Enter & View Report
Outpatients Department at Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells Hospitals
28th & 29th September 2016
Healthwatch Kent would like to thank everyone involved with these visits especially the patients we spoke to, our volunteers and the hospital staff for their support and contributions.

Disclaimer
Please note that this report only relates to what we observed during our visits. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all patients and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

Purpose of the visit
• To talk to patients about their experience of the Outpatients departments in West Kent.

Strategic Drivers
We hear from patients all across Kent about their experiences of Outpatient clinics. These experiences can be both good and not so good. Particular issues we hear are around waiting times, the appointment system and communications.

We have also heard from Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells Trust that they are already aware of many of the issues that we raise with them. Together we agreed that an Enter & View visit to gather more feedback from patients would be beneficial to support their desire to improve the experiences of patients as well as make the departments operate more efficiently.
Summary of our Findings

• Most patients reported delays to their appointments at Tunbridge Wells although for some this was only a short delay. Patients at Maidstone had less of a wait.

• Almost half of the respondents in Tunbridge Wells said that they had not been informed about any delays whereas in Maidstone only 1 patient had not been informed about the delay.

• Patients reported difficulties in parking and transport at both hospitals which had caused them to be late and frustrated.

• While the majority of patients told us that they had been given no choice over the timing of appointment, no patients mentioned this as an issue.

• Patient satisfaction levels were high at both Hospitals.

• We found aspects of the waiting areas' environment to be satisfactory to excellent as did the respondents.
What we saw

Tunbridge Wells Hospital

What did we see?
The waiting area was clean and hygienic. The senior nurse explained that alcohol hand gel dispensers were located in the corridors on the way to consulting rooms. Some had been moved to inside the consulting rooms as they had frequently been stolen from the reception areas. The location of fire extinguishers were also signposted.

Signage and display boards were raised as an issue by patients and they felt the temperature to be slightly too warm and stuffy.

Comment boxes were placed at the side of the reception desks for patients.

We observed the entrance doors to be rather heavy which could cause problems for frail patients or those using wheelchairs.

Who did we see?
We spoke to 36 patients from a range of ages. Patients were from 9 different clinics but most were from the Orthopedic clinic and Fracture clinic. Patients were spread across the two Zones (Zones 1 and 2).

Appointment Delays
20 of the 36 patients we spoke to had appointments which were running late (56%). There were more delays for Zone 2 patients.

7 patients in Zone 1 were delayed at the time of our visit. Five of these were for appointments with consultants for their first diagnostic investigations. In Zone 2, there were 13 delayed patients. 8 of these were orthopaedic or fracture patients.

Patients in both waiting zones mentioned transport and parking difficulties which had caused them to arrive late for appointments.

Seventeen patients out of a total of 20 who experienced delays were seen within an hour.

47% of patients said they had not been informed about the delay to their appointment. Most of these respondents were in Zone 2.

Waiting Area facilities
Several patients mentioned signage and information as an area for improvement.

Particular comments included information about delays to clinics and improved signage for people with visual impairments.

Vending machines for drinks was suggested by one patient.

In general patients found the waiting area to be fine.

Frequency and Cancellations of appointments
For most patients their appointment was a follow-up appointment (22) and there were similar numbers in each waiting zone.

Only 2 patients stated that the hospital had cancelled an appointment with them. A further 2 patients had to cancel their own appointment and had done it successfully.

Referral issues
GP referrals were the main source of referrals to the Outpatients department.

Asked if patients had a choice of appointment times, most answered ‘No’, particularly in Zone 2 where 15 out of 20 responded in this way. However, no patient commented that this was a problem for them and the majority of patients (31) said that they knew how to change their appointment time if it was not convenient for them.

The majority of patients reported that they were informed of their appointment by letter (89%) and 9 had received a text reminder.

Half of respondents had been asked to provide their mobile phone number so the Hospital could contact them.

Asked about the use of the electronic check-in system, 21 patients had used it with a large proportion (13) commenting positively.
What we saw continued.

Tunbridge Wells Hospital

Satisfaction measures

80% of patients felt they had been given clear and easy to understand information

86% felt staff had given them their full attention

89% felt their privacy had been respected

75% felt they had been involved in decisions about their care

Suggested Improvements
Patients were asked to make some suggested improvements. Comments in order of frequency included:

- More parking space
- Improvement to waiting times
- Nothing to change, all fine
- Communication issues
- Stuffy waiting room

Reception Staff Observation
We talked with reception staff to understand any issues or concerns they may have.

Their major concern was around patient transport especially for wheelchair bound patients who often have to wait for hours to be collected to take them home. They mentioned that at times these delays were so long that they provided food and drink to the patients as they were concerned for their wellbeing. One of the affects of these delays is that sometimes the number of wheelchairs in the waiting room obstructs the flow of other patients.

The staff were at pains to point out that this was not a criticism of the transport staff who were very good with patients but it was to do with the organisation of the service and sometimes they had to wait 20 minutes for their telephone calls to be answered by the Ambulance Centre in East Sussex.
What we saw

Maidstone Hospital

What did we see?
The clinics were clean and tidy. Observations by some patients were that the waiting area could do with being “a bit more cheery” especially for patients with a longer wait. There were plenty of posters and information around the waiting areas. There was a drinking fountain, toilets and some light reading material available.

Who did we see?
We spoke to 33 patients from a range of ages. Patients were from 13 different clinics but most (11) were attending the Respiratory Clinic followed by six from the Fracture clinic.

Appointment
This was the first appointment for 6 of the people we spoke to, the rest were follow ups. Approximately a third were waiting for the nurse, with a similar number waiting to see the consultant and then also a third were post-consultant.

Many appointments were running on time (73%) for the people we spoke with. Of those patients experiencing delays, 7 were under half an hour, with 1 being delayed 30-60 minutes and 1 person having waited more than 1 hour at the time of speaking to them. Positively, 8 of the 9 people who were experiencing a delay had been informed by staff.

Waiting Area facilities
There were a range of thoughts from people when we asked them what they thought of the waiting area. These included those that thought there was nothing that could be improved, one person said “I think it is extremely good”. Of those that suggested some improvement the most consistently mentioned ideas were:
- Clear information displayed about waiting times so that patients don’t have to keep bothering staff
- Improved lighting to stop it feeling gloomy
- Improved signage to both clinics and toilets, although one person mentioned how helpful volunteers were to help with directions.

Frequency and Cancellation of Appointments
Just over 9% of patients had experienced the hospital cancelling one of their previous appointments. This includes the many follow up appointments that the people we spoke to had attended.

Only 3 patients had needed to cancel an appointment before, with another person changing the time of their booking rather than cancelling. All cancellations had been made easily with one relative of a patient, who had needed to cancel more than once, commenting “the hospital has been very flexible and understanding”. Although, the person who had wanted to change their appointment reported they had found it quite difficult to do this.

One person did suggest the wording on the appointment letter they had received “if you cancel more than 1 appointment you will be referred back to your GP” was too strong and in fact some patients might have perfectly good reasons to cancel more than one appointment.

Referrals
20 patients were referred by their GP and 5 came via A&E. The remainder were referred from different sources including other hospitals.

10 patients said they had a choice of appointment time with 23 not being offered a choice. However, this only appeared to be an issue for one person who said they had been waiting months for an appointment so would attend regardless of whether it was convenient or not. 88% of people said they knew how to change their time if it was not convenient.

88% of patients received an appointment letter and 15 were notified (some in addition to the letter) by text. One patient had not received prior notification to confirm their appointment so rang the day before for clarification and was told it was booked for the next day.
What we saw continued.

Maidstone Hospital

Patients' suggested improvements
Patients were asked to suggest some improvements. Comments in order of frequency included:
- Signage (car park, clinics, toilets)
- More parking spaces
- Drinks machine
- More regular buses
- More comfortable chairs

Looking at signage overall, patients suggested improvements could be made on locating clinics on arrival and signage to toilets (although other people we spoke to found the toilets easily). One person thought that directional lines on the floor had been helpful in other hospitals they had visited. Of those that mentioned signage and signposting as an issue, half of these attended the gynecology clinic.
Our Recommendations

- Check that signs to clinics on arrival are clear, visible and easy to follow. Ensure signs are easy to see from the seating areas.

- Ensure signs to toilets are clear and visible.

- Make sure noticeboards are obvious and make sure waiting time information is up to date. Give some consideration to using electronic boards.

- Consider improved signage for people with impaired vision.

- Give thought to the appointment letter to include information about parking and transport - Healthwatch Kent would be happy to help with this.

- Explore the possibility of installing a vending machine in the waiting areas.

- Ensure patients are consistently given information about waiting times across all Clinics.

- Review temperature control in the Outpatients waiting areas or alternatively keep the entrance doors open to facilitate airflow and enable easier passage for wheelchair patients.

- Assess the viability of dedicated wheelchair spaces in the waiting areas to minimise obstruction to patient flows.
What is Healthwatch?

Healthwatch is the independent voice for local people. We gather and represent people’s views. We have significant statutory powers to ensure that people are listened to and involved in the commissioning and delivering of services. One of the ways we achieve this is through Enter & View visits.

What is Enter & View?

Enter & View visits are conducted by a small team of trained Healthwatch volunteers. They visit health and social care services to talk to patients and understand their experiences. They then make recommendations if there are areas for improvement and highlight and share any best practice.

Enter & View is the opportunity for Healthwatch Kent to:

- Enter publicly funded health and social care service to see and hear people’s experiences
- Observe how the service is being delivered
- Collect the views of patients, carers, families and staff
- Highlight and showcase best practice
- Share our findings with the public as well as the Care Quality Commission (CQC), commissioners, Healthwatch England and other relevant partners

Enter & View visits are usually announced, however if circumstances dictate we have the power to arrive unannounced.

Methodology

These were announced Enter & View visits

We met with the Head of Outpatients along with the Deputy Chief Nurse to plan our visit and agree the logistics. We also shared our questionnaire with the team prior to our arrival.

A small team of three trained volunteers visited each Outpatient Departments at both Maidstone Hospital and Tunbridge Wells Hospital. They were met and welcomed by staff at each site.

Each volunteer used a questionnaire as the basis for a conversation with patients.

We spoke to 73 patients in total across both hospitals. Patients were approached on a random basis and were from a range of age groups.

We explained to everyone we spoke to why we were there and left information about Healthwatch Kent.

All our observations have been shared with Trust and they were invited to respond to our findings. You can find a copy of their response at the end of this report.
Response from Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust

Firstly I would like to thank you and all of the volunteers who conducted this audit – their support of this work is most appreciated and we value their observations and recommendations outlined in the report.

We have reviewed the report in detail and have shared with a number of colleagues in the Trust and would like to offer you some initial feedback relating to some of the following recommendations.

Signage

• The estates team have commissioned a small internal ‘wayfinding’ project that involves a review of signage on both sites of the Trust. This initial work will focus on the Maidstone site and will include making improvements to current external and internal signposting of all areas including outpatients and toilets. The lead for this work recently met with a number of Patient Representatives including representatives from Healthwatch who provided feedback on proposals. They are going to have continued engagement in this work stream.

• The full report has been shared with the lead for the ‘wayfinding’ work and she will consider all proposed recommendations that refer to improvements needed to signage in the scope of the project, including improved signage for people with impaired vision.

• The lead will also be reviewing the appointment letters sent to include information about parking and transport. At the meeting with Patient Representatives and Healthwatch representatives the group reviewed a patient information guide for the Maidstone site with a view to updating this document to include information about parking and transport. The group are going to have continued involvement in the revision of this document.
Response from Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust continued.

Provision of information to patients about waiting times in clinics
- There are current differences in how patients are provided with information about waiting times in clinics. This is currently managed with an electronic system on the TWH site and there is a reliance on verbal communication on the Maidstone site. The sisters of each outpatient department will support a review of current processes to ensure that patients do receive timely information about waiting times in each clinic.
- Of note the Outpatient departments are undertaking a manual audit on the start and finish times of each clinic. The aim of this audit will be to identify any specific challenges and for consideration to be given regarding any requirement for change.

Option of installing a vending machine in the waiting areas
The contract for the provision of vending machines is currently under review and the feasibility of having one in OPD will be included in this review. This work is being facilitated by the Estates and Facilities team.

Review of temperature control
At the time of the audit in September it was reported that the OPD on the TWH site was exceptionally hot. This matter was raised to staff in the department at the time. The temperature is controlled on the site in zones and unfortunately the system for temperature control does not operate fully when the doors are open. Since September there has not been any further issues with temperature however this will continue to be escalated should there be a repeat of the situation. Clearly with the doors shut that can make access to each zone more challenging for patients in a wheelchair; this is something for ongoing consideration.

Provision of dedicated wheelchair spaces in the waiting areas
There are dedicated wheelchair spaces on the Maidstone site however on the TWH site there is limited space in the Zones where patients wait for their appointment. The staff currently flex the seating arrangements to facilitate a person in a wheelchair. The outpatient Sisters will be asked to consider any other options to provide more dedicated spaces which would in turn minimise obstruction to general patient traffic in each zone.

Improved lighting on the Maidstone site
- Whilst not listed as a recommendation, there is a Trust wide review of lighting with the intention of implementing a full LED conversion of lighting which will improve the lighting in all areas; this work is due to be completed in 17/18 financial year.