

July 2022 Monthly Feedback report



The feedback presented in this report represents 249 responses from the following:

- **Calls and emails to Healthwatch Greenwich from Greenwich residents and service users**
- **Meetings between Healthwatch Greenwich and groups of Greenwich service users or advocates**
- **Outreach and engagement events by Healthwatch Greenwich**
- **Conversations as seen on social media, and on community and neighbourhood sites**
- **Online reviews of services**

GP Services

Getting an appointment

Service users experience long waits on the phone trying to book appointments and often find timely appointments are unavailable. Some reporting waiting weeks for a telephone consultation:

“Terrible patient care from reception but good doctors, if you can manage to get an appointment. I was on hold for 25 mins and decided to drive to the surgery, while still holding. I walk in and there's an empty waiting room with two receptionists working on computers, with the phone beeping with incoming calls which are quite obviously being ignored. I asked if there was something wrong as I've been holding for 25 mins only to be abruptly told 'we're really busy, we're short-staffed'.

“I had to wait more than month for phone call appointment”

“Today, I visited the practice to get an appointment with the nurse and one with the GP. I've been told I'll have to wait over a month to see the GP and 3 weeks for the nurse”

“I have been back and forth with them (since joining over a year ago) in regards to abdominal pains and lumps which is very concerning, but it seems no matter what the condition at this place you still need to have a phone call which takes about 4 weeks, and then if they think you're ill enough they'll see you...another 2 weeks later...

The NHS often says that if you have symptoms of cancer it's important to get these checked by your GP as soon as possible as timing is everything... Well if this is the case then I may as well start digging my own grave”

Front desk staff

We heard positive feedback about the support and helpfulness of front desk staff at some GP practices:

“I spoke with one of the receptionists today over the phone. She was very helpful. She listened without interrupting and provided me with the best solution for what I called for. Very helpful”

“I've called the practice via the phone and the receptionist was quick and helpful to book me a phone consultation with the doctor and attentive to the situation”

However, not all report such positive experience:

“I tried to hear what the receptionist said through the glass panel, but she makes no attempt to speak up or move closer, I wonder how older people are dealing with this? Or if you are hard of hearing?”

“The receptionist was very unsympathetic, abrupt and not interested in helping”

Digital Access

Service users report concerns with digital platforms such as eConsult:

“they “missed” my eConsult and I didn't get an appointment for 3 weeks. The doctor was supposed to call me and then I get a text through, on the day, saying it will be face to face the following week.

I took time off work, spent 30 minutes walking to the doctors in 40-degree heat and sat in the waiting room sweating for 20 minutes. When I asked how long it would be, they told me the doctor was supposed to call me to rearrange cause they aren't in today”

Prescriptions

Some service users must build their requests around surgery staff availability to make sure they get their prescription in time, while others have to chase 'missing' prescriptions. Some service users don't understand, or have not been informed, why their prescriptions are limited to 4-week cycles, and others say they've had conflicting information from surgeries and pharmacies on what can/can't be bought over the counter:

“The prescription lady only starts work after 1:30pm - so she only works only half days which is problematic when you have problems occurring with prescription request as no other staff have authority to help you.

I always put my request in at least a week ahead so they have plenty of time to solve any problems that might occur with it.

I have also had staff tell me that the website where you can request prescriptions is not reliable and they did not get my request even though the website said it went through”.

“On numerous occasions I’ve gone to collect my prescription and the GP hasn’t even sent it [to the pharmacy]”

“They don’t give out more than one month’s prescription at a time, so I unfortunately have to contact them every 4 weeks”.

“Doctors send out texts stating to get certain medications over the counter when the pharmacy states it’s by prescription only”

Making a complaint

All GP practices must have a well-publicised complaints process, setting out the handling and consideration of complaints.¹ However, service users at one GP practice feel that they are not being listened to. They report unresponsiveness to feedback and unwillingness to provide the complaints process when requested.

“They disbanded their patient feedback sessions and honestly don’t care about your feedback. If you write a formal complaint via their website, the practice manager is supposed to reply to you, but they won’t”

“I asked to complain and they said you have to contact xxx - no email address [was given to me]”

¹ <https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/gps/gp-mythbuster-103-complaints-management>

Case study: COVID vaccination for vulnerable service users

John, a 75-year-old man diagnosed with depression, has had three COVID vaccinations and has been trying to get a booster dose and a flu vaccination. John is very worried about his health and contracting COVID. As a result, he does not go out

"I've never been out of lockdown - I'm too anxious to go out"

John desperately wants his booster and flu vaccination, but he's frightened of the prospect of taking transport (bus or taxi) to get to the surgery (Plumstead Health Centre). John tried to find information on walk-in centres or pharmacies that might offer what he needs.

"I am not online, so I have found it very hard to get information about walk-in vaccination centres. After asking several organisations and my GP, it transpires that there aren't any within walking distance of my house"

As there is nowhere within walking distance, John asked his GP practice for a home visit, but the surgery told him he's not classified as housebound, so they can't visit him.

John says he now feeling more down than ever and really worried about not getting his booster dose and flu vaccination

Mental health support

GPs are often the first port of call for mental health concerns. This month, we heard mixed feedback from service users seeking mental health support from their GP:

"Highly recommend [my GP], they dealt with my mental health issues for years incredibly well with lots of compassion".

"The doctors don't care about women or mental health"

"[My GP] was so condescending, patronising, and rude when I was seeking support for my mental health that it triggered a panic attack.

*Some of the things she said - interrupted and spoke over me to express were:
- "no, you don't know what you're talking about"*

- *“the symptom you are describing [of your] experience is unlikely “*
 - *“so if therapy doesn’t help, what do you expect me to do about it”*
 - *“Psychiatrists are the same as Counsellors” (No... They’re not. Where did she get her training!)*
- It felt as if she were saying, “If you’re going to kill yourself, just do it”.*

Sexual Health Advice

The Guardian² featured a report on a pregnant Greenwich woman considering having an abortion given an anti-abortion leaflet by her GP. South East London Integrated Care System are investigating this case: *“We take matters like this very seriously and are currently investigating the alleged incident with the GP practice.”*

² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/30/pregnant-woman-shocked-gp-anti-abortion-leaflet-society-protection-unborn-children-spuc>

Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust (LGT):

Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH)

Communication

Service users are finding it difficult to contact a variety of departments at QEH.

"I'm trying to work out the best time to go up for an X-ray (walk in) so there is minimal disruption to my working day. I've tried calling the imaging department 23 times today and the phone just gets cut off. I've also called the switchboard and the guy I spoke to didn't even know what the opening/closing times were"

"I needed to speak to someone in Ultrasound and gave up after 2 days of constant engaged tone"

Basic information on clinic hours for the imaging department is not easy to find on LGT's website. We also checked LGT's website³ and could not find the information.

"Just looked at the [LGT Imaging department] website - extremely poor, almost useless information. I was expecting to find a booking service like they now do for blood tests. Oh no! Not impressed"

A&E and Urgent Care

Waiting times

We heard mixed feedback this month. Some service users praise the care and rapid attention received, while others report a lack of urgency and extensive waits:

" [for treatment of a dog bite].. From check in to getting treatment Tetanus cleaned and antibiotics took less than an hour... Thank you NHS"

"No sense of urgency. Large wounds exposing fat, muscle and blood loss left hours to be dealt with. Offering someone with a broken foot just one crutch to travel through the hospital. There is no logic there"

³ <https://www.lewishamandgreenwich.nhs.uk/radiology-at-queen-elizabeth-hospital> - Checked on 9.8.22

“12hrs in Queen Elizabeth A&E Woolwich. No x-ray or scans for severe abdominal pain. Sent home with pain killers”

“Went to A&E at 6pm on a Sunday, still here waiting to be seen at 1.42am Monday. Suspected appendix pain...It's disgusting how long a sick person has to wait in their supposedly urgent care department. There is nothing urgent about it... I would rather drive to miles away to attend Kings in the future than attend this place again”

Getting home from A&E can also be difficult:

“Once I was discharged, QE reception said there were no cabs available at 2am – it was dark and cold and I am a disabled woman left by myself. They're so busy, sometimes you seem forgotten about”

Case study: A&E

Rosie's teenage daughter, Bimpe, attended A&E twice feeling very unwell. On both occasions she was given anti sickness and antibiotics tablets, but neither helped. She could not eat or hold down any fluids, including water.

In desperation, Rosie contacted 111. They advised to stop taking the medication and sent a prescription for Bimpe to the chemist. After four days, her condition had not improved and Rosie called 111 again. After worrying and waiting 4hrs for a call back, she decided to call 999 for an ambulance. *“I was told the ambulance would be there in 50 minutes or sooner. After waiting 1.5hrs, I had a phone call saying that they were extremely busy. They were very aware that my daughter was not in a good way. I was advised to spoon feed her water every 10 minutes until the ambulance got to us”*

When the ambulance arrived several hours later, Bimpe's was taken to A&E at Queen Elizabeth Hospital and told Bimpe would need a blood test. *“The nurse set up the equipment in Bimpe's arm to draw the blood. But for some reason she could not get the blood out. She kept on trying, but it was affecting my daughter very much. She was in terrible pain and asked her [the nurse] to STOP, please stop, at least 3 times. The nurse would not listen and tried to continue”*

Bimpe began to sweat and shake, feeling hot and cold and nauseous. After telling the nurse that she needed to lie down, Bimpe collapsed onto the floor. *“The nurse was saying that she [Bimpe] was exaggerating and left the room. 3 or 4 of her colleagues came to the room. They were shouting at my daughter to get up, but she could not. After some time, they helped her back onto the*

wheelchair. I was told that another nurse would try and get the blood from her other arm and [that] she would be given medication to get hydrated. We waited for hours. But nothing happened. I asked a number of times. They kept on saying that she was next to be seen but it never happened”.

During their wait, Rosie and Bimpe overheard nurses talking about them – making them feel uncomfortable. *“They kept telling me she was next in the queue. But they were deliberately overlooking her.... They acted like we weren’t there. It was humiliating”*

Eventually a doctor came and managed to get a blood sample, but said he was, concerned that she may have some damage to her kidneys. *“On hearing this I became very upset. The lack of treatment and the added long wait had made my daughter’s condition worse”*

After some time. Bimpe was taken into a room and several doctors and nurses were called to see her. *“I was very upset and felt totally helpless. I felt like I was possibly losing my daughter”*

Once Bimpe was transferred to a different section of the hospital, Rosie felt the quality of care improved and, unlike her earlier experience, staff looking after Bimpe in room 12 and ward 1 were compassionate and caring. *“My complaint is nothing to do with Room 12 in A&E or Ward 1. I appreciate all their help with getting Bimpe to where she is today.”*

Rosie told us that she is anxious about the complaints process and is concerned that there will be repercussions for her and her family if she submits one.

Food provision

Food served in hospital is a vital part of patient care. As well as receiving the right levels of nutrition and hydration; it can help recovery and is an important aspect of the overall care experience⁴.

We heard mixed feedback from service users this month about the food at Queen Elizabeth Hospital:

⁴https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/586490/HFSP_Report.pdf#:~:text=The%20food%20served%20in%20hospitals%20is%20a%20vital,an%20important%20aspect%20of%20the%20overall%20care%20experience.

“I’m diabetic, disabled and a practising Muslim. At Queen Elizabeth, I found I could not eat half of the things in the vending machine”

Another service user praised the portion size of the food and uploaded an



image:

Dentistry

Access

Service users continue to report difficulty finding a dentist willing to provide routine NHS funded treatment. Greenwich service users are not alone, Healthwatch across the country report similar challenges⁵.

“I was at the dentist yesterday after waiting for two years looking for a NHS dentist, but when I find one, she told me that 3 of my teeth need to be extracted, one of them needs surgery to extract it and maybe two and that I have to wait for the hospital”

“I have been forced to find a private dentist as I was unable to find an NHS one”

Referrals: waiting times

Some service users report long waiting times for dental surgery referral:

“I waited over a year for an appointment to remove an impacted wisdom tooth”

“I’ve been waiting since April and still heard nothing”

As a result of long waiting times, some resort to paying for treatment, both in the UK and abroad:

“I went abroad to take out my wisdom teeth...I tried here many times but no luck so I decided to do it some where else cheaper”

⁵ <https://healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk/news/2021-02-12/healthwatch-warns-dentistry-crisis-public-concerns-continue>

Pharmacy

Medication supplies

Service users are still reporting difficulty accessing preparations to ease Chickenpox, such as Calamine lotion⁶. Service users are resorting to home remedies to prevent itching including:

- Porridge baths
- Oat milk baths
- Baking soda baths

Next Steps

We 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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⁶ <https://healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk/report/2022-07-12/what-did-we-hear-june-2022>