

# Support for partially sighted patients at Maidstone Hospital

A Healthwatch Kent Impact Report. July 2019



## Making your voice count

June 2019

# Support for partially sighted patients

## The story so far

In August 2018, we visited Maidstone Hospital in partnership with Kent Association for the Blind to understand what support was available for partially sighted patients

Our partially sighted visitors identified a number of issues which we shared directly with the Hospital. For example, some posters & signposts were too small to read. During our visit we picked up on issues for other patients with additional needs such as hearing loss.

We made several recommendations. We've been working with the hospital on making improvements to ensure people with sight impairments find it easier to attend appointment

# Reaching decision makers

First, we shared our findings with the Trust's deputy chief nurse before talking directly with the Hospital Board. Together with Kent Association for the Blind, we took over a Board meeting and asked the members to complete simple tasks such as pouring water and wrapping a present with a blind fold on. It was a mess! Then we went on to talk to them about the challenges partially sighted patients face on a weekly basis coming to hospital.

The Board were very supportive of our recommendations and committed to making improvements as a result.

This is what they told us they have done so far:

<b>Our recommendation</b>	<b>What has been done</b>
All staff should receive training about the Accessible Information Standard	A focus on Accessible Information was launched to all staff with a

focused month of activities to raise the profile with staff.

28 staff champions were identified to raise the profile and understanding of AIS in their work areas. They have been working in all areas of the hospitals to increase the understanding amongst staff and improve the support that is given to patients. These champions have recently got together to review their achievements and agree new priorities

All staff champions have received sighted training

	<p>A programme of training is being rolled out across the Trust which includes two hospitals. The programme included training on hearing impairment, learning disabilities and sight.</p>
<p>Communication aids must be provided for all patients who have a sight or hearing impairment and staff should know how to use them.</p>	<p>An audit of hearing loops has been completed across both hospitals.</p> <p>Additional equipment is being sourced for patients.</p> <p>Training for staff on how to use hearing loops is being rolled out</p>
<p>The Trust should conduct an audit of its Accessible Information Standard across both Hospitals to ensure it is</p>	<p>Audits have been completed in A&amp;E, Oncology, radiology, Outpatients,</p>

<p>compliant with its legal responsibilities.</p>	<p>main reception and the Stroke unit with further audits planned.</p> <p>ALS is now included as standard as part of internal assurance visits which take place regularly across the hospitals.</p>
<p>Information on patient letters should be reviewed and colour coding explored, to help patients find their way to their appointment.</p>	<p>Patient letters have been improved to include additional information for patients who may have additional needs. Letters now include the first sentence in large font and easy read format to ensure people who need information in different format know how to request one. All appointment letters are now available in large print.</p>

	Healthwatch have offered to support further improvements in patient letters.
A text phone number should be provided on the main website with the other phone numbers that are shown.	We are awaiting improvements for patients who cannot use a telephone number. The Trust is currently exploring solutions to this issue.
Patients should be encouraged to ask reception for support if they need it, especially if they are attending an appointment on their own.	Reception staff have received sight training. Lead reception staff are now also AIS champions.  Volunteer Wayfinders have also been offered training to support patients who may be partially sighted
An audit of posters and banners within the hospital should be	The hospital has agreed a standard poster with other Kent hospitals

completed to ensure more are of an appropriate size.	which should be clearer for patients.
Signage from the bus stops to the main reception entrance at Maidstone hospital should be improved	Bushes which were obstructing the main sign have been cut down
Evacuation information should be available to patients in an Easy Read format	This has been escalated to Health & Safety. No update as yet.



# What's changed as a result?

- The experiences of partially sighted patients have been heard by decision makers
- Staff are better trained and more aware of the challenges partially sighted patients face and how to support them
- Hearing loops are working and staff know how to use them
- Some signs are easier to read
- Improvements have been made to posters and patient letters

“Working in partnership with Healthwatch Kent, we have been able to further identify and improve several issues for our patients who may have additional needs. Hearing directly from patients who are partially sighted about the challenges they were facing when coming to our hospitals, we have listened and made significant changes. Appointment letters are better, posters are being changed, staff have been trained and we continue to progress our work to achieve the Accessible Information Standard.

We would like to thank Healthwatch Kent for our continued partnership working and the benefits this brings to our patients experience.”

Gemma Craig, Deputy Chief Nurse, Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells  
NHS Trust

**We've made a difference and you can too.**

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[info@healthwatchkent.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchkent.co.uk)**

# What next?

## What else needs to be done

**Voice :** We will continue to share experiences of patients who find it difficult to attend appointments to raise your voice

**Commitments:** we will continue to work with the Hospital to make further improvements particularly around patient letters and text phones

**Next steps:** we will be visiting Tunbridge Wells Hospital with a patient who uses a communication aid

## *Making your voice count*

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