



# Dorset County Hospital A&E: People's experiences

What works well and what could  
be improved?

# About us

Healthwatch Dorset is your health and social care champion.

We're here to listen to your experiences of using local health and care services and to hear about the issues that really matter to you. We are entirely independent and impartial, and anything you share with us is confidential. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice to help you to get the care and support you need.

As an independent statutory body, we have with the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care. This report is an example of how your views are shared.

Healthwatch Dorset is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We cover the geographical area of Dorset, which includes the unitary authority areas of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and Dorset.



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<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
Introduction	4
• Background	4
• What we did	4
• Who we spoke to	5
Key messages	5
• What people liked	5
• What could be improved	5
What people told us	6
• Staff	7
• Environment and facilities	8
• Information and communication	9
• Redirection to another service	10
• Further support after A&E visit	11
• How people got to A&E	12
• Waiting times	14
• Improvements to A&E	15
Recommendations	17
Next steps	18
Stakeholders response	18
Thank you	18
Appendix: Telephone interview questions	19



# Introduction

## Background

In September 2021 we published our report [Poole Hospital A&E: local people's experiences](#), highlighting how patient experience of A&E could be improved. This project was a way to gather feedback while maintaining social distancing rules during the COVID-19 pandemic, with our volunteers carrying out phone call interviews with people who had visited Poole A&E. The hospital used their text messaging system to invite people who had recently visited Poole A&E to take part in our project. In total 147 phone interviews were carried out between January and June 2021.

We shared our findings with Dorset County Hospital and agreed to replicate the project there. They wanted to understand the needs and expectations of people who use A&E, to help make their service better now and to inform their plans for a new modern Emergency Department as they develop the site over the next five years.

We also used this project to find out about people's experiences of the NHS 111 First service, which encourages people to contact NHS 111 to book an appointment before visiting A&E. (Read Healthwatch England's findings about people's experiences of NHS 111 and awareness of 111 First: [Is NHS 111 First making a difference?](#) (March 2021)).

## What we did

Dorset County Hospital used their text messaging system to invite people who had recently visited A&E to take part in our project.

We trained and worked with 16 of our volunteers to design a phone interview script (see Appendix) and to carry out phone calls.

Between September and December 2021 we interviewed 256 people over the phone about their A&E experiences. Each volunteer called approximately four people each week.

Anonymised patient feedback was added to our database, and we then worked with five of our volunteers to analyse findings and identify the key themes.



## Who we spoke to

We interviewed 256 people about their experiences of attending Dorset County Hospital A&E department.

- **Gender** – 142 people we spoke to identified as women; 95 people identified as men; and 19 people chose not to answer this question.
- **Age** – Most of the people we spoke to were aged over 50. We talked to 20 people aged under 24; 7 people aged 25–34; 59 people aged 35–54; 91 people aged 55–69; 58 people aged over 70; and 21 people preferred not to tell us their age.
- **Ethnicity** – Of the people we spoke to, 224 identified themselves as White British, Irish, or any other White background; 12 people identified themselves as from another ethnic background; and 20 people chose not to answer.
- **Geography** – 66 people we spoke to told us they live in Dorchester; 55 people live in Weymouth; 20 people live outside of Dorset; 11 live in Bridport; 99 people live in other areas of Dorset; and 5 people chose not to answer.

## Key messages

We analysed people's feedback and identified common themes.

### What people liked

The feedback we gathered was overwhelmingly positive and almost three quarters of people rated their experience as 'very good'. Most people told us that:

- A&E staff treated them with care and kindness
- Staff were professional, efficient, and organised
- Waiting times were quick
- They were offered further support, and the information and aftercare met their needs
- Patients were kept fully informed and communication was good.



### What could be improved

There were some common themes in the negative feedback that we gathered, including:

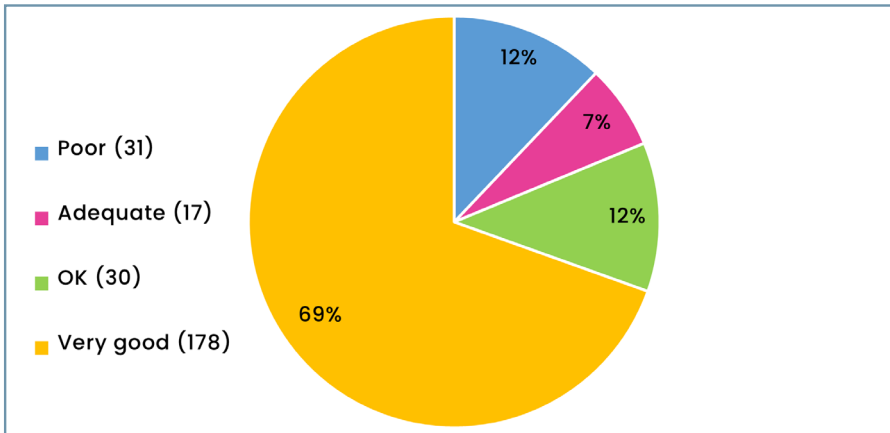
- Long waiting times for a small number of patients
- Some unhelpful staff, particularly at reception
- Information, navigation, and signposting
- Lack of comfortable facilities (blankets/ refreshments/adequate seating)
- Lack of confidentiality and privacy for the patient
- Poor communication and lack of further support for some people.



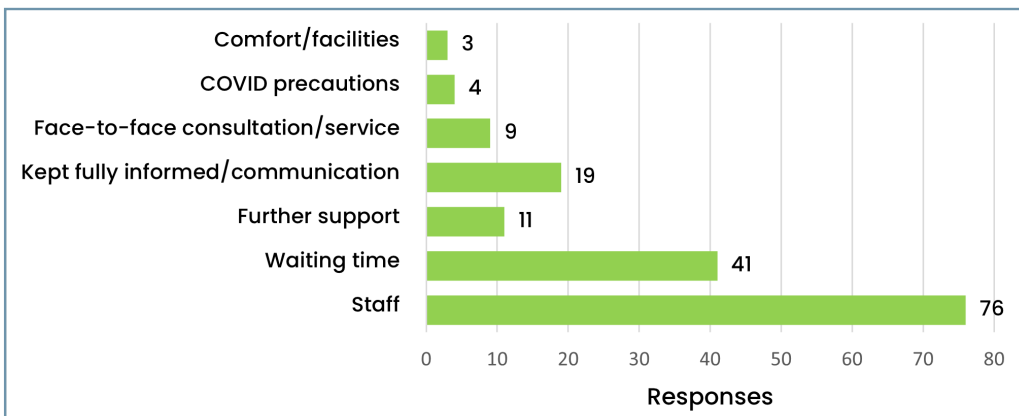
# What people told us

We interviewed 256 people about their experiences of attending Dorset County Hospital A&E department. The vast majority of people that we spoke to gave positive feedback about their A&E experience.

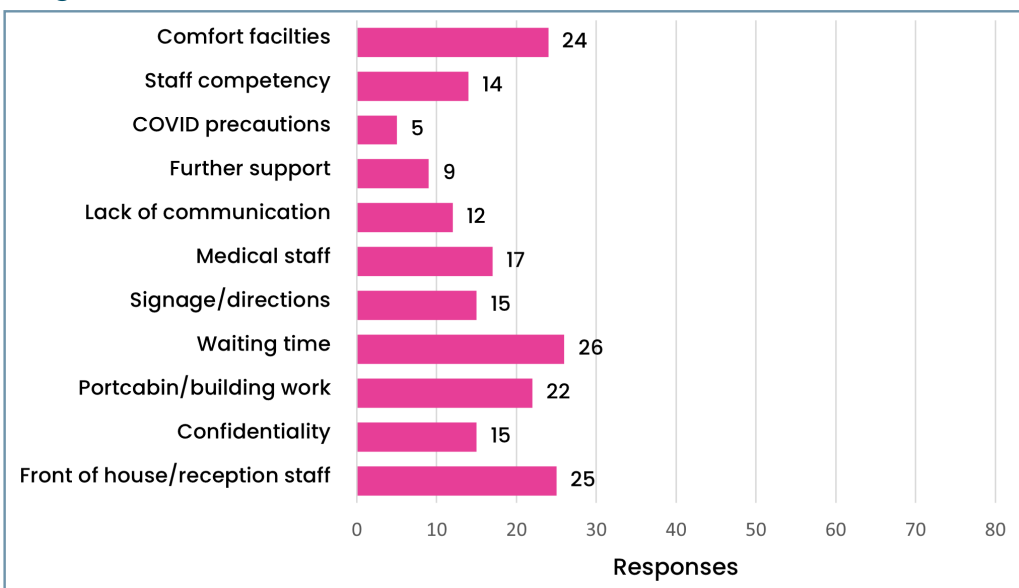
## How would you rate your recent visit to Dorset County Hospital A&E/Weymouth Urgent Treatment Centre?



## Positive themes



## Negative themes







## Staff

### Positive

Most people we spoke to gave positive feedback about staff.

Treated with a great deal of respect and professionalism.

The doctor spoke Hungarian, so he explained everything to her in her native language, for which she was very grateful, as it made the whole experience a lot easier.

I was so impressed with the nurse who treated me, I have nominated her for a hero award. I really hope she gets it.

Couldn't have asked for a better experience. Everyone was brilliant, from paramedics to A&E staff.

### Negative

Where people had a negative experience during their A&E visit, the most common theme was around staff.

Nurse was very unkind, did not want to know about past or current medical conditions. She made very unprofessional remarks about the haematology team.

Reception staff seemed clueless and not helpful at all when asking about a taxi to get home.

Attitude of the staff totally inappropriate - they were laughing and joking and at one point started having an argument.

## Environment and facilities

### Negative

When talking to us about the environment and facilities at Dorset County Hospital A&E, more people had negative things to say than positive. People told us the current portacabin is uncomfortable and cold and there is a lack of privacy when using the phone triage system at the entrance and in the waiting area.

No seating inside; the portacabin was freezing and awful.

No drink available for regular medication which needed to be taken during time in A&E.

There was no bed available, so I was seated in a wheelchair for hours which exacerbated my condition.

I was directed to portacabins where you registered. Signage instructed using telephone to speak to reception - I was aware of elderly people having trouble with this procedure. The aspect of confidentiality arose as in explaining your problem while other people were listening in on the conversation.



### One phone and a long queue waiting to register arrive at A&E

“As you enter the temporary building there is no way of alerting any health professional of the urgency of the matter. My two year old daughter was crying - very very upset and bleeding from a head wound. There was a queue of people waiting to use the one phone (to register arrival at A&E). I did try to ask if we could go in front, but I got a bit of ‘pushback’ from a few people. If a member of staff had been present, maybe that would have helped what was a distressing and stressful situation for my daughter and myself.”

### Positive

A very small number of people we spoke to gave us positive feedback about the environment and facilities.

Offered a hot drink and a sandwich which helped a lot.

The hospital was very clean and tidy, and they managed all the COVID requirements very well, and I felt safe. Outstanding.





## Information and communication

### Positive

Information and the way it is communicated has a clear impact on people's A&E experience.

Provided with a two day open pass to the King Fisher Ward by the hospital and an information sheet on what to do if the son felt ill again, and also told to contact her GP surgery to make sure they were aware.

Felt supported and cared for, got all the correct information that she needed.

The staff were great at communication and care as son had autism. Triage nurse in particular was great - her knowledge of hypermobility and autism was outstanding.

### Negative

Of the negative comments about information and communication people told us:

Hospital did not pass on the notes of my admission to my GP.

It felt like I was kept in the dark.

Signage to the hospital was really poor.

No information whatsoever apart from the white board informing of five hours wait. Nothing within the main A&E waiting area.

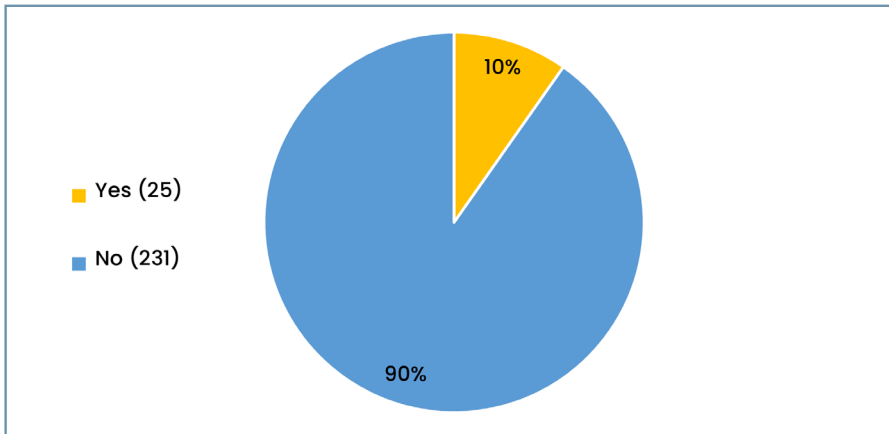
# Redirected to another service

## Negative

Most people were not redirected to another service from Dorset County Hospital, but those who were felt negatively about the experience.

### Did you visit Dorset County Hospital A&E and get redirected to Weymouth Urgent Treatment Centre?

256 people responded to this question.



☞ Took my five year old son to Dorset County Hospital (in Dorchester) after he sustained a head injury which was bleeding profusely. Was surprised to be redirected to Weymouth Urgent Treatment Centre as I couldn't understand why his injury could not be glued at Dorchester. ☞

☞ Went to Dorchester (Dorset County Hospital) and would rate them as POOR. As a first aider I had dressed my toe to stop the blood, and Dorchester did not remove the dressing and sent me to Weymouth. ☞

☞ The entry system at Weymouth - the sound is not audible. ☞

## Positive

Only one positive comment was made about being redirected.

☞ It was all very organised, and I managed to get redirected and another appointment on the same day. ☞



## Further support after A&E visit

117 people said they were offered further support after visiting A&E; 73 people said they were not offered further support; 53 people said further support was not necessary; and 13 people chose not to answer.

### Positive

Those who had a positive experience with further support used the following words to express how they felt.

Proactive  
Good  
Amazing  
Communication  
Reassuring

Doctor contacted me after for ongoing support.

Given follow up support from a social prescriber.

The Doctor explained everything at the time, and my daughter was discharged.

### Negative

Those who had a negative experience with further support, used these words to express how they felt.

Neglected  
Irritating  
Disappointed  
Dismissive  
Patronising  
Condescending

No support was offered by the hospital. I took it upon myself to pursue matters with my local GP.

I was offered a phone call the next day, but it never happened.

I could not face calling 111 again or going back to the hospital, so I took my stitches out with scissors at home.

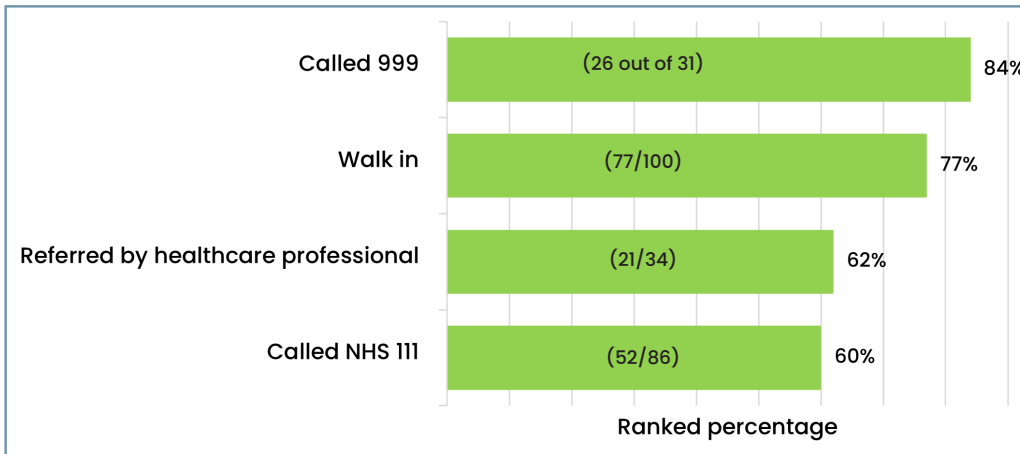


## How people get to A&E

We also wanted to look at whether people had a better or worse experience in A&E depending on how they got to the hospital. We asked if they were directed there by another service or walked in, and we asked them to rate their experience as 'very good', 'OK', or 'poor'.

### Experiences ranked 'very good'

Rated by 176 people.



Overall more people (84%) rated their experience as very good if they initially contacted 999 and were taken in to the hospital by ambulance (31 people).

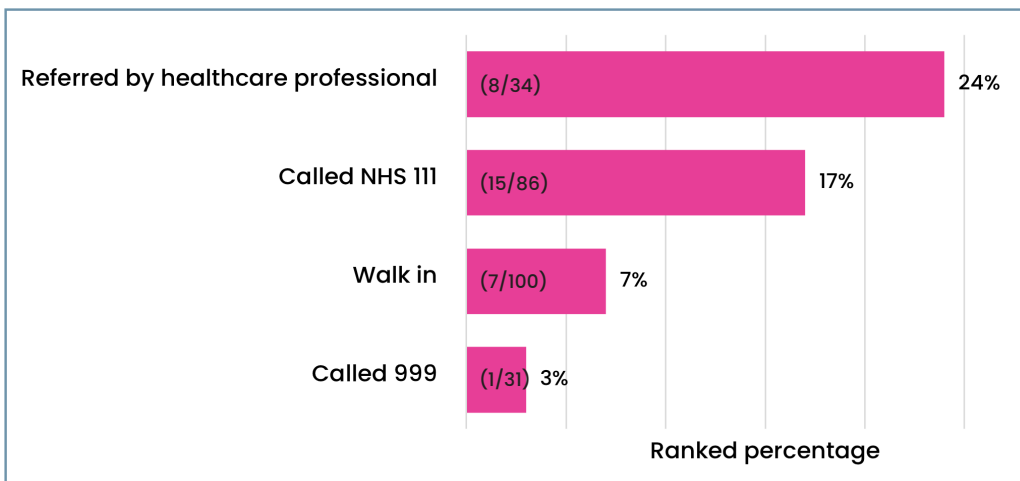
The most common way the people we spoke to got to the A&E department was by making their own way there (100 people) of which 77 people rated their experience 'very good'.

Couldn't have asked for a better experience. Everyone was brilliant, from paramedics to A&E staff. They reassured my children, everything was great.

It was a pleasant experience and I want to say thank you and send huge praise to the team at A&E. It was very efficient and they made me feel very comfortable.

### Experiences ranked 'poor'

Rated by 31 people.



24% of the 34 people who were advised to attend A&E by a healthcare professional told us their experience was 'poor'.

**Arrived at A&E where reception said they were not aware from haematology that my husband should attend. Receptionist unhelpful and unfriendly.**

### NHS 111 First

NHS 111 helps people get the right advice or treatment when they need it by directing them to the most relevant health care service, including A&E. This also helps the NHS to manage demand for services. The NHS 111 First service can pre-book appointments for patients who need to visit A&E.

A significant proportion of the people we spoke to (86 people) contacted NHS 111 first, and then were advised to either make their own way to the hospital or were told an ambulance would be sent out to them. Of the people who contacted NHS 111, 60% (52 people) rated their experience 'very good', and 17% of them (15 people) rated their experience as 'poor'.

It is worth noting that of those 86 people who contacted NHS 111, only six were told that an appointment at A&E had been booked for them by NHS 111 First. Three of those six people found that the hospital wasn't expecting them when they arrived.

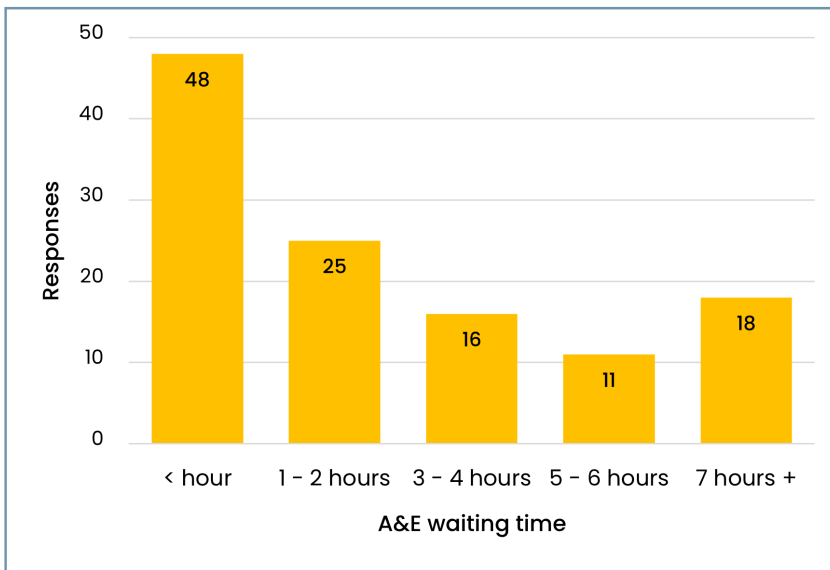


**They had my information at the front desk from 111 so that made it quicker and meant I could go straight through to see someone, so didn't really have to wait.**

**After establishing on the 111 phone call that there was an appointment waiting for this person at Weymouth, they got a relative to drive them there, for the centre to say that they had no appointment. A lot of driving around for an X-ray with poor communication between Dorchester, Weymouth and 111."**

# Waiting times

We asked people how long they waited in A&E before they were seen and how they felt about the waiting time. 120 people answered this question.



## Positive

96 people said that the service in A&E was very quick. 48 people told us that the experience lasted under an hour.

Quick  
Efficient  
Speedy  
Fast  
Very good  
Swift  
Reasonable



Not even 15 minutes! Happy about the wait.



Outstanding, kind, polite, fast and reassuring.



My child has attended A&E on previous occasions, and this was the best so far regarding time.



## Negative

While the short waiting time is usually something to be celebrated, some people felt that not enough time was given to the patient.

Frightening  
Upsetting  
Long  
Appalling  
Terrible  
Unhappy  
Slow  
wait  
Disgusting  
Neglected  
Abandoned  
Ridiculous  
Concerned



Almost felt too quick - felt disregarded.



Patient admitted concern that only 33 minutes was taken in respect of his medical problem.





36 people were not happy about the length of time taken before being seen.

**Big issue was not the A&E process, but the time taken for the ambulance to arrive.**

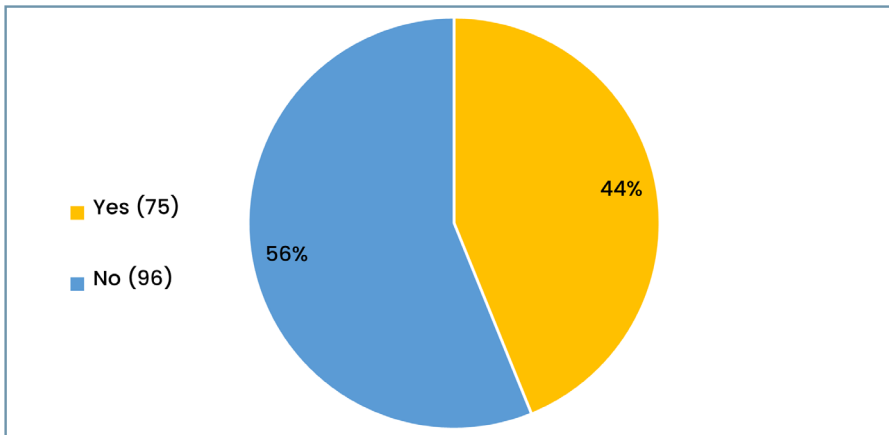
**Ridiculous! Saw a nurse after two hours in the temporary building and then was left to wait for another 2/3 hours before seeing anyone else. Saw a doctor after seven hours, they were flippant, and didn't listen.**

## Improvements to A&E

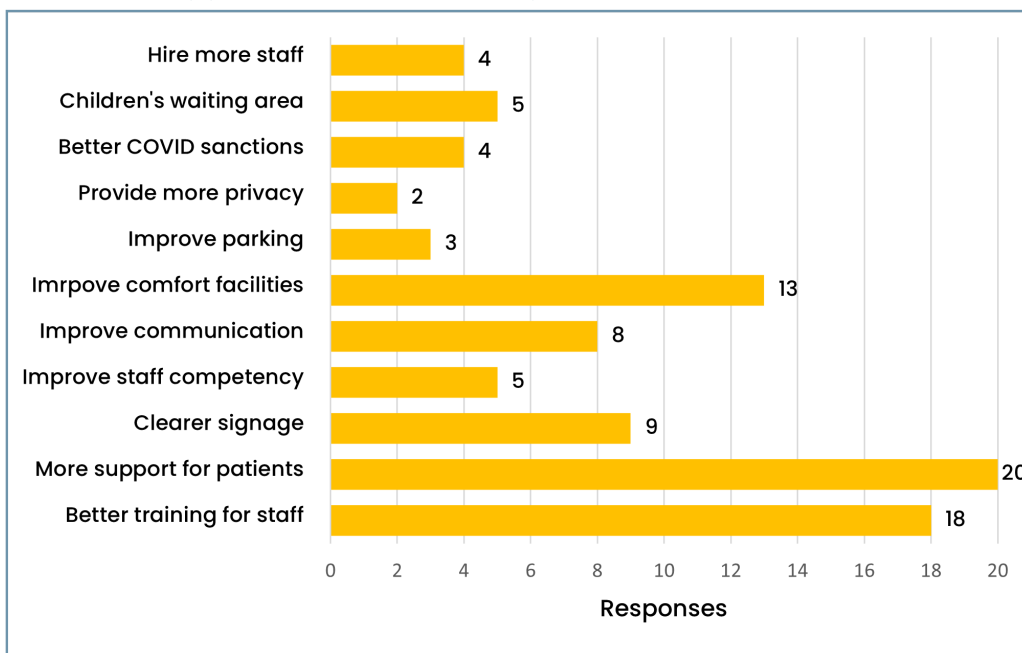
96 patients told us there was nothing the hospital could have done differently to improve their experience, while 75 people offered suggestions for improvement, and 85 people declined to comment.

### Could the hospital do anything differently to improve your experience?

171 people responded to this question.



### People's suggestions for improving A&E



Staff should be trained to be aware of very urgent case signs and have a fast-track treatment procedure.

Do not speak about the patient on the other side of the curtain - they can hear!

Consideration of mental health issues to be taken more seriously.

A trained person (porter or volunteer if medical staff unavailable) should be on hand at all times to guide patients through the portacabin process.

Parking; cannot pay by cash.



# Recommendations

We believe that health and social care providers can best improve services by listening to people's experiences. We have analysed what people told us and recommend the following actions to improve patient experience in A&E.

## 1. Environment and facilities

We recommend that the hospital uses the feedback we've gathered in this project to ensure that the A&E refurbishment meets people's needs and provides more comfort and privacy for patients.

**Note:** The Hospital were fortunate to bid for, and receive, central funding to refurbish the A&E department. The building work is happening right now with a planned finish for August 2022. The refurbished A&E will have new larger waiting areas inside the department with self check-in. The hospital hopes this makes a big difference to the experience of patients. They are also increasing the size of the department, so they will be able to see and treat more patients at the same time. The clinical areas will be more modern, much bigger and provide better privacy. The department will also have provision for paediatric and mental health patients.

## 2. Redirecting patients to other services

We recommend that Dorset County Hospital and Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust work to increase public awareness of Weymouth Urgent Treatment Centre to reduce the number of people being redirected there from A&E.

## 3. Signage and parking information

The hospital should improve the signage and parking information. One way to achieve this would be by inviting patients, visitors, and hospital volunteers to help redesign the signage and information.

## 4. Communicating with patients while they wait to be treated

The A&E department should review the ways in which people are kept informed while they are waiting. They could consider having volunteers in the department to be a friendly face for patients who are anxious or distressed.

## 5. Information for patients about care and support after leaving A&E

We suggest that a leaflet and online information is produced to provide patients and their carers with a contact for any follow up questions they may have after leaving A&E, and this should include information about the role of the Patient Advisory Liaison Service (PALS).

## 6. Staff training and moral

The hospital should look at staff training and ways to improve staff morale, particularly for A&E reception staff. There have been many challenges for hospital staff over the past year and the stressful situation of working in the NHS during a pandemic will have taken a toll. However, patients who are scared and in pain deserve to be treated kindly and with respect.



## Next steps

We will share our findings with Dorset County Hospital and work with them to explore ways to meet our recommendations. We will also share this report with Bournemouth Hospital, Poole Hospital, Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, and the local Health Scrutiny Committees. We will follow up with Dorset County Hospital in six months to see what changes have been made based on our recommendations from this report.

## Stakeholders response

Nicky Lucey, Chief Nursing Officer/Interim Deputy Chief Executive, thanked Healthwatch Dorset for this report saying: “The experience of people that use our services is really important to us, particularly as they have accessed services when we have been under pressure through the pandemic. Working with Healthwatch Dorset helps us engage differently with the population to really hear their voice to influence our quality improvement. I am pleased the report echoed our clinicians voice on the need for the estate development, which is part of our future estates strategy for the Emergency Department.”



## Thank you

Thanks to Dorset County Hospital PALS team, our amazing volunteers and especially everyone who took part in this project and shared their story with us.



# Appendix

## Telephone interview questions

1. Did you visit Dorset County Hospital A&E and get redirected to Weymouth Urgent Treatment Centre?
2. How did you get to Dorset County Hospital A&E/Weymouth Urgent Treatment Centre? Did you contact NHS 111? Or call 999?
3. How would you rate your recent visit to Dorset County Hospital A&E/Weymouth Urgent Treatment Centre? Can you tell me a bit more about why you feel this way?
4. Were you kept fully informed about what was happening during your visit?
5. How did you feel about the time it took for you to be seen?
6. Have you been offered further support from the hospital or your GP, or anyone else since you left A&E?
7. Is there anything the hospital could have done differently to improve your experience?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience that we have not asked you about?

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