



Healthwatch Kent - August 2019

If you used a communication aid, how easy would it be to attend a hospital appointment?



Foreword

Attending a hospital appointment can be daunting. If you struggle to read, hear, understand or communicate these worries can be extreme. 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

In Kent we know that organisations have been working to ensure they meet the Standard and that every patient can access information. We have conducted a series of visits to Kent hospitals to see for ourselves what support is available for patients who find it hard to get to an appointment. We've visited in partnership with people who have learning difficulties, are partially sighted or who have Dementia. The findings from all these visits can be found on our website.

In this, our latest visit, we wanted to understand how a patient who uses a communication aid would access an appointment at Tunbridge Wells Hospital. We have made several recommendations for Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells 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.

Do tell us your thoughts and share your own experiences with us. With your stories we can continue to make changes for others. Contact us anytime for free on **0808 801 0102** or email info@healthwatchkent.co.uk

Robbie Gotham

Manager, Healthwatch Kent



What were we trying to achieve?

We wanted to see for ourselves how someone with Multiple Sclerosis, who uses an electronic aid to communicate, would experience an NHS Hospital appointment.

How did we go about it?

The Motor Neurone Association put us in touch with a man who has Multiple Sclerosis. Mike uses a wheelchair and a communication aid. Together with his wife, who is his main Carer, we visited Tunbridge Wells Hospital.

We went to the main reception, the fracture clinic, the Older Persons Department as well as the Dementia ward, 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?

In addition to talking to patients, our volunteers reviewed the hospital Trust's website to see how easy it was to use and what information was available to help patients plan their visits.

Whilst we focused primarily on the specific needs of our volunteer who used a communication aid, we did also capture feedback based on other communication needs such as Deaf or partially sighted.

We had informed Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Trust prior to our visit and were made to feel very welcome. We were met at the start of our visit, and again at the end for a discussion of our immediate findings.





Our findings in summary

- Reception staff knew how to assist patients who may have additional needs.
- The hospital has an Accessible Information Standard Steering Group that monitors progress on the implementation of the Standard and communicates any updates to staff.
- We saw positive interaction between staff and patients throughout the areas that we visited.
- Staff champions are in place throughout the hospital for the Accessible Information Standard. There is also a Disability Champion on each ward.



- In the main reception, there is a noticeboard which displays information for people with additional needs. Our volunteers found it to be too busy, with too much information. It wasn't easy for them to understand.
- The website is not easy to navigate for people with additional needs and it's hard to find information about booking an interpreter or attending in a wheelchair.





What have we recommended?

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Healthwatch Kent has identified the following areas to be addressed:

- Clinicians who are referring patients to the hospital need to clearly indicate any additional communication and physical needs to enable the hospital to prepare for the appointment.
- The noticeboard in the main reception should be reviewed. It needs to be clearer for patients to read with less information.
- The hospital website is not easy for people with additional needs to use. There should be a function that allows the pages to be read out loud. Information about attending an appointment with a wheelchair and/or a communication aid should be easier to find.



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



What did we see?

- The appointment letter had clear information about what would happen and how to ask for any help they may need.
- A Hospital Porter was very helpful. They supported the relative while his wife parked the car.
- They found staff to be very helpful especially when they were on their own.
- Patients told us they found the signage in the hospital to be very clear.
- A patient with learning difficulties confirmed to us that information was explained to him.
- We observed good interaction between staff and patients in the reception area, fracture clinic and Dementia ward.
- Patients in the Dementia ward were up and dressed and involved in activities with staff around a table in a pleasant homelike environment.
- One person told us that the information about his mother's appointments was inconsistent. His mother uses a wheelchair and comes to her appointments on her own using patient transport from her nursing home. However, the son has been told he must accompany her to appointments as she cannot attend on her own.
- Wards and departments are divided into colour coded zones which is displayed on a noticeboard in the main reception. Patients told us the board can be confusing as the colour code for a department is not visible until further along the corridor. This would also be an issue for people who have poor vision or colour blindness. However, while we were there, we witnessed a volunteer and two receptionists signposting patients. We were told that they would help patients to a ward/department if necessary.





What did staff tell us?

Information and support for staff

- There is no specific training for staff on Accessible Information Standard, but champions have been identified throughout the hospital. There are also Disability champions on each ward.
- Accessible Information Standard champions share information with staff and recently delivered Deaf and Blind awareness training to staff.
- The Accessible Information Standard Steering Group monitors the implementation of the AIS standard. The group communicates updates to staff via email.
- A recent audit to review how much reception staff knew about the AIS standard showed that staff were clear about how they help patients with disabilities.
- The Accessible Information Standard champions we spoke to told us that they were in the process of updating posters about the Accessible Standard. Patients had been involved in the poster design and they were just awaiting final approval before printing.
- We were told that a representative from security is on the AIS Steering Group to ensure that their staff are trained on how to support people with challenging behaviour.



What did staff tell us?

Support from staff

- We saw positive interaction between volunteers and reception staff, both in the reception areas, the Older Persons Department and the wards that we visited.
- Staff had identification badges, but the different uniforms can be confusing for patients.
- It was very busy during our visit, but patients were booked in quickly with no waits.
- We saw that GPs were not always including information about a patients' communication needs or disability in their referral letters which meant the hospital hadn't been able to plan the necessary support ahead of their appointment.
- A volunteer or receptionist would take patients who need help to the ward if necessary. The Porter service is also available to help patients within the hospital, but not from the car parks.
- Patients are asked in the appointment letters to inform the hospital if they have any additional needs prior to their appointment. GPs and Community Nurses are meant to flag this information when they refer a patient but this is not available for all referrals from other sources.





What did patients tell us?

Information for patients

- When patients book in, they wait in the main reception area until they are called to the relevant clinic. This happens 15 minutes before their appointment is due. The Trust is looking to implement a personal buzzer system to alert patients with sight problems.
- We saw Easy Read information tailored for people with additional communication needs on a range of topics including, what is cancer, how to make a complaint and information for patients with dementia and their families.
- We also saw a large print booklet which had pictures and large symbols which patients can point to indicate where they have a pain or which department they want. We saw this in several places we visited including main reception and the Older Person department.
- Information was available in different languages and there is an interpreting service either face to face or via phone when necessary. British Sign language interpreters are also used, as well as Makaton to communicate with patients with communication difficulties.
- The Hospital can do individualised information for patients with learning disabilities, but the majority of people with learning difficulties are accompanied with a relative or carer.





What did patients tell us?

Website

We asked our volunteer to check the Trust website to see how easy they found it to use.

They found it difficult to navigate and there was no option to have the pages read out loud to you. However, our volunteer did say that most sight impaired users would have that functionality within their own computer to read the information.

There are phone numbers on the website but no option for a text phone number. We also couldn't find any information about attending an appointment with a wheelchair or booking an interpreter.

Getting to your appointment

- The signs directing people to the car parks from the hospital entrance is clear.
- However, the signs on the main road outside the hospital refer to it as Pembury Hospital which is confusing given that the official name is Tunbridge Wells Hospital. We appreciate this is a Highways issue.
- There is currently no dropped kerb between car park 1 and the main entrance due to building work.
- There is steep slope from some of the car parks. There is a grab rail but this could still be dangerous for wheelchair users. This could be mentioned in the appointment letters to ensure people avoid the top car park if necessary.
- Signage for the coffee shop, toilets and café is clearly visible.
- There is a facility for patients to check themselves in at the main reception and staff and volunteers are available to help if needed.



Response from Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust greatly values the ongoing partnership working with Healthwatch Kent in supporting our work to hear directly from our service users about any challenges or concerns people may have when visiting our Hospital sites.

We have continued to raise awareness and make positive changes to reflect our commitment to meet the Accessible information Standards (AIS) with a now established AIS working group and “Champions” throughout the organisation. It is great to see that these changes have been recognised and we will be actively following up on the recommendations made through our continued work.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Healthwatch for their continued support and collaborative approach to improving our patients experience.



Healthwatch Kent

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Kent.

Our sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf.

We are here to listen to what you like about services and what you think could be improved. No matter how big or small the issue, we want to hear about it. Tell us your story.

Our **FREE Helpline** 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 anytime on **0808 801 0102** or email **info@healthwatchkent.co.uk**



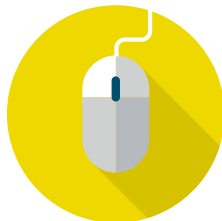
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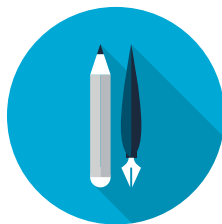
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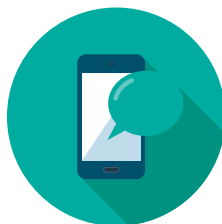


By Post: Write to us or fill in and send a Speak out form. **Freepost RTLG-UBZB-JUZA**
Healthwatch Kent, Seabrooke House,
Church Rd, Ashford TN23 1RD



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.