appointments – they do not use a mobile phone so cannot receive texts, and their practice had not put an alternative in place for them.

A common theme is difficulty getting an appointment – 7 people told us they were struggling to get through to speak to anyone, or there were no appointments available when they finally did get through.

### Communication for people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

We have heard two positive experiences this month, where front line staff ensured that people who needed to lip read were able to do so.

Yorkshire Ambulance Service staff helped one patient's relative while they were being taken into hospital. They wrote things for her so she could understand, and stood back and removed their face coverings to help her to lip read.

*“her attitude to mental health was caring, validating and compassionate”*




*“Receptionists seemed to think everyone has a mobile or computer”*



*“8am call for appointment takes about 2 hours for someone to answer”*



Charles Clifford Dental Hospital also allowed the relative of a patient to accompany them to their appointment to help them to lip read.

 For several years we have been raising the issue of inequality of access for people with sensory impairments (particularly for people who use British Sign Language). It's positive to hear experiences where staff have worked with an individual to understand the best means of communication for them.

## Covid-19 vaccine rollout

We have heard detailed experiences from 13 people who received their Covid-19 vaccination in May. These were largely positive, with the vaccination service at Foxhill Medical Centre being particularly praised by people who attended.


*"was so impressed with the efficiency and organisation"*

However, we are now starting to hear that some people are having difficulties accessing their second dose of the vaccine in a timely manner, and in a way that is suitable for them.



One person who is housebound had their first dose at home, but were struggling to access this for their second dose. Another person told us that their relative who was in hospital was struggling to get their second dose too. The logistics involved – discharging them into the care of their GP then readmitting them to hospital – were too difficult. A third person whose relative was on the Learning Disability Register said they had struggled to get their second dose, as the GP practice cancelled or changed their appointment without communication, and they had to chase it up several times.


*"I rang back [...] to be told the 2nd vaccine had been cancelled!"*

 We have been helping people to liaise with Sheffield Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in individual circumstances where someone's vaccine has been delayed or missed, looking into issues as they arise.

## Getting a dentist appointment

This month we have again seen a reduction in the number of enquiries we receive about dentistry. Two people got in touch to tell us they were struggling to access dental care. One had been told there was a 6-12 month waiting list, and another said they had managed to access emergency care, but this treatment was only temporary – they now need help again and are struggling to get it.



 In May we and other local Healthwatch met with dental commissioners for Yorkshire & the Humber. This was a helpful opportunity for us to raise people's concerns and seek clarity on NHS England's plans to improve access. More meetings have been set up and we welcome the opportunity to work more closely with commissioners to amplify your voice on a wider scale.

## Treatment in hospital

We have heard the experiences of 11 individuals about hospital services in May. 8 people shared that they had received very caring and effective treatment in a range of areas, from A&E to gynaecology. They said that friendly staff had made their stay much more pleasant.

Two people did say that they'd experienced a lack of communication which delayed their treatment – one person hadn't heard from the hospital for nearly a month after a procedure had unexpectedly been rescheduled for a different date and location. Another said they had waited over 6 months for a telephone appointment, which never came. One person also said they were not treated with compassion when their relative was receiving end of life care.



*"the nurses were some of the most genuine and sincerely kind people"*

## Communication with mental health services

This month we have heard detailed experiences of accessing mental health services, both from individuals and from voluntary sector organisations. Most of this feedback focused on crisis care, including inpatient mental health services, the Home Treatment Team, and Single Point of Access (SPA).

Most of the issues relating to SPA were about communication. Some individuals told us they received little contact throughout the pandemic. Other individuals and voluntary sector organisations told us that there is a lack of timely response when people phone in crisis, feeling at risk of suicide or self-harm. For some of these people, the phone wasn't answered, while others were promised call-backs which were delayed or never came. Some people also told us it's unhelpful to not have a known contact within the service – instead, people have to call the same number and repeat their story each time. When in crisis, some individuals felt they had to call 999 or present to A&E instead – and have told us that this has led to a lack of trust in mental health services.

A voluntary sector organisation told us that where mental health services use the NHS 'Attend Anywhere' platform, this doesn't always work – they reported issues such as long delays, people losing sound, and people being removed from the meeting and struggling to regain access. They had a sense that staff have not received adequate training to use the platform.


The other main concern we've heard about mental health services is that when individuals or organisations raise an issue – either informally or through the complaints process – they do not feel listened to. For instance, one individual told SPA that decisions about their medication had been made without them, but they were told this could not have happened.

*"I have been trying to reach out to the SPA for help, information and support and have been failed time and time again."*



*"I have yet to have a call back despite 9 promises."*

*"Complaints raised but never registered."*

 We have already shared all the experiences we heard with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and are working on ways to share this feedback in additional ways, to help improve services while being considerate of the needs of those who shared their stories.

## Experience with Long Covid

We heard one very detailed account from a person suffering from Long Covid. They told us they were largely left to self-manage their symptoms until the Long Covid Clinic was developed. Doctors they spoke to treated them as anxious, and they felt like they weren't listened to or believed about the impact the illness was having on them.

They were eventually referred to the Long Covid Clinic, but were quickly discharged back into the care of their GP. They now feel that neither the clinic nor the GP are doing much to support them to manage their symptoms – it is unclear where responsibility for support lies, but the experience has had severe impacts on the person's physical and mental health.



## Community Nursing

We have heard from two people whose relatives had been visited by District Nurses this month. One person told us that their nurse had promptly identified items their disabled relative needed and requested them. This was in contrast to the experience they had when their social worker had requested items for them, which was a much more delayed process.

Another person said that a District Nurse came out to care for their relative – she realised that their condition had worsened and quickly escalated the matter to get them the appropriate care.



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This summary of key issues is a snapshot of what we are hearing about. We want to reflect the experiences of people who share their stories with us, and we hope that it can help services, and commissioners of services, by indicating potential areas of focus. It is based on:

- Experiences that members of the public share with us through our information and advice service
- Feedback shared by voluntary sector partners who support clients in Sheffield
- Stories shared through Care Opinion, who we've partnered with to provide a feedback-sharing platform

Want to share your own experience? Get in touch

Online: [healthwatchsheffield.co.uk](https://healthwatchsheffield.co.uk)  
Email: [info@healthwatchsheffield.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchsheffield.co.uk)

Phone: 0114 253 6688  
Text: 0741 524 9657

