

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 Volunteer Samson at the Woolwich migrant hub

What did we hear in April?

We heard from 353 people¹ about their experience of health and care services in Greenwich.

“ The clinical staff is top notch here. The new admin staff are very good and very caring. I have been with them for over 4 years, and I have to say the place has just gotten better and better over time. I was treated quickly and efficiently.

GP Practise

“ Cannot get any appointments in advance. Requested a long appointment and was booked for a telephone appointment instead! Staff take no responsibility and do absolutely nothing to help rectify the situation. So many practice rooms and GPs and yet it is impossible to get an appointment and some reception staff are so rude.

GP Practise

¹ Feedback collected through calls and emails to us, meetings between us and local groups or advocates, outreach and engagement events, conversations on social media and online reviews.

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Primary care

GP services – Appointments

You told us that appointment booking wasn’t always clear and straightforward, that it could be hard to get through on the telephone to book a same day appointment and it wasn’t always easy to find out how to book appointments online. Some of you told us that your GP surgery’s website was confusing to navigate or did not have any (easy to find) information about online appointments.

“ Once registered they give you an online account and you can go there and book appointment telephone or face to face. If its same day service, you'll have to call at 08:00 or 12:00 each day to be given a slot.

GP Practise

“ I have been calling since this morning to get help for my child who is experiencing asthma symptoms. The receptionist refused to help me on the phone, and I had to log it onto their online eConsult system. After going through every option on there, I found you can't actually book for your child on their eConsult if they are under 18! I now have to phone again – I'm 28th in the queue and am at work so I can't sit on a phone for 5 hours.

GP Practise

You told us that some admin staff were kind and supportive, but that others could be more helpful. You told us that some admin staff didn't always appreciate that a same day appointment isn't an option because work or domestic commitments.

“ Booking an appointment on the same day is really ridiculous as they think we can get time off at such short notice at our jobs. I tried to book a appointment for a future date, but didn't find anything on their website that could help.

GP Practise

“ The reception staff are unfortunately ill-equipped to do this job. There have been numerous mistakes made, which has left me chasing for online activations codes, prescriptions and made me go back and forth between hospitals/pharmacies. They misspelled my email in the system, so the wrong email address was sent to the hospital and information that they were meant to send me didn't get through.

GP Practise

GP services- Clinical staff

You told us that clinical staff are patient and accommodating and make sure you understood everything about your treatment.

“ I am so very grateful to the surgery staff and GPs who saw me recently. I got an appointment within hours of calling, the doctor listened and was able to put my mind at rest, and everyone was so friendly and helpful. I felt completely looked after and can't thank them enough.

GP Practise

Dr A was amazing, I felt he took the time to assess me and explain everything in detail. Thank you so much!

GP Practise

You told us that some clinical staff are dismissive and don't listen to your concerns.

Recently I waited 40 mins for my appointment regarding pain in my wrist. The doctor sent me straight to A&E without even looking or touching the wrist where I had to wait a further 3 and a half hours to find out it was simply carpal tunnel.

GP Practise

You told us you didn't have confidence in how staff handle personal data and patient complaints.

A nurse from the practice contacted my employer, without my knowledge or consent, and breached details (both current and historic) about my health. I raised a complaint regarding this, and the practice were initially very apologetic. After 7 months, my complaint was never resolved, so I escalated this, and was then sent a threatening email and de registered as a patient. This left me in tears, as I only ever wanted an apology.

GP Practise

Healthwatch Greenwich | Anna's experience: "...as much as we're both hurting, I don't even see the point of going to the doctor"

Pharmacies/ prescription services

You told us your pharmacy doesn't always issue your prescription correctly.

"My medication was dispensed incorrectly (not as per prescription) and re-issued with a mixed batch of meds some without batch numbers."

GP Practise

You praised GP prescription teams for their kindness and patience.

"Thank you for the kindness and never-ending patience of the Prescription Team. They are all so lovely, even when they're crazy busy. I'm not an easy customer, and I need different medications all the time. The Team never makes me feel bad for bothering them, and they'll patiently listen to my little panics and go over and above to get me sorted."

GP Practise

Anna's experience: "...as much as we're both hurting, I don't even see the point of going to the doctor"

Anna, a mother of four children, including two with special needs, struggled to get medical care for herself and her eldest daughter, Sophie, after a car accident they were involved in at the end of February. After being discharged from the Queen Elizabeth hospital, despite being told to see their GP to deal with the pain and discomfort from the accident, Anna just couldn't get an appointment at her GP surgery². **"I keep ringing to get an appointment and they just keep telling me they can't do anything; they don't have any appointments. My daughter is in year 11 doing her GCSE's. I can't keep taking her out of school every day in the hope we'll get an emergency appointment. I've tried to explain this but keep being told I just need to keep ringing every morning to see if I can get an appointment that day. Now I'm at that stage where as much as we're both still**

hurting from the accident, I don't see the point of going to the doctor. They keep saying they're sorry, but nothing ever changes."

Sophie also suffers with sleep problems and her counsellor suggested she get referred and advised Anna to see her GP to start the process. **"I made the first appointment with the surgery in January. They cancelled it without telling me why or anything. I had to ring and was told they can't offer another one for four weeks, which already annoyed me because we had to wait four weeks for the first one."** After waiting for an appointment, the doctor at the surgery told Anna that she shouldn't have come to them for a referral to the sleep clinic. **"I explained the situation and that we needed a referral to the sleep clinic. He told me GPs don't do referrals to the sleep clinic and started shouting at me, telling me that GPs are under stress and that people like me wasting appointment slots are the reason no one can get an appointment."**

Anna was shocked and upset. She tried to explain to the GP that she didn't know how the referrals process for the sleep clinic worked, and that Sophie's counsellor had told her to go to her GP. Eventually, the GP agreed to do the referral, but Anna was left feeling distressed. **"I am not a doctor by any means. I do not know any medical things. I don't know who is responsible for what referrals. I was told by my daughter's counsellor to go to get an appointment with my GP and to get them to do the referral. So I just did what I was told. And I was shouted down. I couldn't get a word in. Every time I tried to say, look, it's not my fault, I was told to come and see you for a referral, he didn't listen."**

Hospital care

Emergency Department

You told us waiting in A&E could be long and uncomfortable and staff didn't always seem to notice.

"It seems you have to be half dead if attending the A&E department. The staff do not introduce themselves, do not listen to what you have to say or if you have to wait for hours in a sitting position despite repeatedly advising staff of your increased pain when being in a sitting position."

Lewisham University Hospital, A&E

You praised night staff for the care provided, especially as an emergency admission late at night is particularly unpleasant for a patient.

“I recently had to attend A&E in the middle of the night. This was of course very scary and concerning for anyone to experience. I would like to extend my thanks to all of the nurses and doctors I saw in A&E who were extremely kind, caring, and put me at ease. They were all working so hard. Thank you.”

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, A&E

Outpatients

You told us the outpatient department is efficient, caring, and professional.

“Visited Dermatology, the service I received was first class from the doctor I saw to the senior nurses who treated me. Professional, efficient, very kind and put me at my ease. Thanks so much.

QE Hospital

You told us some outpatient appointments can only be booked over the phone, and it can be difficult to get through.

“I have tried for a week to book my ECG and every time I call them, I’m told they’re fully booked and to call back tomorrow, I hear this from them every day.

QE Hospital

You told us getting a referral for an out-patient appointment can be difficult, and communication between NHS organisations is not always joined up.

“They [Lewisham hospital] ... repeatedly sent my referral to the wrong email address. It was an incredibly frustrating experience it got to a point where I felt I was doing their job. Issues like these are why many people suffer unnecessarily I could've had a consultation by now but now that probably won't happen for another month or so, plus the waiting list for surgery. I was under severe stress from the whole ordeal and all they had to do was ring Kings College Hospital.

Provider response

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

"We're a patient-focused NHS Trust working hard to improve the experience of our patients, which is at the heart of everything we do. We really welcome feedback that allows us to reflect on progress made and opportunities to drive further improvements."

"We know that wait times and basic admin mistakes are frustrating for patients and we are always sorry to hear when we haven't got this right. It's great to read such positive feedback for our dermatology teams and our A&E colleagues though and we are delighted to read about such great service."

"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."

Emma's experience: "When I needed the NHS, it wasn't there for me."

Emma, 72, had been living with a painful lump in her side for three years. Despite having scans and being told she needed surgery, due to COVID and lockdown, the operation didn't happen. **"I'd been to the GP and I'd had scans at Queen Elizabeth and then nothing happened because of the pandemic. I went back to the GP and they referred me to Queen Mary because they said the waiting list was shorter. I had to wait again to have all the scans and the X-rays done all over again. And finally, I got the day of the operation. I was relieved because I'd had this pain in my side for a long time."**

On the day of the operation, Emma arrived at Queen Mary hospital. **"It wasn't simple to organise. I'd had to make arrangements at home, somebody to look after my dog. Somebody to come and pick me up afterwards."**

Not sure how long she might have to wait, Emma brought a sandwich and a drink with her. A nurse stopped her from eating, explaining that she wasn't allowed to eat because she was having an operation. Confused, because Emma thought she was only having a local anaesthetic she asked the nurse to check. Eventually,

Healthwatch Greenwich | Emma's experience: "When I needed the NHS, it wasn't there for me."

the nurse confirmed that she could eat. Emma felt unsure and even more anxious, worried that clinical staff weren't clear about her operation.

After waiting for six hours in a hospital gown she was told she was next in line for surgery. Excited and nervous, Emma was ready to undergo the surgery that would hopefully get rid of the painful lump in her side. Just as she was hoping to go into theatre, the nurse told her the operation was cancelled. **"I waited all day in a gown, ready for theatre. The nurse came in at 5:00 o'clock and she said to me my operation would be going ahead. And then she came in at 5:30 and said my operation was cancelled. There I was, sitting still alone in the room, it was horrible. I'd been alone for hours. By the time I got out of that hospital at 6:00 o'clock I was crying and shaking. My experience was horrendous.**

The hospital apologised and promised to rebook her surgery, but Emma couldn't shake the feeling of disappointment. **"And when they said they'd re-book me, the thought of doing all that again was too much."** Emma couldn't understand why they hadn't told her about the possibility of cancellation when she arrived for the procedure, or why they'd waited until the last minute to tell her. Emma said if that information had been made clear in the letter they'd sent to her booking the operation, she would have been better prepared and not shocked and caught off guard like she was.

Despite the apology, Emma couldn't help but feel let down by the hospital and the NHS. She decided to do the operation privately spending thousands from her life savings. **I used some of my life savings to have the operation privately because I couldn't relive that. I'm a pensioner. I'm somebody who's paid into the NHS all my life and I'd waited nearly three years with this problem because of lockdown and COVID. When I needed the NHS, it wasn't there for me."**

Provider responses to our March 2023 Feedback Report³:

The Discharge to assess service at Charlton park is a newly established service combining multi disciplinary professionals from across Social care, health, the hospital and the care home. There is a multi disciplinary group that meets weekly to review individual patients and ensure their care and support needs are assessed and the person receives support to achieve any individual goals. The ethos of the service is to promote independence and enabling people to do things for themselves where this is safe and appropriate to do so.

We are sorry to hear the experience of this resident did not meet expectations. Charlton Park receives oversight and support as part of the Local Authority Commissioning Quality team assurance and officers will work with the provider to improve the quality of care for all residents where concerns are raised.

-Charlton park care home (pg 10)

We are sorry to hear that some patients have had a negative experience when they visit our practise, and would strongly encourage all patients, anonymous or otherwise, to contact the practise manager to discuss any problems or issues they may have whether it is relating to Reception, Nurse or a GP.

-Janet Riches, Practise Manager, Waverley Practise

³ <https://healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk/report/2023-04-26/what-did-we-hear-march-2023-what-action-has-been-taken>

Next Steps

We follow up on all concerns or issues raised.

We work with commissioners, providers, regulators, and service users 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:

- Telephone: 020 8301 8340
- Email: info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk
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