

Experiences of health and social care services in Sheffield

Key insights from June- July 2024

During June and July 2024, we gathered insights from 318 individuals accessing health and social care services across Sheffield. Particular highlights included GP experiences of care along with NHS treatment provided by One Health Group. We have heard about issues with some home care providers and lengthy waiting times in place when trying to access CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and the Memory Service.

Accessing GP services

Over the past two months, we gathered feedback from 225 patients registered at 32 different GP practices across the city. Nearly 75% of individuals (166 people) were happy with their experiences, praising the good quality care they had received and the support provided. Many also noted the friendly interactions they had experienced with staff.

Concerns have been raised about the difficulties some prospective foster carers encounter when trying to obtain a health assessment for fostering applications. Some reported being refused the assessments, whilst others experienced significant delays in having them completed by their GPs.

Some patients told us they felt unheard when requesting medications such as pain relief or sleep medication. Despite reaching out to their GP multiple times, they felt their concerns were ignored, leaving them without treatment or support. We also heard from some people seeking support for women's health issues, who felt dismissed by their male GPs.

Several patients felt their GP had not taken them seriously when presenting with symptoms of Fibromyalgia or Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS). They felt the conditions were not understood, meaning they didn't receive further investigation, diagnosis or support. Patients with these conditions also reported difficulties in obtaining the medical evidence required for benefit applications, such as PIP (Personal Independence Payment). This left some people concerned about the financial difficulties they may experience as a result.

27 people reported difficulties securing timely GP appointments. Some patients who sought urgent appointments were offered slots up to three weeks later, leading them to seek care at A&E or the Walk-In Centre instead.



“Professionalism and kindness made the process much more comfortable and stress-free.”

“It puts me off going to my surgery when I don't feel listened to. It's a waste of time going.”



Additionally, there were cases where patients had requested to see a GP, but were booked in with other clinicians such as nurse practitioners. As these clinicians were unable to address their issues, patients had to request another appointment to see a GP. Concerns were also raised about GPs refusing to carry out home visits for patients with mobility needs or if patients were too unwell to visit the surgery.



Young people's access to healthcare

In June we visited the Element Society, a local non-profit organisation that provides a range of programmes and workshops for young people. During our visit many young people said they had limited knowledge of their healthcare rights or of how the healthcare system works; this is a topic where more information is needed to support young people to manage their health and wellbeing. For example, several young people told us they were unsure how to register with a GP or schedule an appointment, or when they could go to an appointment without an adult present. We are currently finalising some information resources that will support young people to understand some of these issues in more detail.



Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Several young people we spoke to in this period found accessing mental health support challenging, largely due to concerns about confidentiality. Opinions on CAMHS indicated a widespread lack of trust, with many feeling that staff would share their discussions with parents or carers. Instead, they relied on voluntary sector organisations to provide a safe space to seek information, advice, and support.



We also heard feedback about CAMHS from SYNC (Sheffield Youth Neighbourhoods and Communities), who shared concerns with us about the lengthy wait times young people often face when accessing CAMHS, even for urgent issues. These delays have a significant impact on young people as well as their families. SYNC also reported instances where young people age out of CAMHS before receiving any assistance and face further delays transitioning into adult services.

Issues with home care providers

Issues were shared with us about home care providers, including carers who arrived very late or didn't show up at all. We also heard that requests for carers of a specific gender were not fulfilled, despite being agreed in initial care plans. Concerns were also raised about the quality of care provided, with some feeling that their carers lacked the training necessary to be able to carry out the role effectively.

"We just want to have 2 female carers per session who have been trained and are experienced."

Barriers to obtaining support for adult social care

Some people got in touch to tell us their views about the care and support assessment process conducted by Sheffield City Council. People were shocked to discover their relatives were not eligible for support despite there being a need for assistance. Additionally, individuals who had completed assessments over the phone reported feeling rushed, which led them to miss out important information. Those whose applications were rejected said it would have been helpful to be directed to voluntary sector or community organisations offering wider support, as the information provided was limited.



Financial challenges

This period, we heard from individuals struggling to afford their regular prescription costs. We signposted these people to the prescription services helpline, (<https://tinyurl.com/4jwx9r9x>) to check their eligibility for support. We also continue to hear from people facing financial difficulties with travel costs to healthcare appointments, particularly when using public transport to visit their GP. Additionally, some individuals reached out to tell us despite undergoing a care and support financial assessment, they still find the cost of paying for home carers a strain and a significant source of worry.

"I will have to cancel my much needed carers(...) because I can't afford what they say I can."

Experiences of hospital care

17 people shared their experiences of hospital care with a third of those praising the staff and treatment they had received at A&E, Endoscopy, Orthopaedics, and Weston Park.

We received reports that there was a shortage of patient wheelchairs across the hospital sites. This left some patients having to walk long distances when in the hospital and when leaving to access transport home. Additionally, patients with mobility needs using taxi patient transport services, expressed frustration over the lack of assistance available to help them enter their homes upon arrival, leaving some to struggle.

"There were no wheelchairs available when we got to hospital and had to walk a long way to the ecg unit which was very painful for me."

Views were shared by patients who had been advised to attend SDEC (Same Day Emergency Care) instead of A&E as they would be seen quicker. However, they reported that they were still waiting long periods of time to be assessed by staff. There were also reports that staff communication was lacking in SDEC as patients reported they often didn't know or didn't receive updates about what was happening with their care.



We heard from relatives of people living with dementia who had been in hospital. They felt the staff were not equipped, or had sufficient time to be

able to provide the level of care needed for their family members. We heard of one example where a patient had sustained injuries while in hospital due to a lack of staff observation and other cases where patients were not encouraged to eat and drink. Additionally, it was noted that patients with dementia often faced lengthy discharge delays due to the limited spaces available in specialist care homes.

Accessing dental care

The majority of people getting in touch about dentistry this period were in need of a regular dentist for themselves or their children. They had tried calling local dentists but discovered none of those contacted were taking on new patients. We regularly contact dentists across Sheffield to get an accurate picture of which practices are accepting new NHS patients so we can signpost people to them. After we called round in July, we discovered just one practice across the city was able to offer appointments to new adult NHS patients.



Sheffield Foyer, an organisation who support young people affected by homelessness, wanted to express their appreciation to a local dental practice. After encountering difficulties in finding a service who could take on their residents, the dentist agreed to see 20 residents and is open to accepting more young people in the future.



One person got in touch to tell us they had asked their regular dentist to refer them to the Community & Special Care Dentistry service, but their request was not granted, leaving them unable to access a dentist who could provide them with individualised support. Additionally, we heard some people felt that the Community & Special Care Dentistry service was not well-publicised, and were unaware that the service existed.

Getting in touch with South Yorkshire ICB

In our February – March briefing we reported that South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) no longer maintain a dedicated switchboard service for public enquiries. At present the only contact method is via email. This is not accessible for everyone, and some people have reported experiencing significant delays in receiving email responses. The ICB informed us that they have established a new complaints team, and are working on implementing a new telephone system.



Long waits for the Memory Service

Concerns were raised relating to the lengthy wait times people experience to access the Memory Service. One case involved an individual's relative who had

been on the waiting list for nine months. During this time their health had declined, which made the family feel very concerned. We contacted the Memory Service at the beginning of July and were informed they were currently booking in referrals from August 2023 however; it was also noted that waiting times can fluctuate.

Positive NHS care at One Health Group

Sixteen patients shared positive experiences of the high-quality NHS care they had received at One Health Group. A large proportion of people stated they had experienced short waiting times for consultations and to undergo surgery, as well as receiving helpful communication. Patients also noted that their stay was comfortable, the environment was clean and welcoming, and they felt genuinely cared for by attentive staff.

“One Health meant I was seen much sooner and all was done in a short time. So much better than the usual long waiting lists.”

Patient medical records

Several patients told us that during interactions with clinicians at different services, they felt their medical records were not reviewed thoroughly or had not been consulted at all. For instance, following a written GP triage request, one patient told us the clinician they saw centred the conversation around a previous condition, rather than the current issue they were there to seek advice for.



Impact from our last briefing (April- May 2024)

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals and South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board have responded to our last briefing, outlining how they plan to address areas for improvement. Their comments are below in blue.

Response from Sheffield Teaching Hospitals

Issues were raised relating to personal care and inappropriate staff conversations heard in A&E. The A+E department have launched a back-to-basics programme with the intention of focusing nursing time on things that are important to patients. Example of this are personal care, nutrition and hydration, and pain relief. Complaints and incidents are being monitored as part of this programme to measure improvement. Inappropriate conversations in clinical areas does not come up as a regular theme in patient feedback, but the Deputy Nurse Director has raised the matter with the A+E Matron who will feedback about this to staff through the regular staff meetings and handovers to prevent this occurring again.

Patients experiencing difficulty with swallowing and awaiting a Speech Language Review were provided with food that did not meet dietary needs. This issue has been escalated

via a risk assessment and the team are collecting data on patient complexity over summer which will form part of a business case for additional staffing to enable us to provide more timely assessments and support patients and their loved ones.

Prolonged waiting times for patients experiencing symptoms of cancer. We agree that information should be provided at each step of the pathway and will look to review our current processes/resources as part of our improvement work.

Referral delays to initiate Intensive Home Nursing Service (IHNS). We are working to better understand the reasons for these late referrals. The Clinical Services Manager responsible for IHNS has been having meetings with others across STH regarding this, to address this concern, and this feedback will be used to support looking at solutions to this. The Community Nurses work very closely with IHNS and so it is unlikely that this is the source of late referrals. However, Integrated Community Care have organised a lunchtime meeting for their District Nursing team leaders to meet with the IHNS leads to provide clarity on the service offer and discuss how the two services work together, to support these teams working closely together.

Limited options around blood testing. To be discussed at Patient Experience and Engagement Group whether it could be suggested to as part of the Trust's policy for supporting patients with a learning disability that carrying out any required blood tests on the same day as the appointment to reduce anxiety, stress and additional journeys' is a reasonable adjustment for clinicians to facilitate this where appropriate to support patients with a learning disability.

Healthcare accessibility- staff disability awareness, screens causing issues for people who lip read. To be raised at the Patient Experience and Engagement Group for discussion around existing resources/staff awareness and how to address any gaps. Patient Experience and Engagement Group to also discuss the use of Perspex screens across STH and the issues raised for the difficulties around the use of these for patients who lipread.

Patient transport arriving late. We appreciate the stress and worry late transport can cause a patient, and therefore, as reflected in the feedback in the briefing, we will make every effort to accommodate a patient for their appointment if they arrive late due to patient transport, so that they are still able to be seen.

Response from South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board

Patient transport: issues reported around repetitive questioning of patients. The feedback about the Patient Transport Service is very helpful. The issue of frequent users having to answer the same questions every time they ring for transport will be raised with Yorkshire Ambulance Service who run the service. We hope to explore the introduction of a prompt question for people who need to use the service often so they can raise any changes in their circumstances instead of having to repeat answers each time.

This summary of key issues is a snapshot of what we are hearing about. We want to reflect the experiences of people who share their stories with us, and we hope that it can help services, and commissioners of services, by indicating potential areas of focus. It is based on:

- Experiences that members of the public share with us through our information and advice service
- Feedback shared by voluntary sector partners who support clients in Sheffield
- Stories shared through Care Opinion

Want to share your own experience? Get in touch

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