

Wexham, Frimley Park and Heatherwood hospitals- service users' views.



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What we did

Our monthly hospital visiting programme has been running since September 2023. We have spoken to 546 patients, visitors, volunteers, and staff at Frimley, Heatherwood and Wexham Park hospitals. (306 in the last 6 Months)

The programme has complemented the work we have done through Enter and View visits, community engagement and other project work. It has also supported our promotion of local Healthwatch and has served to encourage more people to talk to us and to get involved in our activities.

We are committed to seeking out examples of best practice so that we can shine a light on 'what good looks like' and help our system partners to learn from it. Alongside this we have shared examples of feedback that highlights improvements that patients wanted to see at our acute hospitals in East Berkshire.

We are passionate about ensuring the voices and experiences of local people influence decisions and improvements across the sector.

With this in mind, we are providing this summary of service visits from 6-12 Months. For views in the first six Months of the Programme please see our report published in March 2024. Any urgent or concerning experiences within this report have been escalated to the appropriate teams. All appropriate information and advice and signposting has been given.

Who did we speak to?



At Wexham Park we spoke to **128** people over 3 visits.

At Frimley we spoke to **138** people over 2 visits.

At Heatherwood we spoke to **40** people during one visit.

We asked people to share their feedback about any health services they had used including the hospital where they or a loved one had recently experienced treatment.

Thank you

We would like to thank everyone who gave their time and shared their experiences with us. We would also like to thank the staff and volunteers who welcomed us on these visits.

Summary

- A strong appreciation for the dedication and skill of healthcare staff was a common theme at all three hospital sites. Patients value the person-centred care they receive with many acknowledging the pressure that the staff and NHS in general are experiencing. Many wanted to pass on thanks to departments highlighted in the report.
- Patients and visitors told us about areas for improvement in facilities at all 3 hospitals, but this was a strong theme at Frimley Park. Parking and public transport to the hospital site causes difficulty for most patients we spoke to. We also received feedback about navigating the hospital site and while we were there, we provided help to patients who could not find the department they needed. Amenities such as cash machines and vending machines were difficult for patients to find or use at Heatherwood and Wexham Park which affected their view of services.
- Communication and administrative processes work well for most patients, but we heard about difficulties at all 3 hospitals. Patients who waited a long time for appointments requested better communication during the waiting period for re-assurance and to get information about how to manage their condition or pain. We also heard about a need for better communication with loved ones when a patient is moved to a new ward, has deteriorated or needed a diagnostic test.
- Accessibility at Frimley Park hospital was an issue for those patients with disabilities or mobility problems. Lack of disabled parking spaces, car park lifts and a non-logical layout of hospital departments contributed to this.
- We spoke to an individual in the discharge lounge at Frimley Park who we were concerned about. The patient had not eaten that day having missed breakfast on the ward and her care situation at home seemed uncertain.
- There was a concern raised regarding the level of compassion and dignity afforded to a patient at Wexham Park. Instances of perceived disinterest from staff and inadequate attention to the needs of a seriously ill patient indicate a need for improvement in empathetic care and patient respect.

Recommendations

- Consider patient feedback about communication as part of on-going work to improve communication across all hospitals in Frimley ICS. Improving information available to patients who are waiting a long time for treatment or who have had appointments cancelled at late notice will help to ease anxiety and keep people healthier while they wait.

- Ensure patient feedback about lack of dignity and compassion at Wexham Park is acted upon and any service improvements are shared.
- Improve accessibility information given to patients at Frimley Park Hospital. Directions to departments more easily accessible through entrance B should be shared on appointment letters.
- While patient parking improvements may not be possible at the current Frimley Hospital site, attention should be given to feedback regarding accessibility for people with disabilities in the interim and as part of the hospital re-build program.
- Ensure patients being discharged have been given food and drink before being moved to the discharge lounge. Have readily available drinks and snacks in the lounge for those who are kept waiting longer than anticipated.
- Check that vending machines in A&E are working or another option is available for patients overnight.

Response from Frimley Healthcare Foundation Trust

The Trust is grateful for the Healthwatch report and the feedback from our service users. The content of the report is in keeping with feedback we have received through other methods and supports the current improvement workstreams.

The acknowledgement of the dedication, skill and compassion of our staff is appreciated, particularly during the operational pressures we are experiencing. We understand that long waiting times are frustrating and want to ensure that we do what we can to keep people informed and alleviate anxiety. There is a continued focus in the trust on providing person-centred care, where people are involved in decisions about their care and treatment. We understand the key role of loved ones and carers who know our patients best; and how important it is that we communicate effectively with them.

We are working hard to better understand the issues around appointments and ensure that our systems are joined up and delivering consistent communications to our patients. Our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) continues to be a point of contact for patients if they have any concerns or require any assistance.

Response from NHS Frimley Integrated Care Board

NHS Frimley appreciates the detailed feedback gathered in this report, which provides essential insights into patient experiences across Frimley Park, Heatherwood, and Wexham Park hospitals. While many recommendations are specific to the NHS Trust, the ICB

is committed to collaborating closely with our Trust partners to address them, with a particular focus on quality of care and effective patient communication. We commend the dedication of Healthwatch in capturing these voices and highlighting areas for improvement. This patient-centred information will guide our ongoing efforts to enhance delivery within our system.

The ICB plays an essential role in monitoring the quality of care provided across our health system, using feedback like this to ensure that high standards are consistently met. We will continue to review these findings with our Trust partners to support continuous improvements.

Effective communication is a shared priority, and we are collaborating to ensure patients, and the wider public receive consistent, clear information. This winter, our communications will particularly emphasise “making the right choice” when accessing healthcare, aiming to support service capacity while helping patients navigate to the best resources for their needs.

What did we hear?

Below we have shared key themes from the feedback received at each visit.

Wexham Park May 2024

Positive Treatment Experiences: Many patients expressed satisfaction with the care and treatment they received, particularly regarding medication management, efficiency in booking appointments, and skilled doctors and nurses. This theme highlights a general appreciation for the quality of care in specific departments, such as pharmacy and urgent care.

I've had back issues and see a consultant at Wexham. I'm very happy with every aspect of my care. I used to work in the NHS so I know the pressure it is under.

Communication Issues: While most patients praised communication, others pointed out deficiencies, especially in terms of appointments and updates on

care. This suggests a mixed experience, with some patients feeling well-informed and others feeling confused about their treatment plans.

I'm happy, I've had good service with my blood test. Communication was good, the appointment came through quickly and they were very efficient in the clinic.

I moved from another area of the UK. I was seen three times a year for ear issues but here they have only seen me once, and the last appointment was cancelled without any explanation. I feel communication was not great at the hospital.

Concerns About Compassionate Care: There was a concern raised regarding the level of compassion and dignity afforded to a patient. Instances of perceived disinterest from staff and inadequate attention to the needs of a seriously ill patient indicate a need for improvement in empathetic care and patient respect.

The staff seemed disinterested and showed no compassion. She was not allowed to get out of bed, so they put incontinence pants on her. When she had urinated, we asked the nurse to change her and they refused, saying she will probably go again soon. This is a young woman who is seriously ill and there was no dignity for her.

Frimley Park June 2024

Quality of Care and Staff Interaction: Many patients expressed satisfaction with the care they received from doctors, nurses, and volunteers, highlighting the exceptional kindness and professionalism displayed throughout their experiences. Patients frequently mention feeling respected and valued, particularly during critical times, such as diagnoses of serious illnesses. Stories emphasise effective communication, where staff not only provided medical assistance but also took the time to listen to patients' concerns and involve them in decision-making processes regarding their treatment.

Actual care is brilliant, consultants are excellent. The kidney, cancer care and respiratory care. I would recommend to anyone; all the staff were polite, friendly and caring.

Emotional and Patient-Centred Care: Feedback highlighted the importance of emotional support and patient involvement in care decisions. People expressed appreciation for being treated as active participants in their healthcare journeys, with staff respecting their preferences and providing thorough explanations of conditions and treatment options. This theme underscores the critical role that compassionate, patient-centred care plays in enhancing patients' emotional well-being during challenging times.

I have cancer in my spine and came in with what I thought was an injury, that turned out to be end of life care. I've asked to be involved in all my consultations and to have information on absolutely everything. The consultants speak to me and my friends and family. They respect my decisions. They have made it as easy as possible for me to do this, I don't want to be passive, and the doctors have respected that.

Administrative and Operational Challenges: A number of comments point to frustrations with lengthy waiting times for appointments, scans, and surgical procedures, especially in cases of serious health issues. Many express a sense of urgency for improvements in scheduling and coordination to ensure that patients receive prompt care when it matters most.

It took 3 months to see oncologist after a diagnosis of cancer. They only run clinics on Mondays. Had surgery in November and I didn't see an oncologist for another 3 months.

I had to wait four days for an ultrasound scan on a torn Achilles tendon, this does mean that the surgery I probably need was not possible due to the wait. I'm having ongoing physio and appointments so hopefully it will be OK.

Parking and Accessibility Issues: Numerous patients voiced their frustration with the hospital's parking situation, telling us about insufficient available spaces, particularly for disabled bays. This has led to heightened stress and anxiety as patients often arrive hours early to secure parking. Issues with public transport were also noted, leaving patients feeling they have no option but to drive.

We are aware that parking and public transport will be a consideration of the Frimley hospital 2.0 rebuild but we would like to highlight the need to address accessibility in the interim.

Arrived two hours early for my appointment in order to secure parking. On my last visit I had to park on the road in an emergency and got a ticket. I'm not taking any chances today!

I need a disabled bay and there were none left so I had to find another normal bay and struggle to walk to hospital.

Discharge process. We spoke to patients in the discharge lounge who were awaiting transportation.

At 10am one person told us that they had been waiting some time and had not eaten that day as they had missed breakfast on the ward. She told us that she was worried about whether care had been arranged for her at home as her family all live a significant distance away. We raised this with the nurse on duty as we were concerned that she would not be able to buy and prepare food for herself once she arrived home.

Heatherwood June 2024

Positive Experiences with Staff and Services: Patients highlighted the exceptional treatment and kindness received from hospital staff across various departments, including gynaecology and physiotherapy. This reflects a strong appreciation for the quality of care provided.

This is an amazing place. I wish this model could be everywhere in England and raise standards everywhere. People are good, services are good.

Suggestions for Improvement: Patients provided constructive feedback, such as improving the check-in process to offer more information and relocating promotional activities (like the Frimley Health Lottery) to avoid discomfort for patients receiving bad news.

You can get a really bad diagnosis, and you are starting to try and process that as you leave the hospital, you get asked in the foyer if you want to pay for health lottery. This either shouldn't be there at all or placed somewhere else.

If I could improve one thing it would be the check in machine. It could give you more information e.g. where to go for appointment. Currently if you check in you still have to go to the reception desk to ask where to go so you may as well just go straight to reception desk.

Hospital Environment and Amenities: While the modern, comfortable atmosphere in communal spaces and wards was a strong theme, some people addressed issues related to the hospital's physical environment, such as the need for a larger car park and the absence of cash machines. Patients express frustration with parking availability and the full disabled bays.

This is a great hospital however I think they could have made the car park bigger, there is certainly enough free land to have done so. I sometimes have to wait a bit to get a parking space. Also, while there are about 16 disabled bays they are always full up

Wexham Park July 2024- Maternity and Gynaecology

Experience of care. The majority of people we spoke to were happy with the care they received in the antenatal clinic and gynaecology. Patients mentioned empathetic midwives, respectful care and high standards.

I've travelled here because I prefer it to my local hospital. I've already had two babies here and I'm looking forward to having this baby there too. The midwives are so great.

Communication Quality: Many comments emphasised the importance of good communication between patients and healthcare providers. While some patients report positive experiences with clear communication, others mention issues, particularly in cases where poor communication led to unnecessary delays or confusion.

I have had an issue because I was admitted for three days waiting for a scan. There was poor communication which meant that I was waiting as an in-patient. This was completely unnecessary, and I have children at home, so it was very difficult to manage.

At every appointment the midwife asks me to tell them about what has happened. It's all there in my notes and it has been a traumatic pregnancy so it would help my mental health if they could read them and come to the appointment prepared.

Improvements in Maternity Services: Several people we spoke to noted significant improvements in maternity services compared to previous experiences. This includes faster appointment scheduling and the transition to a more efficient digital app, which enhanced the overall experience for pregnant women.

Maternity is much improved since my previous pregnancy. You used to wait for hours for an appointment but now they get you straight in. The app is so much better; it was a nightmare with the paper notes.

Waiting Times and Facility Experience: Feedback indicates concerns about waiting times once they have arrived for an appointment, with some patients noting lengthy waits. Despite this, many express satisfaction with the comfort of the waiting area and the friendliness of the staff, suggesting that the overall experience is still positive even during busy times.

I've been waiting a while but there are comfy seats in the waiting room. I'm feeling very anxious today and everyone has been kind.

Frimley August 2024

Accessibility and Facility Challenges: Comments about accessibility issues, such as inadequate disabled parking spaces, lack of lifts, and distance from entrances to scanner rooms, indicate a need for improvements in hospital facilities and communication to better accommodate patients with mobility challenges.

The scanner rooms are a long way from the main entrance if you have mobility issues. I then found there is another entrance, entrance B. They don't give you that information with your appointment details.

Not having a lift at the hospital car park reduces parking options for those with mobility issues. On a previous visit I fell up the metal staircase to the 1st floor parking. I went there because there was no space on ground floor. I'm too frightened to use stairs anymore.

Quality of Care: Several people praised the quality of care received from medical staff, including the kindness and attention shown by nurses and doctors. Positive experiences are noted in various departments, particularly in A&E and paediatrics.

I'm very happy with Frimley. My daughter has Downs Syndrome, so we have regular appointments. They make a fuss of my daughter, so she loves coming here.

Communication Issues: Patients highlighted problems with communication between the hospital and other healthcare providers, such as GPs, as well as within the hospital itself.

Patients express frustration over lack of updates and unclear information, particularly during waiting periods.

My husband was taken ill on Saturday. The treatment, care and kindness have been first class. However, I couldn't get to the hospital until Tuesday, and I didn't get any updates from Sat-Tue either proactively from hospital or when I tried to contact the ward. It was when I visited on Tuesday, I found out that he had had a brain scan

Waiting Times and Appointment Scheduling: Feedback reflects concerns about long wait times for appointments, with some patients expressing dissatisfaction with the length of time it takes to receive care. While some patients appreciated flexibility in scheduling, others noted significant delays that contributed to frustration.

I was waiting for 14 months for this appointment. I phoned Frimley for reassurance, but nobody called back. No information was given about care while waiting. When you eventually do get care at hospital it is good.

Wexham Park September 2024

Quality of Care: Many people highlighted the excellent care received from nurses, doctors, and volunteers, emphasising kindness, support, and professionalism. Specific mentions of individual staff members, showcase the personal touch that patients appreciate.

I was an inpatient here for four weeks following an episode of pneumonia. They saved my life; I had good consultants, and I felt well looked after by all the nurses.

Communication Issues: Some patients told us about problems with communication, particularly in terms of keeping patients informed about wait times and appointment processes. Feedback indicates that better communication could reduce anxiety and improve the overall experience, especially in emergency situations.

Following an x-ray at St Mark's we were called out of the blue and told to get an ambulance to Wexham immediately. No other information was given, and we were very frightened. On arrival we waited 8 hours to be seen by a consultant. It was all OK, my wife was just given pain relief medication, and we were sent home. It could have been avoided by giving us more information over the phone and asking us to attend for a booked appointment later in the day.

Logistical Challenges: Patients expressed concerns about logistical issues, such as the lack of available patient transport and limited access to food and drink during long wait times. During our visit we noted that the vending machine in reception was working so we wondered if it is switched off overnight.

I arrived yesterday evening at 8pm to A&E and I've just finished my treatment at 8am this morning. It was very difficult being here all night and the vending machines in A&E and in the reception were not working. That meant that myself and others who were there overnight had no access to food or drink and it's been a very long and tiring night, please can we have some overnight options available to us.

Outcomes

- We shared concerns about care and discharge with the patient experience lead in a timely manner.
- Healthwatch will use patient feedback received as part of this project to inform our work streams and priority planning for the coming year. This includes an additional patient feedback exercise at urgent care centres in 2024.
- For individuals who had concerns about their care or their relative's care, we provided information about feedback to PALS or how to raise a formal complaint. We signposted to advocacy services where appropriate and offered further listening and support through our Healthwatch hub.
- Healthwatch will ensure that concerns regarding access to the Frimley Park site are raised as part of the engagement process for planning the hospital re-location.



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