Speaking to Outpatients - What did we learn?

Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust, Spire Dewsbury and Spire Methley Park

October to December 2014

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Our work at a glance

Patients in Wakefield and Kirklees told us they were experiencing problems with appointments in outpatient clinics. In addition, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) says there is ‘a significant backlog of outpatients which posed a risk to patients whose condition might be deteriorating’ at Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust (July 2014).

Healthwatch Kirklees and Healthwatch Wakefield want to understand more about the service that patients receive. We were told that Mid Yorkshire NHS Trust had put measures in place to address the problems in outpatient clinics and we wanted to check that things were improving for patients as a result.

Staff and volunteers from the 2 local Healthwatch visited outpatient clinics in 5 hospitals across North Kirklees and Wakefield and completed 749 surveys with patients.

Fundamentally, patients reported that they were happy with the service they received from the outpatient clinics at the hospitals we visited:

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<tr>
<th>What is working well</th>
<th>What needs attention</th>
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<tr>
<td>• A majority of patients were happy with the time, date and location of the appointment they had been given</td>
<td>• Delays in clinics</td>
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<td>• 99% of patients said the reception staff were friendly and welcoming</td>
<td>• Making sure patients are clear what their appointment is for</td>
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<td>• 86% of patients were satisfied with the length of time it had taken to get an appointment</td>
<td>• Patients chasing appointments after cancellations or mishaps</td>
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Now Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust should consider this feedback and respond to the questions outlined in this report.
Why are we interested in outpatients?

Following the CQC inspection\(^1\) at Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust in July 2014, Healthwatch Kirklees and Healthwatch Wakefield noted that outpatient experience was highlighted as one area where the Trust needed to improve. The CQC found ‘a significant backlog of outpatients which posed a risk to patients whose condition might be deteriorating’. Both Healthwatch were interested in finding out more as problems in outpatients experience was an issue which patients had already brought to our attention.

What did we do to find out more?

From October to December 2014, Healthwatch Kirklees sat in outpatient clinics throughout Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust, Spire Dewsbury and Spire Methley Park. Staff and volunteers spoke to patients about their experiences using this survey. Questions covered booking appointments, cancellations, waiting times, requesting additional support, booking in, waiting areas, delays and private hospital appointments.

We spoke to 749 patients across a wide range of clinics in each of the hospitals. Below is an outline of what they told us.

Why did you visit private hospitals?

As some people who are patients of the NHS do receive assessment, treatment and aftercare at private hospitals, we thought it was important to understand whether there were any clear differences between patients’ experience in outpatient clinics at NHS hospitals and at private hospitals. Healthwatch Kirklees and Healthwatch Wakefield spoke to 75 NHS patients who attended outpatient clinics at private hospitals; Spire, Dewsbury and Spire, Methley Park.

Patient experience at Spire Hospitals was largely positive, therefore the questions we ask of Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust do not apply to Spire Hospitals.

\(^1\) CQC Inspection Report for Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust

http://www.cqc.org.uk/provider/RXF
A. Patients liked...

A1 The service overall - Only 4 patients out of 749 said they were unhappy with an aspect of the service they had received and wanted PALS to contact them so that they could take their issues further. We have followed these up; PALS have been in touch with these patients and they are satisfied with the support they have been given.

A2 Convenient appointments, close to home - 69% of patients said they hadn’t had a choice about when and where to go for their appointment but the majority were happy with the date, time and location of the appointment they had been given. 82% of patients hadn’t used Choose & Book to make their appointment and most said the appointment had been arranged by their GP or had just received a letter in the post.

“’They send dates through and I can change it if I need to’”

A3 Pleasant reception staff - 99% of people we spoke to said that the receptionist was friendly and welcoming. From our observations, the receptionists dealt with patients with respect and coped well with the pressure of handling anxious and occasionally angry patients.

We observed one receptionist at Dewsbury Hospital who had to manage a difficult situation on her own. Two clinics had been cancelled at short notice so there had been no opportunity to let patients know. The receptionist was having to turn all the patients away, advising them to contact the appointment centre. Another receptionist told Healthwatch this was one of the most difficult parts of the job; patients arrive and are then understandably upset that their clinic has been cancelled and they haven’t been informed. The receptionist said that at the very least they should be able to rearrange appointments there and then for people.

A4 Sensible waiting times to get an appointment - We asked patients how long they had waited from referral to appointment date and 86% of patients were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the length of time it had taken.

A5 Appointment letters that contain relevant information for patients - When asked about the information contained in appointment letters, 88% of patients told us their letters gave them everything they needed to know.

A6 Easy to use touch screens - just less than half of the patients we spoke to at Pinderfields and Pontefract Hospital used the in-touch screen and most of these found the system easy to use.
A7 Smooth transition from using NHS services in a private hospital to an NHS hospital - 74 patients (11%) we spoke to had attended a private hospital in the last 12 months. Of these, only 10 patients (15%) had experienced problems when getting an appointment in the NHS after previously attending a private hospital. The problems were predominantly around the length of time patients had to wait for an appointment.

87% of patients we spoke to at Spire were attending follow-up appointments and didn’t need to get an NHS appointment. These patients were very happy with the service they received at Spire.

B. Patients would like these changes...

B1 Fewer appointment ‘mess-ups’

When things go wrong with appointments, patients sometimes face difficulties when trying to sort things out, which can lead to long delays for people.

“Came for first appointment. Dr was doing an operation at another hospital so the clinic was cancelled. No further appointment was sent. I was told to back to my GP. My GP was very cross and said the hospital should have arranged it. I then got letter with an appointment, then that clinic was cancelled by the hospital” (Patient at Dewsbury Hospital, orthopaedic clinic)

“Very much down to me to chase up appointments and make things happen. If I hadn’t been capable of doing this, my child could have fallen out of the system” (Parent at Dewsbury Hospital, paediatric clinic)

“Patients have to work around the system and it’s not patient focussed” (talking about rearranging appointment in ophthalmology clinic, Pinderfields Hospital)

“Had lots of difficulties in last 12 months with appointment booking. Used choose and book then when we got to the appointment the clinic didn’t know about us. Another appointment was cancelled but we didn’t get a letter” (Patient at Dewsbury Hospital, general medicine clinic)
Other patients had to arrange their own follow-up appointments, rather than having them automatically arranged by the hospital. In fact, one parent we spoke to at Pinderfields had put a complaint in as it had taken 22 weeks to get her son’s post-operative follow up when this should have been arranged for 6 weeks’ time.

**B2 To be told what their appointment is for** - some patients commented that they didn’t know which clinic they would be attending or which consultant they would be seeing. Having this information is particularly important where patients have multiple health conditions and attend a few different clinics.

> “Doesn’t say what I’m coming for - I have lots of different appointments and it’s hard to keep track of which appointment is which”
> Patient at Dewsbury Hospital who was unsure which clinic he was attending

**B3 Not to have long delays in clinic** - Certain clinics appear to be particularly prone to delays, for example ophthalmology at both Dewsbury and Pinderfields Hospital and the fracture clinic at Pinderfields. Where delays are unavoidable, patients appreciate being kept informed. Some patients like to be told by a member of staff, others prefer to have the information on a screen; to have both systems in place would help patients most. There was a suggestion that the ‘in touch’ screens could inform patients of delays and show how many people are in the queue before them.

> “General chaos in the area - doesn’t give the impression of an effective service. People shouting names...not enough seats, elderly people standing”
> Pinderfields, Opthalmology Clinic

When delays occur, patients appreciate having distractions such as having the TV switched on, having magazines available, having toys/books for children and being able to have a drink, even if this is just water. Some clinics have these facilities and resources but others have nothing and it would be good to see consistency across the clinics.

Most patients across all the hospitals felt the waiting areas were fine, however patients in some clinics at Pinderfields wanted larger waiting areas with sufficient seating, particularly in ENT and Plastic Surgery clinics. There was some concern from patients who were afraid of missing their name being called out and would have preferred a display screen, which would be more appropriate for Audiology or ENT where patients may be deaf or hard of hearing. The gynaecology clinic at Dewsbury was noted to have a particularly poor layout, with patients sat facing the opposite direction to where the staff were calling names. Healthwatch Kirklees observed patients having difficulty hearing when it was their turn as staff sometimes called names from behind the seating area.
C. What surprised us

Patients were not always aware that they had a choice about when and where to be seen. We appreciate that some clinics are only available at certain hospitals but we thought more patients would have used Choose & Book to select their preferred time, date and place, rather than having their appointment made by their GP, dentist or optician.

D. Other patient issues

We asked all patients if they had any additional feedback that they would like to give us about the experience of being an outpatient and they raised some interesting issues.

D1 Parking - We received quite a few negative comments about parking; the number of available disabled parking places at Pinderfields and Pontefract frustrates patients “car parking for disabled people is insufficient and it’s a long walk from the car park” Pontefract Hospital

At Dewsbury Hospital we received comments about the cost, “parking charges are extortionate” and about the way patients pay, “at other hospitals you get a parking ticket on the way in and pay on the way out. At Dewsbury you have to guess how long you will be and pay for that time before you come in. You might end up paying too much or not enough”

D2 The quality of care - comments were overwhelmingly positive about the staff and care given at each hospital

“Very efficient - consultant, listens and has given hope that there will be a light at the end of the tunnel”
Patient attending pain clinic at Spire, Methley Park

“Staff are amazing. Friendly, caring and professional. Always made to feel welcome”
Patient attending Covell Unit at Dewsbury Hospital

“I have been treated very well and kept informed at all times”
Patient attending Pinderfields oncology clinic

“Very lucky to have such an excellent service. Really value the NHS”
Patient at Dewsbury cardiology clinic

“Doctor's very nice, explained it all. Really pleased”
Patient at Pontefract, rheumatology clinic

“Doctor - very good. Very thorough and explains everything. He’s tried everything possible rather than having to operate”
Patient attending orthopaedic clinic at Spire, Dewsbury
E. How Healthwatch Kirklees and Healthwatch Wakefield helped patients

Part of the role of local Healthwatch is to inform the public about health issues and services. Whilst speaking to outpatients, we had an excellent opportunity to engage with the public and to let them know that:

- They have a right to have a say about the services they receive, and how they could go about doing that
- Dewsbury and District Hospital isn’t closing, and to offer some reassurance about what is, and will continue to be, available at the hospital
- There is a free shuttle bus service that takes patients between the hospitals for appointments. Many patients were unaware of this service and we made sure we had a few timetables to give to patients who wanted this information.

We also signposted patients to Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) or took their feedback and passed it on to PALS on their behalf.

F. Questions for Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust

After considering all the information that patients have shared with us, we think that these are the crucial questions that Mid Yorkshire Hospital Trust need to answer:

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<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Crucial question</th>
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<tr>
<td>Arranging an appointment</td>
<td>• How can patients be better informed of their right to choice when arranging an outpatient appointment?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• If patients decide to change the date, time or location of their appointment, can this be done easily or do patients face barriers which put them off rearranging?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delays</td>
<td>• Why do some clinics consistently have delays?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What can be done to alleviate this problem?</td>
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<td>Cancellations</td>
<td>• Where clinics are cancelled, could patients be informed sooner, ideally before they leave home?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• When patients attend a cancelled clinic because staff haven’t had a chance to inform them beforehand, are there ways to make it easier to rebook your appointment?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What are these?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Providing more information</td>
<td>• How can you provide patients with accurate information about the reason for their outpatient appointment and which specialty it is with?</td>
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