

December 2021 Feedback Report



The feedback presented in this report represents 961 responses¹ from the following sources:

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

¹ This month we saw a significant increase in feedback responses online

COVID Vaccinations / Boosters

Booking an appointment

In response to the new Omicron variant of COVID-19 and the subsequent rise in cases, the booster vaccine is offered, directing service users to the NHS Booking System.

The NHS booking system experienced multiple crashes in mid-December. As a result, many report difficulty in booking a vaccination appointment:

“I couldn’t book online last week so called 119 and they sorted me out, and also told me when local walk ins were”.

“I received text messages to book my booster but the only available appointments that I saw on the link is week starting 27th December [in two weeks’ time]”

“They advertise slots available for boosters - but good luck getting one. I tried several times and it kept getting cancelled. And the other places nearby that offered boosters didn’t have slots at times I could do. I ended up traveling all the way to Eltham for my booster”

“NHS website Covid booking site is playing up! Been trying to book booster!”

Walk-in centre information online was not always accurate or comprehensive, prompting service users to request further information regarding:

- The type of vaccine offered at various locations
- Opening times for walk-ins
- The specific location of the walk-in centre on site at Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Vaccination Centres

We heard lots of positive feedback on the two-day vaccination event (18th and 19th December) at Charlton Athletic Football Ground, with many comments on how fast and well organised it was:

“Charlton football is a well-oiled machine. Literally in and out in 5 minutes”

“Charlton football ground in and out within 8mins”

“I went to Charlton Athletic football club, went straight in, couldn’t fault it...”

Other centres also got positive endorsement from service users:

“No queue. Excellent staff”

“Very quick in and out in no time, staff [were] nice as well”

Vaccination hesitancy/resistance

A heated discussion opened on local social media about the booster vaccine.

Most accept the evidence supporting vaccination as protection against significant unpleasant outcomes. However, there is concern regarding the vaccination's effect on transmission:

“People have 3 jobs and still catch and spread it!”

“Wish you all the best but please understand, getting the jab will help reduce the severity of your symptoms, it will not stop it spreading”

“I had my booster on Wednesday but it just all feels pointless. You can still get covid and you can still pass it on to others so how is it helping anyone?”

Primary Care

Telephone Contact

Service users continue to report difficulty getting through on the telephone to their GP surgery, with many finding it very difficult or not possible at all to get through or to get an appointment:

“Phones answered half the time, doctors phone consultations missed by the doctor... It's very poor, even with the consideration of a pandemic”

“It took 37 minutes to get [from] no 3 [in the queue] from four. This is an awful customer service, really disappointed.”

“It's impossible to get an appointment at this surgery, and it's impossible to get through on the phone during the 8am to 9am slot which they allow you to book appointments. Their voicemail is full, and they don't allow more than 10 people at a time to queue on the phone. So each time you call you have to wait for 5 minutes listening to the automated messages only to find that the queue is still full”

Once a service user is connected to reception, feedback on the customer service experience is mixed. A minority report a positive experience, with some commenting on the friendliness of the receptionist. Most report a poor experience, leaving them frustrated and angry.

“Booking appointments for this surgery is stressful. One receptionist in particular is very rude & impatient, to the point it actually puts you off calling to make appointments”

“Terrible service. I had to call 3 times for a very simple issue. They hung up in the middle of the call and I had to call again and again. They finally did not assist and asked me to send an email with my request by giving me a wrong email address. They were also quite rude. Awful experience”

“Had to call Xmas eve, the receptionist was unprofessional I know it was Xmas eve, you got the shift but hey, it's your job....no need to be rude. Reception staff need to be routinely trained/accessed on performance...The dialogue was [as follows:] I explained my situation I might need an examination [and] she responded [that I

should] go to the chemist, I asked a question the response was "can you hear me?" the call was ended, she just put the phone down on me!?"

Service users tell us what good customer service means to them:

"The practice is not helpful, there is a long wait, waiting for referrals could take weeks and the receptionists are so rude except [one] receptionist who is amazing, calm and reassuring her patients. Feel so glad and reassured when I speak with her"

"Now you can get hold of them on the phone (long wait sometimes but must be a lot of pent-up demand), the staff are polite ('why are you here?' was the standard greeting before)"

Whilst some prefer to use online and digital facilities, GP services are required to provide an accessible option for those who prefer, or need, to communicate via telephone.

Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Quality of care

This month, we heard lots of positive feedback for specific wards at QEH, with many wanting to thank NHS staff. There was a general feeling of sympathy amongst service users. Some commented on the noticeable staff shortage due to the growth in COVID cases amongst staff, and others commented on the unfairness of verbal and physical abuse against staff.

"I know QE hospital is accused of a lot of things but let me tell you I had the best treatment there 22/23/ and 24th December, they were understaffed but so committed to their patients. I wish them all a very happy new year, and thank them again for the long hours they work"

"Although they have been short staffed all week these nurses have been true heroes. I've witnessed them rally round to support each other, no matter how tired they are always having cheer and a smile with all the patients keeping everyone's spirits up.

I've seen them attacked by patients physically and verbally, relatives shouting at them because they want to visit out of hours without booking and throughout all this the nurses always remained professional and supportive to each other and checking on each other throughout the day"

"Not long came out of QE. Thank you so much to all the amazing nurses and doctors who looked after me could not of ask for more care - nothing was too much trouble"

A&E

Waiting times

In December, we had reports from service users who had excessively long waits in A&E:

"[My] partner's in there now just been told the waits now averaging on 7 to 8 hours from triage"

"Never going QE again, 17 hours on a plastic chair, waiting in A&E for a surgery I was booked in for when I was literally slowly dying. Disgraceful place"

Case Study

Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

Queen Elizabeth

Laura's husband, Michael, has been in Queen Elizabeth hospital for over four weeks with pneumonia, an infected bone and diabetic issues.

When Laura arrived to visit on Christmas eve, all visitors to the ward were told that it was closing as they had a Covid outbreak. This was upsetting for Laura, but she understood the reasoning for the closure. She wishes that the staff had let her know before she arrived as she knew they had her contact details.

“We were all upset but understood. However, they had all our mobile numbers and could have sent out a text message warning us”

Michael caught Covid while on the ward and his health deteriorated over Christmas. Staff did not notify Laura and she received no communication from the ward.

Given the exceptional circumstances (no visiting/Covid restrictions) and Michael's deteriorating condition, as next of kin, Laura expected to be communicated with on a regular basis.

“Trying to contact the ward has been very difficult. I have just spent the last day trying to get through to the ward as I had not heard from my husband for over 36 hours. Every time I was put through to the ward no one picked up the phone”

After Laura had logged a complaint with PALS, the ward manager phoned her, and she was able to speak with Michael.

“The only communication I have had was when I made a complaint to PALS”

She told staff that she just wanted more communication and information about her husband's condition.

“I do understand that NHS is having a very difficult time, but not being able to have some information from doctors [with] regards [to] my husband's condition once a week would not be too difficult”

Laura became more worried after speaking to Michael.

“My husband told me that Christmas dinner consisted of a slice of Turkey and a small amount of mash... quite often, the food was cold and not cooked through”

Following her complaint to PALS, Laura still found it impossible to get hold of the ward and get an update on her husband's condition.

“I contacted the switchboard to put me through to the ward today. I tried at least 12 times. There was no answer”

On the Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust website, as visitors are not allowed - belongings for in-patients can be left with the Patient Belongings Hub, which will then be delivered to patients on wards.² In desperation to communicate with her husband, Laura decided to drop off some belongings for Michael along with a letter. When Laura arrived at the hospital, the receptionists had no awareness of the Belongings Hub and instead sent her to Michael's ward where she was able to pass the belongings to a member of staff to then pass onto Michael.

The lack of communication and the worry of not knowing how Michael is has taken a huge toll on Laura.

"I have felt stressed and at times, completely helpless"

Care for older people

Feedback on the care of older people at QEH is mixed.

"Cannot fault the care given to my Nan and the compassion shown to us through nana's last days. This was ward 2 ... They were true angels"

Positive feedback shows how the smallest of interactions can have a powerful impact.

"There is a Porter [on ward 2] who remembered us from my Grandad passing and he stopped and spoke to my Nan just before we got moved to the side ward. Worth his weight in gold"

However, we also heard some negative comments about care for older people.

"...after many stays for my mum, senior care [care for elderly people] leaves a lot to be desired with only a handful of staff that seem to care - carrying the burden of those that don't"

Maternity

This month we had positive feedback about maternity services at QEH.

"I was recently in for 8 days delivering my new-born and for care after, and although it took a while to be admitted and discharged, when I was in - the care was fantastic. All midwives, doctors and other support staff were so kind and although sometimes things weren't perfect (trying to sleep on a new-born ward when beyond exhausted from 5 days of no sleep) the staff did everything they could, with the resources they had. They were truly brilliant in a very tough, and sometimes thankless environment"

COVID restrictions

Service users told us about the effect of COVID restrictions on visiting loved ones:

"At QE I was behind another visitor who did not complete a [COVID] test but was given access to the ward? They do not update you or give you video access - they

² <https://www.lewishamandgreenwich.nhs.uk/latest-news/patient-belongings-hub-2218>

only have one on the ward! My mum went in and the next time I heard was when she was being discharged!”

“Certain wards were actually closed to visitors last week on 23rd due to Covid infection within. My brother-in-law spent Christmas alone with no visitors until God knows when”

Dentistry

We continue to hear from service users who find it difficult, if not near impossible to access non-urgent NHS dental treatment. This is a recurring issue that has been formally raised by Healthwatch England to national commissioners of dental services.

In Greenwich, service users struggle to find NHS dentists, and some feel private treatment is their only option.

“Can anyone recommend a dentist that will take an emergency that also won't break the bank. My normal dentist has let me down and despite telling them I am in pain they are happy to leave me in pain until the 4th January. The private one I had to use a few months ago cost me £70 and I really cannot afford that again otherwise I'd go straight there”

Some service users have commented on a decline in quality of care at one dental practice since it has been under new ownership:

“Very poor care since it's been taken over. My mum waited so long in pain for an appointment to be told there is nothing wrong, perfectly fine. 2 days later her tooth broke and had to seek emergency care elsewhere!

“They've now only got one dentist there and if you've got an emergency, you're lucky if you can get seen the same week”.

“My daughter went - was told nothing wrong with tooth which she had pain in. She went elsewhere and got it sorted out. Won't be going back there. Our family have been going there for years it was a very good. Not now”

Case Study

Access to NHS Dentistry

James is in a lot of dental pain and has been looking for an NHS dentist in Greenwich. He initially went online to the NHS directory, but the information was out of date, so it wasn't clear which surgeries were taking on new NHS patients.

“I phoned around 16 different NHS dentists and all of them told me that they are not taking on new patients”

As he couldn't find updated information on the website, James phoned 111 who referred him back to the out of date NHS dentist directory. He was not given any information by 111 on local dental emergency hubs.

“I didn't know where to turn. I keep on being sent around the houses.”

As his dental condition has worsened, he is now at risk of losing teeth.

James feels his only option is to pay for private dental care, which he cannot afford to do.

“I'm in agony and I need to see a dentist as soon as possible”

Next steps

We will follow up on all concerns or issues raised. We will work with commissioners, providers, and service users to understand where services are working well and where further development may be needed.

Contact Us

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