

Snapshot Insight Report: Hospital Transport

Introduction

In March 2021, Healthwatch Barnet was contacted by community organisations expressing difficulties in using hospital transport for their journey to Barnet Hospitals. Consequently, we surveyed 18 Barnet residents from different community groups through three focus groups to understand their experiences in more detail.

History

Healthwatch Barnet has reviewed the topic of hospital transport in [2017](#) and [2019](#), and Healthwatch England produced a full report about patients' experience from travelling to and from NHS services in [2019](#).

Key issues from our [2017](#) report:

- Lack of information about travel options.
- Public transport: expensive, long journeys, stressful, unhygienic, tiring.
- Patient transport: long journeys, long waiting times, lack of clear information about eligibility criteria including for carers.
- Parking is difficult and expensive.
- Limited awareness of community transport.

Key issues from our [2019](#) report:

- Patients not informed about available help on arrival at the hospital.
- Eligibility criteria for taxis unclear.
- Changes to hospital appointments, which affect access to patient transport.

2021 Key Findings

- **Difficulties in booking the transport & long waiting times**

"I was an in-patient for 10 days or so, and once you get discharged it takes a long time to happen because you have to make sure you have your discharge letter, and it takes a long time to synchronise the appointment with hospital transport."

"My local surgery gave me the number to podiatry in Finchley and I found it frustrating with the different switchboards and different transport systems. It's not coordinated, and it can be time consuming."

"They tell me to wait 2.5 hours before an appointment and I'd rather they give me a realistic time. If I have an appointment at 10 am then I have to be ready at 7:30 but I know they won't be there at 7:30 so if they gave me a more realistic time and I wouldn't be so tired by the time I get back home"

- High parking cost and difficulty in finding car parking spaces on hospital sites

“At the Royal Free there is limited car parking only if you have a badge and parking is very expensive.”

- Lack of information about available transport schemes, from the NHS and charities upon arrival, and different travel options

“No [I was not made aware of transport schemes], but that would be good to have something like Dial-a-Ride that everyone could use. But with Dial-a-Ride if you have an appointment, they're not always reliably on time, by the time they pick others up you can be late to your appointment.”

“Staff are very helpful and happy to assist you in and out of the vehicle and offer a wheelchair if needed and they are patient and guide me because I can't see to the clinic or my flat. It's been a positive experience with people, that's been fine. It's logistics that are the challenge, you either use hospital transport or don't.”

- Impact of COVID-19 for in-person appointments view and on the NHS Long Term Plan Chapter 4, digitally enabled care

“As a deaf person, I would have difficulties in using more digital appointments in the future and would require an interpreter.”

“Online appointments are hard for people like me, I don't find it easy. Regardless of hospital transport costs and time, I still prefer in person appointments.”

“I've had digital appointments with Royal Free - once I get used to the technology it's OK. As I'm blind, I don't get much out of video appointments but for consultations and reporting back results, it would be better on a digital platform, so I don't have to travel.”

“I worry about connection issues and online cyber hacking, which is not a risk in in-person appointments.”

“Not everyone has internet at home and it can be hard to communicate online sometimes for people with learning difficulties.”

Our Core Recommendations

1. Add a leaflet about all the different transport options as a standard item that is sent to all patients with their appointment letter/confirmation so people can be informed and plan accordingly before their appointment.
2. Through internal and external channels promote more widely information about the different transport options, including through the NHS and alternative transport schemes offered by the voluntary sector.

Patient Suggested Recommendations

1. “Buses/minibus going through to the hospitals.”
2. “Have more free car parking places or cut the cost of parking charges at least in half.”
3. “Accurate tracking for when the transport is expected to arrive, like taxi companies.”

Contact Us

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Response to Snapshot Insight report: Hospital transport – Healthwatch Barnet

The Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust is committed to ensuring patients receive the very best care, treatment and experience when they visit our hospitals.

Our non-emergency patient transport service is provided for patients who are unable to attend hospital appointments by public transport or any other means including private car or taxi due to their medical condition.

Our transport service can assess whether patients meet the Department of Health and Social Care's criteria for eligibility to use this service.

We always welcome feedback on how we can improve our services to ensure they are meeting the needs of the communities that we serve. Healthwatch Barnet is a member of the trust's patient transport forum and an organisation that regularly provides feedback on our policies and services.

Below are responses to the core and patient recommendations set out in Healthwatch Barnet's Snapshot Insight report on hospital transport.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Healthwatch Barnet for all their support.

Core recommendations

Add a leaflet about all the different transport options as a standard item that is sent to all patients with their appointment letter/confirmation so people can be informed and plan accordingly before their appointment.

On the Royal Free London's website, there is a [patient information leaflet](#) setting out answers to some common questions about the patient transport service. This includes the options available if patients are not eligible for patient transport. There is also a [webpage](#) which includes this information.

We are exploring ways we can share this information in a better way with patients.

Through internal and external channels promote more widely information about the different transport options, including through the NHS and alternative transport schemes offered by the voluntary sector.

On the Royal Free London's website, there is information about the different transport options available such as Dial-a-Ride and how TFL can be contacted if assistance is needed.

When the patient transport booking line is contacted, if a patient does not meet the eligibility criteria, they are advised of the alternative options available to them.

They are also informed that they may be able to get reimbursed for travel costs through the healthcare travel costs scheme. This funding can also be issued in advance, either per journey or in a block sum, depending on the frequency of travel. More information can be found on the website below:

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/help-with-health-costs/healthcare-travel-costs-scheme-htcs/>

Patients can find out more details by visiting the cashiers office at the hospital they are visiting for their appointment. These are open at the following times:

- Barnet Hospital, level 3, Monday to Friday, 10am-12.30pm and 1-2.45pm
- Chase Farm Hospital, ground floor, Monday to Friday, 9am-12 midday and 12.30-4.15pm
- Royal Free Hospital, lower ground floor, Monday to Friday, 9.30am-4.50pm

We would welcome the opportunity to work with Healthwatch Barnet to help us identify gaps with the information provided and how we can share this more widely through our internal and external channels.

Patient suggested recommendations

“Buses/minibus going through to the hospitals.”

A range of bus services serve our main hospitals:

Barnet Hospital

There are a number of buses to Barnet Hospital. Bus routes 263, 384 and 307 stop at the hospital - a couple of minutes away from the main entrance. Bus route 107 stops nearby, in Queens Road.

Chase Farm Hospital

Buses stop outside the main entrance of Chase Farm Hospital. Bus routes W8 and W9 start and finish at the hospital.

Royal Free Hospital

There are a range of buses that stop near the Royal Free Hospital, a few minutes away from the main and side entrances of the hospital. These include bus routes 24, 46, 168, 268 and C11.

“Have more free car parking places or cut the cost of parking charges at least in half.”

In line with national guidance, we have the following in place:

For those with a valid blue badge attending hospital as a patient or visitor, they receive free parking for the duration of their attendance at, or visit to, the hospital. On arrival to our hospitals, blue badge holders must register at reception/security office to ensure they are not charged.

Free parking is provided to all out-patients who attend hospital for an appointment at least three times within a month and for an overall period of at least three months. A 'month' is defined as a period of 30 days.

A parent or guardian of a child or young person under 18 years of age, who is admitted as an in-patient at hospital overnight, receive free parking. This is between the hours of 7.30pm and 8am while visiting the child and applies to a maximum of two vehicles. Parents/guardians, are advised to speak with the ward manager who will make arrangements with the car parking office.

“Accurate tracking for when the transport is expected to arrive, like taxi companies.”

On the day of their appointment, patients will (if they agree at the time of booking) receive an SMS text message or an automated message giving them an estimated arrival time of their transport; this will be an estimated period of 30 minutes.

The pick-up time for patients depends on a number of factors including; distance from destination, patient mobility and if other patients need to be picked up en-route. Patients will be collected to allow enough time for them to arrive before their appointment.