



**Healthwatch Kent** - December 2017

If you had learning difficulties, how easy would it be to attend a hospital appointment in East Kent?



# Foreword

**Attending a hospital appointment can be daunting. If you struggle to read, hear, understand or communicate these worries can be so much worse. We regularly hear from patients who have major concerns before attending an appointment. They are worried that they might not find their appointment, or that they won't be able to read and understand the information or that they won't be able to communicate with the Doctor and make themselves understood.**

Since August 2016, all NHS organisations (and local authorities) must make it possible for anybody and everybody to be able to communicate and to be understood. This is called the Accessible Information Standard and it is a legal requirement. You can find more information about the Standard and what it involves here [www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/accessibleinfo/](http://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/accessibleinfo/)

In Kent we know that organisations have been working to ensure they meet the Standard and that every patient can access information. We published a report in 2017 summarising what each organisation told us they were doing. You can read the report on our website.

We wanted to test these assumptions for ourselves and understand how a patient with learning difficulties would access an appointment at William Harvey Hospital Ashford, Q E Q M hospital, Thanet and Kent & Canterbury Hospital. We worked in partnership with East Kent Mencap to visit all three East Kent Hospitals and see for ourselves what is in place to support someone with learning difficulties. On this occasion we visited the main reception and Outpatients and we have made several recommendations for East Kent University Hospitals Trust.

We have already met with them to share our findings and discuss our recommendations. We also shared our feedback directly with staff on the day of our visits. We will continue to work with the hospitals to ensure they improve their support for patients.

We are currently planning to test NHS services in North & West Kent as well as Kent County Council services.

Do tell us your thoughts and share your own experiences with us. Contact us anytime for free on 0808 801 0102 or email [info@healthwatchkent.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchkent.co.uk)

**Steve Inett**

Chief Executive, Healthwatch Kent



# What were we trying to achieve?

**We wanted to see for ourselves how someone with communication difficulties would experience an NHS Hospital appointment.**

## How did we go about it?

**Working in partnership with East Kent Mencap, we visited all three hospitals in East Kent (William Harvey, Kent & Canterbury and QEQM).**

Together with a volunteer who has learning difficulties we went to the main reception and to the Outpatients reception to see how a patient would be supported by the Trust to attend their appointment. Would they be able to find their appointment and understand the information provided to them?

We informed East Kent Hospital Trust in plenty of time before our visits and asked for a named contact on the day.

After our visit, we gave verbal feedback to the staff on duty. We have since meet with the Deputy Chief Nurse and the Head of Equality & Engagement to share our findings and discuss our recommendations.





# What did we find? What did we see?

## In Summary

- Information has been developed by the Trust, but the majority of staff that we spoke to were not aware of it, so it is not provided to patients.
- Not all relevant information is suitable for people with learning difficulties.
- The Trust's website is not fully accessible.
- We only met one staff member who was aware of the Trust's Communication booklet.
- At the time of our visit, Deaf patients had no way to contact the hospitals about their Outpatients appointments. The only option was on the phone. We now understand that the Trust has purchased Video Remote Interpreting and a Video Relay Service. VRS will enable d/Deaf users to contact the Trust via a link on their website.
- There are areas of the Accessible Information Standard that East Kent University Hospitals Trust is failing to meet.
- We have raised several issues relating to the buildings. The buildings are owned and managed by the Estates Department within East Kent Hospitals Trust, so a separate section relating to these issues has been put in.





# What have we recommended?

---

- **The Trust needs to conduct a full audit of its Accessible Information Standard across all Hospital sites to ensure it is compliant with its legal responsibilities.**
  
- **Healthwatch Kent & East Kent Mencap have identified the following areas to be addressed:**
  - Mandatory staff training especially for reception staff. This should include front line staff from other organisations including G4S and Serco.
  - Communication aids must be provided for those with a range of communication difficulties.
  - An audit of posters and banners should be completed to ensure they are accessible to a range of groups. Our volunteer found the posters to be in-accessible to them.
  - Involve members of the relevant groups in testing out the new Video Interpreting Service.
  - Work with external groups of people who have communication difficulties to test other information to access whether it is accessible.
  - Leaflets in alternative formats must be made available.
  - Information on the website should be improved and made accessible.



# What have we recommended?

## Issues relating to signage

- The lack of signage from the car parks to the main reception entrance at Kent & Canterbury Hospital must be improved.
- Information on patient letters should be reviewed and colour coding explored to help patients find their way.
- Clearer markings around the hospital corridors and departments are needed to help patients find their appointments.

**We will be reviewing these recommendations with the Trust and will publish an Impact report in 6 months detailing the progress.**





# Our findings in more detail

## General Information

- Information in other formats such as Braille, Easy Read or large formats were not available in the waiting areas. Patients had to ask a member of staff to print them off as staff did not have printed versions readily available.
- We saw some posters at Kent & Canterbury and QEQM letting patients know that they could request information in different formats but when we asked staff (as directed on the poster) they could not help us and didn't know what alternative information was available. These posters were not available in the outpatients and main receptions that we visited.
- There were no such posters on display at William Harvey Hospital.
- We had been told about the East Kent Hospitals Communication Booklet which summarises for staff the information available for patients. The booklet is also clearly mentioned on their website. When we asked staff for it, they were not aware of it and couldn't locate it. One member of staff at Kent & Canterbury told us she was only informed about the booklet on the morning of our visit.
- The Trust's website does not display information in accessible formats. There are patient leaflets in different languages, but our volunteer couldn't find Easy Read leaflets.
- At Kent & Canterbury we saw one large poster in a corridor about information being available in different formats. Our volunteer welcomed the information which was in Easy Read.
- Different languages used a picture of a speech bubble. This was confusing to our volunteer with learning difficulties. They felt it would have been clearer to use an image rather than a speech bubble.
- The audio image was a picture of a speaker. Our volunteer understood this to mean a loud noise. They felt an image of a CD player would have been clearer.
- The Braille image on the poster had coloured dots. However, someone needing Braille wouldn't be able to 'read' the poster so wouldn't be able to understand what is on offer.
- At the bottom of the poster it said, 'ask a member of staff if you need help in any other format'. This isn't supported by an Easy Read image, so it would be difficult for someone to understand it.



# Our findings in more detail

## Continued

### Instructions

- The ticket waiting system at Kent & Canterbury Outpatients should have had instructions to make it more accessible.
- After an Outpatients appointment, patients are given a form to complete. This form would be very difficult for someone who needs support to read, write or understand information.
- Our volunteer found it difficult to understand many of the posters and information on display. Although there was a handwashing poster at Kent & Canterbury that was easy to understand, most information did not have easy to understand instructions and accessible symbols with pictures.

### Information for staff

- A Pharmacy Technician at Kent & Canterbury Hospital had a good knowledge about what was available and how to get hold of it for patients.
- Some reception staff are employed by Serco rather than the Hospital. These staff had no knowledge of support for patients even though they are dealing with patients all the time.
- The Trust had told us that online training had been provided to all staff. However, many staff members we spoke to were not aware of what was available and what support they should be offering.
- Staff told us “we would just have to do the best we could at the time”

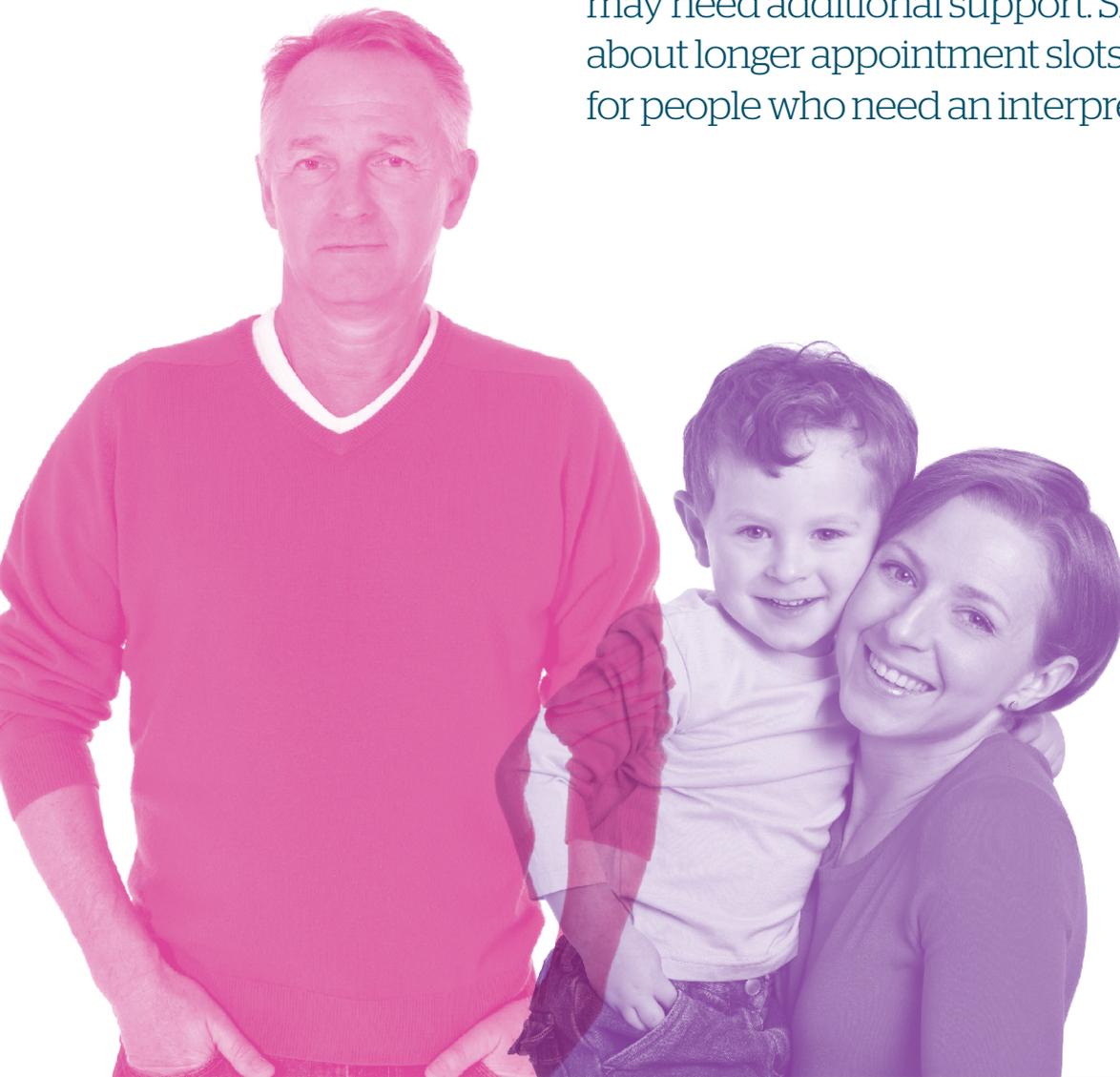


# Our findings in more detail

## Continued

### Additional Needs

- We met a member of staff at William Harvey Outpatients who proactively distributes the Healthwatch Kent Help Cards to patients who may need additional support. She told us about longer appointment slots being available for people who need an interpreter.





# What did we find?

## What did we see? Continued

### Estates - Directions

- Generally, signs to wards and departments were prominently displayed in bold large letters which our volunteer could read by studying them carefully.
- The universal sign for the restaurant is not being used. This is a cup of liquid to indicate where patients can get a drink.
- All the site maps were clearer. Our volunteer could understand most of the symbols but found navigating from the map difficult.
- Our volunteer suggested that coloured floor stripes they saw at Kent and Canterbury hospital could be used to help patients navigate. The colours could correspond to information on the patient's letter. Eastbourne Hospital has a colour coded leaflet to help patients for example.
- Many of the signs at QEQM are written in light grey font. This proved difficult for our volunteer to read.
- At William Harvey there was no site map but the large board showing colour coded routes. This was very helpful for our volunteer. The colour coded floor tiles were also helpful but none of the signage used Easy Read symbols.
- Fire Evacuation posters in the corridors were far too small and not readable. The A3 and colour coded versions at William Harvey were much clearer and should be rolled out across the Trust.
- Our volunteer found the Main reception and Outpatients difficult to find at Kent & Canterbury. There were no obvious external signs and few internal signs. Healthwatch Kent have raised this feedback previously too.



# Healthwatch Kent

**Healthwatch Kent is the independent voice for local people in Kent.**

We gather and represent people's views about any health and social care service in Kent.

Our role is to understand what matters most to people and to use that information to influence providers and commissioners to change the way services are designed and developed.

Our **FREE** Information and Signposting service can help you navigate Kent's complicated health and social care system to ensure you can find and access the services that are available for you. Call us on **0808 801 0102** or email **info@healthwatchkent.co.uk**



## **By Telephone:**

Healthwatch Kent  
Freephone 0808 801 01 02



## **By Email:**

Info@healthwatchkent.co.uk



## **Online:**

www.healthwatchkent.co.uk



**By Post:** Write to us or fill in and send a Speak out form. **Freepost RTLG-UBZB-JUZA**  
Healthwatch Kent, Seabrooke House,  
Church Rd, Ashford TN23 1RD



## **Face to Face:**

Call 0808 801 01 02 to arrange a visit



## **By Text:** Text us on **07525 861 639**.

By texting 'NEED BSL', Healthwatch's British Sign Language interpreter will make contact and arrange a time to meet face to face.