Feedback about experiences of dermatology in Suffolk

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healthwatch Suffolk

Background

- This feedback was received between January 2023 and March 2023 from residents in Suffolk.
- Respondents were asked about their experience of care and support around dermatology needs. All responses are anonymised.
- Not all respondents answered every question. Therefore, responses are sometimes less than 58 or - where several comments are made - exceed 58.
- When asked about ethnicity the majority of respondents were 'White British/English/Scottish', with one 'White European' and one 'White Other'.

Fifty-eight responses from across east and west Suffolk were received from people who had consulted a health professional in the **last 12 months**.

These results are based on these 58 responses.

Locality and age of respondents

Locality

Locality	Respondents
Babergh	**2**
Ipswich	**7**
Mid Suffolk	**13**
West Suffolk	**8**
Suffolk Coastal	**21**
No locality given	**7**

Age

Age	Respondents
Under 25	**4**
26-34	**2**
35-44	**3**
45-54	**7**
55-64	**13**
65-74	**13**
75-84	**7**
Over 85	**2**
Not given	**7**

- The majority of respondents were **over 55 years** of age.
- **Only four respondents** were under 25.
- Respondents **were not asked** what their dermatological problem were.

How did they first contact a healthcare service about their dermatology condition?

Initial contact made	Respondents
Contacted surgery and saw GP	**36**
Contacted surgery and saw nurse/nurse practitioner	**9**
Used online/ eConsult/askmyGP	**6**
Dentist	**2**
Pharmacy	**1**
GP, then GP Plus	**1**
NHS111	**1**
No answer	**2**

- The majority of respondents (51) initially contacted their surgery by **telephone or online** and then saw a health professional.
- **Five consulted other health professionals** and were then referred to their GP surgery.
- Thirty-seven of the 58 respondents were then **referred to hospital dermatology**, and 21 respondents were **not referred**.

What did people have to say?

*"Initially was advised over the phone by a member of the NHS 111 clinical team to **go to A&E**. Following this initial instance, I have seen my GP in person."*

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*"Asked GP about a small growth on my nostril by eConsult and sent photos. Referred by GP to dermatology at WSH to take biopsy, which confirmed non-cancerous rhinophyma. But then **they could not refer me on to plastic surgery**, so had to go back to GP."*

*"Saw my GP first. He referred me to dermatology on the fast track. **Was seen within two weeks**, and history and photographs taken by a dermatology nurse."*

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*"Pharmacy, then GP first via telephone, **then in person**. Then nurse practitioner and nurses to dress."*

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*"Noticed a **lesion on my nose**, thought it looked suspicious, booked a face-to-face appointment with my GP."*

Have you considered paying for private treatment, to receive treatment sooner?

Have you considered paying for private treatment?	Respondents
Yes, I have paid for private treatment	**4**
Yes, I can afford private treatment and am considering it	**3**
No, I cannot afford private treatment	**19**
No, I am comfortable waiting for the NHS	**7**
Don't know / Prefer not to say	**3**
No answer	**22**

- The majority of respondents (19) said they **could not afford private treatment**.
- **Seven** said they were willing to wait.
- Seven had either **paid or were considering** private treatment.

How long did they wait, or how long have they been waiting for an appointment with a specialist?

Length of wait	Respondents
Zero to two months	**20**
Three to four months	**10**
Five to six months	**1**
Over two years	**3**
Don't know / Can't recall	**1**
No response	**23**

- **Twenty-three** of the 58 respondents did not say how long they waited.
- Of those who did respond the majority were seen within **four months**.
- The three respondents who waited **over two years** were initially treated within their GP surgery before referral.

What people said about how long they waited or have been waiting for an appointment with a dermatology specialist – the good

*"I was seen within one week and assessed, and then saw consultant within two weeks. I was **reassured quickly** and booked in to see the consultant for three months' time."*

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*"**Seen quickly** as GP ordered urgent referral."*

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*"Was **seen quite quickly**, and dermatology department very good at contacting me for follow-ups."*

What people said about how long they waited or have been waiting for an appointment with a dermatology specialist – the not so good

*"**Awful. A lot of back and forth** and being put at the start of the list and cancelled appointments."*

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*"The dermatologist I found out later was a visiting GP who has an interest in dermatology. **On my first visit**, doctor sent me to hospital for a biopsy to confirm what he thought. When I next saw this doctor, he wanted me to try creams, tablets etc. - this took over two years. Then a few weeks ago, I was referred to hospital for dermatology triage service. This has had **a huge impact on my mental health**, and I still don't know if this will be treated."*

What was your experience of waiting for your appointment with a specialist?

Respondent experience	Respondents
Respondents who felt they had been seen quickly and no issues raised	**21**
Negative responses to speed of seeing a specialist, with issues such as anxiety or condition worsened	**6**
Respondent who did not want further treatment as too painful	**1**
Respondents who were advised that no NHS treatment available or advised to go private	**3**
Arranged a private consultation first	**1**
No comments made	**26**

What people said about waiting for an appointment with a dermatology specialist

*"I **saw a private dermatologist first** - knowing that comments and photos from them would definitely speed up the process because it was so chronic."*

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*"I was seen **fairly quickly**, but my day-to-day was impacted by the condition **which caused anxiety**."*

*"Recent flare-up of skin condition. Rang and emailed dermatology every week to bring my appointment forward. Skin was **inflamed and intermittently infected**. I couldn't sleep, affected my daily functioning. Dermatology did not respond until I involved PALS. Had to **wait three months** to see dermatologist even though I was already under their care."*

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*"I was seen relatively quickly, but the **condition worsened considerably** during the wait."*

Describing their experience

What was your experience like?	Respondents
The experience was easy / Access was good and treatment excellent	10
The experience was not good / Access and treatment were poor	3
The experience was mixed	8
GP was excellent	5
GP was poor	10
Hospital was excellent	3
Hospital was poor	4
Hospital and surgery was good overall	3
Opted for or advised to seek private treatment	3
No comment made	8

- Twenty-one of those who responded stated that they had a **positive or overall good** experience.
- Seventeen respondents described their experience as **poor**.
- Eight respondents felt their **treatment and care** was mixed.

Describing their experience

The 21 respondents who had a good experience made comments such as:

*"Treatment was **excellent** - the lovely dermatologist **put me and my child at ease**, was thorough, and took care to explain everything in detail and followed it up with a letter. Had a review three months later to ensure treatment was working and blue card was issued."*

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*"Completely **satisfied with advice and treatment** received at surgery at all times."*

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*"After my initial appointment, with a dermatology doctor, I **felt reassured**. I did not, at that point, want to ask any questions, I was happy with my consultation, the information I was given. From reception staff, nurses, and consultant, everyone was kind and professional. It is only natural to worry, but the clinical staff were **very reassuring, kind and professional**, the information I was given on follow-up care and stitch removal was clear and concise, and was paired with an aftercare leaflet, which was very useful."*

Other responses

For some it was a mixed experience:

*"First GP **not great**. Not very understanding of the emotional side of the hair loss. Said it would probably grow back, but wasn't sure. Nurse at practice - **excellent**. Female GP - understanding. Private consultant advised treatment of steroid injections and lotion. The wait time to see a NHS dermatologist is far too long."*

… and for some not so good an experience:

*"I KNEW that I needed dupilumab injections! My allergic reactions were becoming far more frequent and the list of allergens was becoming unmanageable. Yet, I STILL had to **jump through all the other hoops**, including things that had already failed (and, in the case of oral steroids made me worse!) - UV light, steroids and immunosuppressants… All the time I was **signed off sick** (and eventually had to quit my job and career because my sick leave ran out because the process of getting on dupilimab took SO long - so I am far worse off financially!)"*

What would have improved your experience?

What would have improved experiences?	Respondents
To have received professional advice from an appropriate person	6
To see a doctor or professional person who is interested and willing to listen	3
Nothing could have improved it, five stars	5
Treatment and care was excellent	5
More consistency and seeing same person	2
Better treatment by consultant	3
Faster and easier access to NHS staff	3
More regular checks with specialist	2
More information to be made available	2
No comment made	22

Other Suggestions
To have been referred to dermatology
'Could more be done by doctors?'
NHS to treat problem rather than having to go private
More use of online consultations
Make it less like 'a production line'
Better awareness of mental health
A 'correct diagnosis'

What would have improved your experience?

Ten respondents said either nothing could have improved the treatment or that care and treatment were excellent. Comments included:

*"I am **more than grateful** for the care that I have received. I get seen by the dermatologist every six months."*

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*"I really cannot think of anything, **everyone has been lovely**!"*

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*"**All went well** and further treatment carried out."*

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*"Nothing - I **can't fault the process**."*

Respondents who discussed a poor experience said they'd have wanted:

*"To be able to see a doctor or professional who is **interested** and **willing to listen** and to receive some professional advice from an appropriate practitioner."*

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*"I would have liked to have seen an actual GP, and I think, **as a breast cancer survivor, I would have liked some reassurance from a specialist that treatment was not necessary**. I would have preferred the procedure to have been done by the NHS since I trust the professionals and processes."*

Respondents who discussed a poor experience said they'd have wanted:

*"A consultant who is not dismissive and admonishes me for being referred by GP. The **nurse and doctor who were also in room both apologised after she left**. I believe she instructed them to write to GP and admonish him for making referral. I **left the appointment in tears** because of the rudeness and no end in sight to the pain."*

What star rating would you give for the appointments, treatment and care you received?

Star rating given	Respondents
Five stars	**17**
Four stars	**9**
Three stars	**11**
Two stars	**4**
One star	**12**
No rating given	**5**

- Five stars is given for being completely satisfied and one star for not being satisfied.
- The majority of respondents (26) gave five or four stars.
- Eleven respondents felt the way they were treated was okay.
- Sixteen respondents awarded one or two stars, indicating that they were dissatisfied with their appointments, treatment or care.

*"The hospital appointment was a week after the initial consultation, and diagnosed an ulcerated benign haemangioma. I had a call **two days later** to ask if I could come in for a biopsy… I didn't realise it at the time, but the removal of the troublesome blood vessel for analysis was the entire procedure - I had two stitches and was **sent on my way within minutes**. The stitches were removed… ten days later. Six weeks on, all that remains is a small scar."*

"Very easy to access dermatology services. Treatment was efficient and helpful. The information was also useful and gave me something to focus on in between appointments."

"I was very disappointed with the service I received, as the doctor had no empathy and I had to go through a very long process, and only now after over two years will I be referred. I am very upset about this."

"Awful service and communication. Rude consultants."

Conclusion

The experience was made more positive when:

There was a speedy response and a timely appointment made with an appropriate health professional at the GP surgery.

Followed by a referral to the dermatology clinic, if appropriate.

The time between appointments should be as short as possible.

The health professionals provide appropriate treatment and follow-up.

Staff were kind, professional and efficient.

Conclusion

The experience was less positive when:

It was difficult to make an appointment with an appropriate health professional at the GP surgery.

Referral to the dermatology clinic was delayed due to prolonged treatment given by the GP, which did not prove to be successful.

Referral health professionals in the dermatology clinic were rude or not helpful.

Respondents were informed that the NHS did not treat their specific dermatological issue, and that they would have to pay for private treatment.