

May 2022 Feedback Report



The feedback presented in this report represents 233 responses from the following:

- Calls and emails to Healthwatch Greenwich from Greenwich residents and service users
- Meetings between Healthwatch Greenwich and groups of Greenwich service users or advocates
- Outreach and engagement events by Healthwatch Greenwich
- Conversations as seen on social media, and on community and neighbourhood sites
- Online reviews of services.

GP Services

We heard positive feedback about GP practices with efficient administration systems and staff delivering compassionate care.

“...yes you have to call at 8am or 12pm for appointments, test results are only available after 2pm, but I find the surgery to be very well organised, generally runs to time, very helpful and friendly staff, really competent and thorough GPs.”

“The doctor who I saw was friendly and gentle when taking my blood sample (I have fibromyalgia). He was understanding and tried his best not to bruise me. He was very gentle taking my blood, I didn't feel a thing.”

Reception staff

Service users report mixed experience with front desk staff. Whilst some say interaction is “kind” and “helpful”, others tell us it’s “rude” or “just awful”. Some service users feel front desk staff act as gatekeepers, withholding access to services or not taking their concerns seriously.

“I went in to speak to the receptionist to explain that I needed an appointment. She said ‘your daughter must have a virus and she doesn't need a doctor's appointment.’ Eventually I took my daughter to A&E – as she refused to book us an appointment – and my daughter had more than a virus.”

“...the receptionist told me my condition is not serious and refused to book an appointment despite me explaining that I take immunosuppressants for a serious health condition. I am totally confused at what to do, left in the lurch and absolutely hate my decision to use this practice as my GP.”

“[While waiting] I heard one receptionist say to several different people in person, and over the phone, words to the effect of “we can't help you”.

Telephone waiting times and booking appointments

Service users report long telephone waiting times when trying to book appointments. Before the pandemic, some practices allowed service users to book appointments themselves online. Service users would like to see this facility made available again.

“...after waiting 40 minutes or more on the telephone, last thing you want to hear is ‘no appointments – ring back tomorrow.’... maybe extra staff on telephone calls each morning would help to reduce waiting times? Looking forward to booking online appointments again – hopefully soon.”

“They have such a bad service; I really don’t understand – why do we have this My GP app if we can’t make an appointment online? I’ve been ringing them since yesterday to make an appointment for my mom, but appointments are always full, or the waiting is too long. ...why is no one doing anything to change this?”

“I had to wait 52 minutes until someone – finally – was able to answer my call.”

“I tried for over 2 months to book an appointment with no avail. At one point I was curious to see how long they would keep me waiting on hold, trying to get through. I waited over 2 hours and shortly after the phone went dead – they must have cut me off.”

“Calling at 8am when it opens – you get to be number 17 in the queue! Please add more staff to answer the phone or even better – allow patients to book appointments online.”

eConsult

While eConsult has improved access for those who have access to and can use smart phones/laptops, it has created an additional barrier for those:

- who do not speak or have limited English
- with poor literacy
- who live with cognitive impairment
- that have difficulty expressing their symptoms in writing
- who don't have access to a smart phone/laptop or do not feel confident using digital devices.

"It has been hard to access my GP because I'm not online..."

"The only way you will get an appointment is to go down to the surgery before 8 am and ask and sit there. My mum is 81 and disabled. She suffers with COPD and swollen legs, yet she has had to do this several times because the eConsult is a waste of time. You get fobbed off when they eventually ring you.

My mum had a fall in the new year. She hit her head and cut it open. I called an ambulance to get it sorted out and it's only now, months later, that the doctors want a scan done to see if there is any damage. She has a constant headache. I'm her carer and it's awful seeing her like this. The system is forcing her to go and sit in the surgery - just to get an appointment."

Those using digital platforms and eConsult would like to see improvements.

"When the original [pre-Covid] online booking system was working it was fine. Post Covid - eConsult system is ok to book an appointment but as for getting test results or sending a message - not good. It says 'try our online service.' Tried online for a blood test result and I sent a message. Got an email to say call the surgery. Tried calling the surgery and, as usual, no answer or you are no 5 in the queue - 10 mins later you are 4 in the queue 10 mins later still 4 in the queue. Needs to be sorted out, its awful"

Prescriptions

Missed prescription requests, delays in getting prescriptions, and changes in the way prescription requests are made are all issues service users continue to tell us about.

“I’m constantly having to chase up prescriptions. My mother was hospitalised due to being left with no medication that she urgently needed.”

We also hear from service users who contact 111 to access medications because they’ve been unable to register with a GP practice, or their practice has not processed their prescription in a timely manner.

Lewisham and Greenwich Trust – Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH)

Queenie was pregnant and bleeding when she went to A&E at Queen Elizabeth Hospital. She says she spent seven hours waiting. Queenie said there was no urgency from staff, and she felt no one cared. Queenie said the doctor who eventually spoke to her didn’t take her seriously. ***“After a urine test, he said ‘you are still pregnant – what do you want from me?’ He acted like nothing had happened and I was wasting his time.”***

Queenie said the lack of compassion made an already difficult situation worse.

Queenie got an appointment for a scan for the next day. ***“In the end I lost my child that evening. I was still bleeding, and they couldn’t find a heartbeat. The whole situation was awful. The lack of empathy at A&E, being spoken to like I was making it up. No one cared. It was traumatic. It’s hard to talk about it. I don’t want to make a complaint, but I want to share my story if it will stop this happening to someone else.”***

Waiting times at A&E for infants and toddlers

Whilst adult service users continue to report long waiting times at A&E, we also heard from¹ parents with unwell infants and toddlers who also say they have had long waits to be seen.

¹ See Gurpreet’s case study

“You go to accident and emergency with your infant - with a high temperature, breathing problem, cough and they send you to the ‘normal’ queue - the adults’ line - all waiting hours to get help...”

Gurpreet’s experience of paediatric care

Gurpreet called 111 when her 13mth old baby son became unwell and wouldn’t stop crying. ***“The call-handler booked me an appointment for 1pm - so I expected to be seen at 1pm, but when we arrived, I was told that was just the “check-in” time. I know there are staff shortages, but the information given to me was wrong. I saw posters around Queen Elizabeth hospital that said you get fast-tracked if you call 111 first. That was not my experience.”***

We were asked to wait in a room where there were other children waiting to be seen-some of them seemed very sick. I could see another room with toys in and more space, that would have been better than having everyone crowded in together.”

In the end she waited four hours before her son was seen by a doctor. ***“She wasn’t kind at all. She just abruptly said - “why are you here?” When I started to speak - she cut me off and told me to just state his symptoms. She didn’t acknowledge my son at all. At one point she said “take off his clothes” in a very terse way. When I protested about her tone - she just rephrased it to “remove his items”. She put the cold stethoscope on his chest, but he was distressed, and it was difficult for me to hold him still. She seemed to get impatient with him and me. I understand that not everyone likes kids, but if you are going to check a sick baby you must know how to manage them. She was dismissive and didn’t want to listen to me. She said “it’s just a viral infection-just go home”. She didn’t give me any information or tell me what to do if he got worse.”*** Gurpreet said her baby didn’t get better and she took him to an out of hours GP a few days later who said it was not a viral infection and prescribed medication.

Maternity services

Users of maternity services at QEH continue² to share mixed experiences. Many say their experience was inconsistent – with excellent care and treatment on some wards/departments but poor in others.

“... the doctors and NICU staff were all lovely, but most of the staff on ward seven were terrible. Waited more than two/ three hours, after the time I should have got them, for painkillers, even after buzzing for them.”

“Ward 7 in Queen Elizabeth Hospital is the worse place to give birth-no manners, no respect for patients at all. Noise everywhere all the time, no quick diagnostic response, just noise all day, all night.”

Precious’s experience of maternity care

Precious, who is Black British, gave birth to twins a couple of months ago. She says her prenatal experience was ***“confusing”***. ***“I was seen by multiple midwives, under a team of midwives. I thought I would get consistent care from one or two dedicated midwives. My friends, who gave birth at Lewisham Hospital at the same time as I did, had one midwife supporting them right up to the birth. And were able to build a relationship. I wasn’t.”***

Precious says her experience of giving birth at Queen Elizabeth Hospital was good. She was given pain relief when she requested it, and the midwives, doctors, and nurses were friendly, caring, and supportive. ***“The doctor who did the C-section was very reassuring and very thorough when he explained it to me-that really helped.”***

Her experience of postnatal care at QEH was not always positive and it was hard to work out what support and services were available to her. ***After the baby was delivered a lot of people visited me on the ward, doctors, surgeons, interns, students, consultants, a lot of information was given. I felt overwhelmed and everything was a blur.”***

² Our previous reports in 2022 have recorded some of these in our case studies

Precious's experience of maternity care (cont)

“When I was discharged, they gave me a post-pregnancy booklet. It's 40 pages long! You are recovering, you have two babies to care for, pain to deal with, as a new mother, when are you supposed to find time to read it? I didn't have time to read the booklet so I had to depend on friends and family for information.”

“The information is very good, but I could only pick it up and look at it after 6 weeks. It would have been much better to get this information before the babies arrived – when I had time to read it. And a booklet is not a great format – what about video, audio book, podcast – that would have been more useful.”

Precious says she had problems feeding one of her twins and couldn't get him to latch on even after getting instructions from the breast-feeding consultant. She tried bottle feeding, but he still wasn't feeding properly. *“He was distressed. He looked like he was in pain. I broke down because I was not able to feed my baby. No one looked into it. He was crying all the time. He would literally scream.* Desperate to get help, Precious says she went to the children's ward at QEH, two infant feeding centres, midwives, and the health visitor but *“No one did anything. They just kept telling me “maybe he is a fussy eater, maybe it's the formula, maybe it's the bottle.” I even had an online infant feeding session on zoom. I sent a recording of him in distress, crying, but they still wouldn't take me seriously. I knew something wasn't right but as a new mother I didn't know what was wrong. I had never seen a baby behave in this way. Finally, a consultant who watched him referred him to St Thomas where his tongue tie was cut.”* Precious said during this whole process her family noticed her mental health was declining. *“I wasn't offered any emotional support and I didn't trust my GP or health visitor to tell them how I was feeling. My family could see what was happening, they knew I needed help. I had to find this myself – no one offered me support for my mental health.”*

Next Steps

We follow up on all concerns or issues raised. We will work with commissioners, providers, and service users to understand where services are working well and where further development may be needed.

Contact Us

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