

## Outpatients at Addenbrooke's

### Our visit to Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Trust

We are Healthwatch Cambridgeshire. Our job is to make sure you have a say about your health and social care services. We listen to your experiences. We share them with the people who make decisions about local services, to help them improve care.

#### What we did and why

Between 16th - 18th March 2016 our volunteers visited Addenbrooke's Hospital and listened to **218 people's** experiences of outpatient appointments.

We visited the Ophthalmology, Dermatology and the Ear Nose & Throat (ENT) clinics, staying in each clinic for a whole day.

This is something the hospital asked us to help them with, as they want to improve people's experiences of care.

Making sure people are always seen when and by who they need to be, has sometimes been difficult in these clinics. When they visited in September 2015, the Care Quality Commission found some people were waiting too long for treatment, or not being followed up properly.

We wanted to help test how appointment systems are working now, and find out what would help people waiting for care.

#### We asked people:

- How long they waited for an appointment.
- If the appointment information from the hospital told them what they needed to know, in a way they could understand.
- What their experience of the clinic was like that day.
- If they had any suggestions to improve their 'waiting experience'.

The visits were done using our power to Enter and View. This is Healthwatch's legal right to visit places that provide publicly funded health or care services, to see and hear how people experience the services.

We also did a "15 Steps Challenge" to record our first impressions of each clinic. This is a way of walking into the clinic and looking at the care provided through the eyes of people who use the services.



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## What we found out

### Waiting for appointments

Waiting times for clinic appointments varied. Some people waited up to a year or more, and had appointments re-scheduled more than once. Six of the 62 new patients we spoke to waited more than six months for an appointment. However, people referred from the emergency department were normally seen within a few days.



**Almost 1 in 10 new patients waited over 6 months for a first appointment**

Most patients said the information they got before their appointment was clear and easy to understand.

Some people told us the automated appointment reminder phone call was hard to understand. This was a bigger problem for people with hearing difficulties.

Some patients wanted or needed information in a different format.

**We asked people what might make waiting better. They said:**

- ✓ Being told how long your wait might be.
- ✓ Booking follow up appointments immediately after surgery.
- ✓ Not cancelling your appointment several times.
- ✓ A telephone helpline for people waiting for appointments.

### Friendly and helpful staff

In all three clinics, staff were seen to be friendly and tried to help people when they could. Patients told us staff were *“helpful”* and *“friendly”*.

### Booking in procedure.

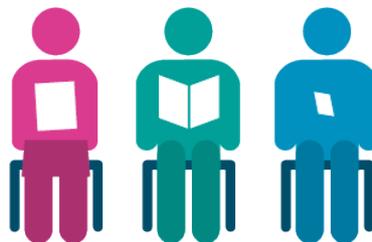
Patients said they wanted a better booking in procedure to avoid queuing at the reception desk. We saw telephone calls lasting four or five minutes, taking priority over people waiting to book in. People’s personal details could be overheard by patients queuing to book in.

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## What else we found:

- The clinics were all clean and tidy. Most people said they were well organised, apart from the booking in process.
- Each clinic had a well equipped play area for young children.
- Appointment information screens were not always updated regularly.
- People could get a drink of water, hand gel or had toilets in some clinics. In others these were not always readily available, or easy to find.
- Some seating areas were well organised. Others were cramped with furniture that was uncomfortable and worn.
- Information on display was relevant, but many posters needed updating as they were difficult to get to, tatty or had too much small print.
- Patient feedback points were not always put in an easy place for people to use.
- Some ENT patients said the waiting times in the clinic were too long.

### WAITING ROOM



## What we told the hospital

We wrote a report about each clinic visit, to let the hospital know what we found. In each report we made some suggestions to improve care. This included patients' own ideas for making care better.

Our suggestions included:

- Reduce waiting times for first appointments.
- Make sure people's appointments are not re-scheduled more than once.
- Make sure appointment information is clear for patients, and provided in a way that suits them.
- Make sure patients are able to contact the clinic easily if they need to.
- Make sure signage to clinics is all clear and consistent.

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- Improve people's experiences of booking into clinics.
  - Look at why some patients wait a long time in clinic, to see if appointment slots can be planned differently.
  - Make sure the clinic environment is comfortable and up to date.

## What the hospital said

After our visit we shared what we found out with the hospital. They told us they:

- have changed and improved the signage throughout the outpatient clinics.
- have arranged for a drinks and snacks trolley to visit the outpatient clinics.
- are looking at different ways of contacting patients about appointments. This includes text messaging and email. They are also looking at introducing a patient portal, so people can manage their own appointments online.
- are piloting an outpatients' helpline in a number of clinics.
- are looking at our other ideas for improvements.

This is a summary of what we found out from patients, and the 15 Steps Challenge. You can get a full report of each clinic visit from our website, or by contacting our office.

## Please get in touch if you would like this report in a different format.

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