

August 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.



A glimpse of 'Feel Better' organised by Greenwich Nepalese Gurkha Community, a small community group that teaches, trains, and empowers Nepali elderly women and works towards improving their access to health and care services.

What did we hear in August?

We heard from 233 people¹ about their experience of health and care services in Greenwich.

“ The nurses at Phebotomy Clinic are aggressive, rude, careless (causing unnecessary pain to patients) and should be either retrained or replaced with nursing professionals with a compassionate disposition better suited to nursing!

Eltham Community Hospital

“ I completed an eConsult for my grandfather on Thursday, had a response and he was seen the same day. A real quick and easy process.

GP Practice

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. This report is a short summary of insight we hear and collect for the month.

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Primary care

Registering with a GP

With the closure of Clover Health Centre (at the end of September) Healthwatch Greenwich is helping patients to register at alternative practices. Patients tell us about their challenges registering with a new GP practice:

- **Complex Forms:** Patients tell us registration forms are too complicated, making them time consuming and difficult to complete. Some ask the same questions for adults and children, regardless of the child’s age, meaning that some questions are inappropriate such as asking the last time a young child had a smear test.
- **Online registration:** While most people tell us they prefer to register on line, for those who are not digitally literate this represents a challenge. Not everyone has access to a smart phone, laptop, or an email address. Patients who are not digitally literate tell us they’re not sure what to do or how to register if they are not online.

- ID documentation. Patients are routinely asked to provide ID documentation as a requirement of registration. This is a source of confusion as NHS guidelines state that patients don't need proof of address, immigration status, ID or an NHS number to register with a GP.
- Front desk communication: Patients tell us they don't always have a positive experience with front-desk staff when trying to register. Communication can be abrupt, curt, and lacking empathy, making it harder for patients to trust the information given. This also makes patients feel uncomfortable and reluctant to try to make an appointment when they need to seek help.

Healthwatch Greenwich is working hard to make things better. We're speaking up for patients and pushing for changes to make the registration process easier and friendlier.

GP services – Appointments

Difficulty of booking an appointment continues to be a concern. You told us getting a timely appointment can be hard and waiting times are long. Unsympathetic staff and seeing a different health care professional at each appointment creates a less than optimum experience.

“ They routinely book you hours before any doctor can actually see you. I lost count of how many I wasted thus far.

GP Practice

“ Appointments are scarcely available. The prefer to do everything by phone... which is frustrating... When you get an appointment, GP often starts very late, which is understandable, but when the patient is slightly late they cancel the appointment. Staff are unhelpful and unsympathetic.

GP Practice

Provider Response:

Response from the GP Practice

"We are sorry that your experience of the practice has been frustrating. If you have any specific complaints about members of our team, we would be grateful if you would refer these to our practice manager."

"We are currently struggling to satisfy demand for appointments, and acknowledge that the wait for routine appointments is unsatisfactory while we attempt to recruit more clinicians. We do offer patients the choice of telephone or face to face for all routine (booked ahead) appointments. Requests for urgent appointments are all triaged by telephone, and patients invited to attend in person if appropriate. If a patient is more than 15 minutes late for their appointment, they are asked to re-book in order to avoid further delays for other patients who are waiting."

“No appointments for weeks. If I am sick, I can't wait 3 weeks to be seen!...

GP Practice

Provider Response:

Response from GP Practice

"I am sorry you have had a problem with appointments, our appointments are available to book via telephone (up to one week ahead) or alternatively if you complete an online form you will hear from us within 48 hours with a booked appt, again within one week. Please do contact me to discuss this and I will do my best to resolve any issue you may have."

“Very difficult to get appointments or follow ups

GP Practice

Provider Response:

Response from the GP Practice

“We are sorry to read of the concerns that you have raised. It is difficult to respond fully without more information. Please contact our Patient Liaison Manager and she will look into the concerns you have raised.”

“ Where to start? 1. Impossible to get any type of appointment that is less than 3 weeks away... 2. Reception staff that are rude, aggressive, and treat you with contempt. 3. Test results that don't get relayed... ”
GP Practice

“ My 80-year-old mother has had bad experiences at this practice, no regular GP, always sees a different person who understandably doesn't know her medical history, and time is wasted explaining things. She is often told that she is over 80, and therefore shouldn't bother them, genuinely. She receives no follow up care after surgery, and any request from hospitals to follow up her care is ignored. She has very high blood pressure, and diabetes, and Guys hospital has written several times to the practice to request that she receives care for these issues, but it is almost impossible to get an appointment, and when she does it is with someone that is completely uninterested in investigating what needs to be done. My mum has become very depressed (she's isn't usually) and has cried due to the lack of care and the way she is dealt with and spoken to from staff at this clinic... despite recovering from cancer, she is treated as if she shouldn't bother them... ”
GP Practice

“ ... Today, ALL before 8:10am; I was told that I may not have a call-back for my mental health as it is “not an emergency”. The GP emailed me saying that he “can’t write Doctors’s letters”, which I am certain is untrue; as I have previously received one from someone else. And I was told I should have booked an appointment for my son (6months old) weeks in advance, even though I’ve been filling out form after form (for weeks), just trying to get some advice. (WHICH I AM YET TO RECEIVE)...

GP Practice

Provider Response:

Response from GP Practice

“We are sorry to read of the concerns that you have raised. It is difficult to respond fully without more information. Please contact our Patient Liaison Manager and she will look into the concerns you have raised.

“ ... appointment check in system said go to the counter. Counter lady said sit - and after 20 minutes told me ‘we cannot see you.’ What the heck - if you cannot see me then tell me right away instead of waiting for 20 minutes...

GP Practice

You praised practices for their responsiveness and care.

“ My mother had been unwell. I was greeted by a very friendly receptionist who asked about my mother and suggested that with the info provided should be seen on the same day. An appointment with their ANP was made for 30 mins later. The ANP was fantastic. A very thorough history and examination was performed followed by and urgent ultrasound referral and blood analysis. Following the results of the ultrasound and bloods, not only was my mother referred for an urgent CT the ANP took the time to contact me to let me know of the findings. The whole process to date has been seamless. Thankfully looks like all is ok! Excellent service in my opinion

GP Practice

“ I registered as a temporary visiting patient. What a great experience. The receptionists were extremely helpful, the appointment booking lady was so kind and helpful and the doctor was thorough, attentive and understanding...

GP Practice

Ronan's Experience: "This experience was so horrible for him, he doesn't want to go back."

Ronan is of South Asian heritage. He has learning disabilities and autism and lives in supported accommodation. Emma – his care worker helps him with daily living tasks. Ronan's autism means he needs a very structured timetable, and he gets upset and anxious if something doesn't happen at the arranged time. Ronan finds it hard to communicate when he's feeling upset and can sometimes harm himself out of frustration.

Emma's been taking Ronan to the dentist because he grinds his teeth in his sleep and needs mouthguards. The dentist realised that Ronan needed multiple treatments and referred him to Guys and St. Thomas hospital to get them all done at once. *"As well as the mouthguards, Ronan needs a filling and plaque removal. The dentist referred him to Guys and St. Thomas - having all the treatments at the same time means he won't get distressed by repeatedly going back. It took months for the appointment to be made. I contacted PALS 3 times because we hadn't heard anything from the hospital. PALS were no help at all and sometimes they didn't even bother to respond. We had to keep taking him back to the dentist to get referred again. We eventually got an appointment a year and half after he was initially referred."*

Ronan and Emma were told that he would need to be sedated for the procedures. Emma was worried about Ronan having to travel on the train after being sedated and asked for help with transport. *"Ronan has disabilities, but no one offered us any help with transport. No one even told us that hospital transport was possible. I had to find the number for hospital transport and make the arrangements myself. Then they said a support worker (me) couldn't assist him at the appointment, I had to explain that he couldn't attend the appointment alone and that he had to have someone with him. I was shocked, they didn't want to help, they weren't interested, they didn't care, but I wasn't taking no for an answer".*

On the day, hospital transport was an hour and half late. Ronan stood watching out of the window, getting more and more anxious, worrying about his appointment. No one rang to tell them there was a delay. In the end, Emma called to check they were still coming. *"When the transport eventually came, they said that another 3 people still needed to be picked up. The appointment was at 12:30, I had to call the hospital and they said if we got there by 2 they would see Ronan. It was a rush, Ronan was stressed, we got at there at 1:50pm.*

Hospital transport was an absolute joke, there were other people, one having cancer treatment and she was late for her appointment as well."

At the hospital, the procedures were explained to Ronan and Emma. *"The specialist disability nurses were good - they sat down and asked Ronan questions and waited for him to reply and ask for information. They broke down the process about X-rays and the different procedures, and he found it comforting for them to do that, but there wasn't any easy-read information available. A more senior disability nurse felt he couldn't give consent. They asked him questions and asked him to repeat the information back to them, but he couldn't answer."*

The nurses decided that Ronan was not capable of consenting to the procedures, so his appointment was postponed until he could provide written consent from a family member. *"He really wanted the appointment, he understood and usually remembers things well, but he was so stressed because of the delay with the hospital transport. He was physically exhausted from anxiety, and he was hungry. There was no information with the appointment details telling us if he could eat or not - so we assumed he couldn't eat anything before being sedated. No one told us anything, we didn't get any letter to say what the precautions would be, if he could eat or not, or about needing a consent form signed or any other information. It's so frustrating as a carer, that we've built him up for it, it's like you've let a balloon down and all the air gone out of it, all the worry and anxiety it caused him - for nothing. The way they've treated people is diabolical, and after talking to other patients on the hospital transport, it's clear this happens a lot."*

Ronan and Emma waited 3 hours for the transport to take them back, arriving home at 8:00pm. *"Ronan was so stressed and hungry and upset about his appointment. We came home and we were physically drained. If you ask him about hospital transport now, he says he never wants to get hospital transport again and we're still waiting for a new appointment. Will we have to wait a year and a half again? I'm worried about how I'll get him to hospital if he needs any other treatment now. This experience was so horrible for him, he doesn't want to go back."*

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Maternity Department

“ My wife recently gave birth at QEH, the quality of care we received was first class. We had to make many trips to the hospital during our pregnancy and we always felt very well looked after by knowledgeable staff who made us feel very safe and looked after. The doctors and midwives provided the most superb support, so much we look forward to having our second child at the hospital.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Emergency Department

“ Late Sunday evening, after an extensive intake, I was referred to the QEH by 111. When I got there, the first thing I saw was a sign with 5 hours waiting time...

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

“ Had to use A&E couple of times. Always felt taken care of and waiting time wasn't too bad.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Outpatient Department

“ Worst call centre ever. Trying to reschedule an appointment (that I've waited 12 months for) because the letter only arrived 2 days before the appointment. I've tried for the last 2 days to reach anyone in the department and people just don't pick up the phone. And finally, after 45 calls, the one person that did answer the phone was so rude that would not let me say what I needed and made fun of my name. This person would not even take my NHS number to try to find me in the system and just said they there was nothing he could do to rebook it...

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Yasmin' Experience: "I felt desperate, I got out of bed, walked out of the ward, and left the hospital in my pyjamas."

Yasmin suffers from fibromyalgia, anxiety and depression and was admitted to Queen Elizabeth hospital due to severe bleeding. *'The toilet was covered in blood, I couldn't walk, I couldn't stand I was feeling extremely weak.'* She arrived at hospital by ambulance.

While in the Emergency Department, the doctor told her to stay on the bed and call the nurses for help to use the toilet. Needing to use the bathroom, trying to get the attention of staff proved futile. *'I was on the bed, weak, not able to move, the buzzer was on the other side of the room, I couldn't reach it.'* Yasmin used her mobile phone to call Queen Elizabeth hospital to ask them to help her in the Emergency Department. *'I had to telephone them to come and help me.'*

Yasmin was admitted to Ward 17 and given a blood transfusion. No one explained to Yasmin why she needed a blood transfusion and Yasmin said there seemed to be confusion about her medications. By this time, dinner was being served on the ward and she was hungry, but no meal arrived for Yasmin. *'I was starving. Everyone around me was having dinner. I asked for a plate, but they forgot about me and left me hungry.'*

Days later, feeling anxious and worried her mental health was declining, Yasmin repeatedly asked to see a mental health professional but was told that only doctors could make such requests. Yasmin said lack of mental health support worsened her condition. *'I knew I wasn't well; I was pleading to talk to a mental health professional, but nobody seemed to care.'* On the verge of a mental health breakdown, she told ward staff how desperate she was feeling, but no one listened. In crisis, Yasmin left the hospital without being discharged. *'I felt desperate, I got out of bed, walked out of the ward, and left the hospital in my pyjamas. I thought someone will stop me, someone will ask me where I'm going, someone will ask me if I'm OK – but no one did. No one stopped me. I left the hospital through the main doors in my pyjamas.'*

Recovering but still feeling distressed at home, Yasmin contacted PALS to complain but they didn't want to speak to her. *'The lady on the phone asked me to send an email, I explained that I was still feeling low and wanted to tell her what had happened to me in hospital, but she refused. She said they don't do long conversations and the procedure is to send an email. What kind of support*

is that? Then she blamed me for not wanting to cooperate because I said I was too upset to write it all in an email and that I just wanted to talk to them. She even said since I left the hospital without being discharged, I didn't have the right to complain'.

Provider Response:

Response from Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

"There's mixed feedback here from LGT patients this month. I am very pleased to hear about the positive patient experiences and it is great to know when we are getting things right, especially in maternity care. However, we are very focused on taking learnings from patients like Yasmin who sadly didn't have a good experience with us and will be using her honest feedback to help improve our services for future visits and patients."

"We are absolutely committed to improving at LGT and 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."

— Louise Crosby, Chief Nurse at Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

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 further development is needed.

Contact Us

For more information on our feedback report, or to request it in large print or easy read format, contact:

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