

**February 2023**

## About us

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Royal Borough of Greenwich. We're here to make sure that those running services, put people at the heart of care.



Our engagement manager, Kiki, with two volunteers, Pamela and Morgan, running our info stall at the Greenwich Health event.

## In February we heard from 218 people.

**“I’ve only been treated with kindness and care here. I am sure everyone working there is stretched and working very hard. It’s a tough job.”**

GP practice

**“A&E is an absolute joke. Absolutely full, and takes 5-6 hours to be seen after you’ve managed to check-in. Which also takes hours.”**

Hospital emergency department, Queen Elizabeth Hospital

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## Primary care

### Dental care: Accessing NHS Dentistry

In February, we spoke to 100 Greenwich residents about their experience of accessing dental care. Half said it’s “difficult” or “very difficult” to get an NHS appointment with a dentist, with long waiting times, difficulty getting through on the phone and NHS dentists closing patient lists.

**“I found booking a dental appointment difficult and stressful and most dentist nowadays do not accept NHS patients.”**

Half said it was “easy” or “very easy” to get an appointment, but only because they’d been forced to pay for private dental treatment, as getting NHS treatment simply wasn’t possible.

**“I found it easy as it is private and not through NHS”**

## GP Practice

You praised the professionalism and quality of care from both clinical and admin staff:

**“I had an appointment with Nurse B today and I have to say what a credit she is to your practice. A wonderful, professional Nurse. Your reception staff are also very kind and caring. Thank you.”**

GP Practice

You said it's hard to get an appointment, and you go to Queen Elizabeth Hospital instead:

**“As a diabetic I regularly end up going to A&E to get antibiotics or other simple things because I can't wait a month for my appointment – if I get one at all.**

You told us you don't always receive call-backs:

**The eConsultation is complete rubbish. They say they will contact you the next working day on the website and on hold with them but it's been over a week and no response.”**

GP Practice

## **Gary's experience: “They closed my GP practice and didn't tell me.”**

Gary, a retired NHS worker, and his wife of 93 both live with long-term conditions. Needing an appointment, Gary went to his GP surgery and found it closed. **“They never told me anything...the practice has several different locations, but they closed the one I usually go to.** Gary tried phoning to find out what had happened but couldn't get through. **“I waited on hold for 30minutes, and then it cut me off!”** Gary said this often happens and he struggles to get an appointment.

Needing to book an appointment, and worried that his branch of the GP practice had closed, he tried elsewhere. **I went to one of the other ones to book an appointment with my GP only to be told I had come to the wrong building. It's not easy for me to get around at my age and then to be told to go somewhere else... Why didn't they tell me before they closed my nearest location, there was no communication from them at all.”**

Gary and his wife have been registered at the surgery for more than 20 years but feel that it's **"really gone downhill"** as more services have been switched to phone or online. Gary and his wife can't access eConsult and other online services. **"There's no personalisation now- it's all remote. I used to always see the same GP for appointments, now I have no idea who my named GP even is. Every time I have an appointment, it's always with a different doctor."**

Gary doesn't feel he's getting continuity of care, and he has to waste time repeating himself at each appointment. **"It's hard to build trust when you're speaking to a different doctor every time."** Gary worries about how hard it is to get an urgent appointment. **"My wife is frail and we've already had to go to A&E several times because we couldn't get an appointment from the surgery. I'm worried about what will happen to us in an emergency. We can't contact the surgery so what else can we do except go to A&E."**

### **Response from primary care**

We are pleased to hear the positive feedback provided to Healthwatch however we are sorry to hear about the negative experiences and we are concerned by the lack of communication expressed by Gary. We cannot comment on individual cases without knowing the details, but we have passed on the feedback to the individual surgeries listed. We realise that getting access to appointments can be frustrating for patients. Primary care services are under a great deal of pressure nationally at the moment and the Greenwich teams are working extremely hard to meet the increase in demand they face. We continue to work with our GP surgeries to try and improve access but unfortunately there is no straightforward solution.

## Hospital care

### Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

You told us waiting times at A&E are long:

**“Like most NHS services it's under strain and the wait times are hours and I mean HOURS! My husband waited 9 hours, even though he had chest pain.”**

Accident & Emergency<sup>1</sup>

You told us the A&E department is dirty:

**“I was quite shocked by how dirty & disgusting A&E was on last two visits, likely due to overcrowding and extremely long waiting times.”**

A&E<sup>2</sup>

You told us staff were not always professional:

**“The receptionists sit in the reception having chats which are not even related to work, joking around but when a phone rings, they don't pick it up and when they do, they don't even listen to what you are saying and transfer you to the wrong department.”**

Early Pregnancy Unit<sup>3</sup>

**“It's been 6 hours in children A&E and waiting, one doctor on her phone for the last 30 mins, not accepting patients.”**

A&E Children's unit<sup>4</sup>

**“Disgraceful appointment attended by my daughter today and rude nurse. Consultant had no idea of the reason for my daughters appointment and asked for dates of previous surgery and treatments. She had no notes and made no effort to look up the details. When leaving outpatients C, the nurse did come and apologise but only because I'd mentioned to her colleague that I work for Urgent Care at the Princess Royal University Hospital and that I was shocked by her rudeness.”**

ENT Department<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Queen Elizabeth Hospital

<sup>2</sup> Queen Elizabeth Hospital

<sup>3</sup> Lewisham University Hospital

<sup>4</sup> Lewisham University Hospital

<sup>5</sup> Queen Elizabeth Hospital

You told us clinical staff provide excellent care. When waiting to get a bed, staff remain patient and understanding and take the time to explain what's happening.

**“My daughter attended A&E following a fall which subsequently needed 2 operations – she waited in the waiting room for up to 4 hours without pain control which was a very poor experience however once she got into the dept her care and treatment was the NHS at its best. Yes, there was a long wait for a bed however the level of care, compassion, kindness and communication was excellent despite the department being completely full and staff extremely busy and never standing still. Every member of staff introduced themselves and kept us fully informed regarding her results, treatment and bed wait.”**

A&E Children's unit <sup>6</sup>

**Joan's experience: “It was so dirty, if it had been my children going into the hospital, I would have turned them around and left.”**

Joan, recently discharged from hospital after surgery, woke up a few days later at home in excruciating pain and was rushed to Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Joan said all the staff at Queen Elizabeth were very good and looked after her really well, but it wasn't clean. **“I woke up on an examination bed that had not had the paper covering changed from the previous patient- it was crumpled and dirty.”**

After being given painkillers, Joan was moved to a chair in another room before her scan. **“I was put in a room with, you'll never guess, nine other people!”**

Joan and her husband were shocked at the state of this room. **“The floor, I couldn't believe it, the floor was covered in mud. There was blood on the floor and there were blood smears on the chairs and the wall... the guy who put my cannula in, he was just kneeling there – right on the muddy floor. I know there have been strikes and the NHS is understaffed, but it doesn't take long to change the paper sheet on a bed. How hard is it to wipe down the chair before putting me in it?”**

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<sup>6</sup> Lewisham University Hospital

Joan was admitted overnight and transferred to another hospital for surgery the following day. *When I was transferred, I told the doctor about the conditions at Queen Elizabeth. The doctor told me I had been lucky not to catch something. The staff at Queen Elizabeth were really nice, no complaints about the staff. But wiping down surfaces, keeping them clean, this is basic hygiene. It's not safe for anyone. It was so dirty, if it had been my children going into the hospital, I would have turned them around and left."*

### **Response from Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust**

Louise Crosby, Chief Nurse at Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust, said:

"LGT is a patient focused NHS Trust. We are working hard to improve the experience of our patients, which is at heart of everything we do, and we welcome all feedback – good and bad."

"This winter has been challenging, particularly in our emergency departments, and we know that long wait times are frustrating for patients. We are doing a lot to address this issue, so that we can ensure our patients are seen quickly and in the right environment. For example, we are supporting patients to choose the right service and have introduced new ways of working to relieve the pressure on our emergency system. However, we know there is still much to do, and the patient stories shared here will form part of our improvement actions."

"A major part of improving patient experience is the quality of care that we offer. This is a real focus for us. Delivering high quality care for every patient every day is our goal and we are so proud to read here that patients are receiving a level care that is "the NHS at its best" and that colleagues at Queen Elizabeth Hospital are looking after patients really well."

"However, we are disappointed to read the comments about levels of cleanliness. This is unacceptable and not in line with our hygiene standards. Action has been taken to address these concerns and we are hopeful that this won't happen again."

"We encourage all patients to come to us directly with any feedback they have on our services so that we can share and investigate as necessary. Greenwich patients can reach us on 020 8836 4592 or [pals.qeht@nhs.net](mailto:pals.qeht@nhs.net)."

## Next Steps

We follow up on all concerns or issues raised.

We work with commissioners, providers, regulators, people and communities to understand where services are working well and where there needs to be further development.

## Contact Us

For more information on our feedback report, contact us:

- Telephone: 020 8301 8340
- Email: [Info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk](mailto:Info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk)
- Website: <http://www.healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk/>
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