



# What's it like being in a hospital waiting room?

People's views: The Royal Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust





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# The Royal Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

## Key findings



Most of the patients taking part in our study are satisfied with waiting times: many clinics run on time, although there were occasions when some patients had waited a long time before being seen by a doctor



Communication with patients was rated as above average



Most staff were said to be helpful and supportive; however, two complaints were raised about the unhelpful attitude of receptionists working in the Admissions and Day Care Unit



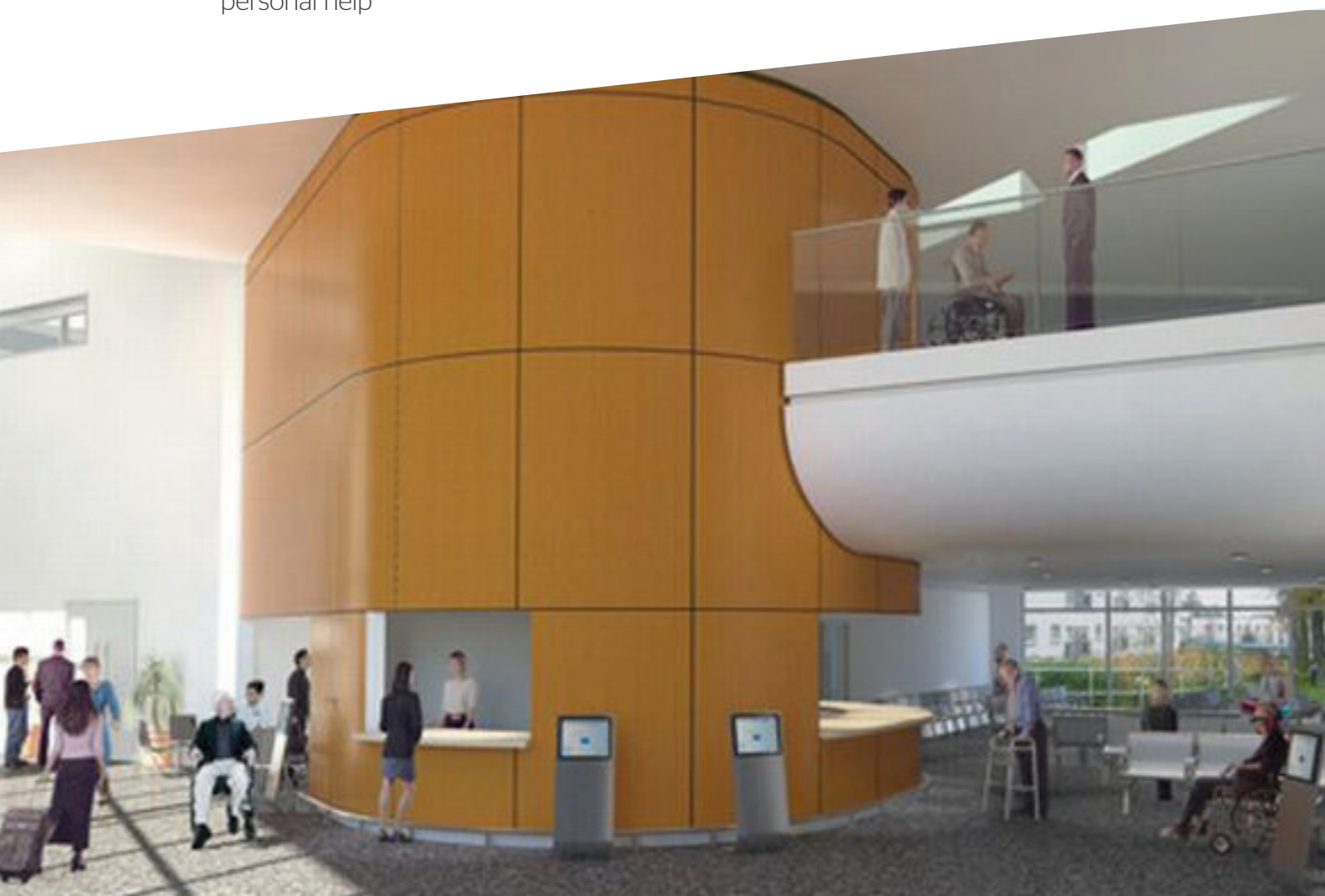
All the patients we received feedback from ranked the waiting room facilities (including the environment and accessibility) as 'very good'



Patients who mentioned parking facilities unanimously declared them to be 'very poor' and below average



Some said that more support for elderly and poorly patients is needed, in the form of wheelchairs and personal help







## Introduction

In 2018, Healthwatch Birmingham asked members of the public across Birmingham to share their views about what NHS or social care topics we should investigate next. People voted on five key health and care issues, and 71% of them asked us to evaluate the quality of service in waiting rooms in Birmingham's hospitals. This report, one of a series of nine for the hospital Trusts we looked at, presents the results of that work for Queen Elizabeth Hospital.



## Background

**We started our investigation into NHS hospital waiting rooms in Birmingham in autumn 2018. Our main focus was on people's experiences of waiting times, the environment, communication, accessibility, and dignity and respect.**

To capture a representative sample of patients' views across Birmingham, our investigation consisted of two stages.

### **Stage 1**

We collected feedback directly from patients who were in hospital waiting rooms, so that we would have information on the experience of patients in real time.

### **Stage 2**

Based on initial feedback that led to the study and the experiences we heard in stage one, we worked closely with third-sector organisations (including Birmingham Focus, BID Services and deafPLUS) and interpreters to host focus groups to collect the experiences of people who have a visual and/or hearing impairment. Focus groups were held in four districts of Birmingham.

Healthwatch Birmingham also developed an online questionnaire to collect feedback from people with a visual and/or hearing impairment. This questionnaire included the same questions that were asked during our visits to waiting rooms and at focus group meetings. It was shared with the support of third-sector groups (including Birmingham's Disability Resource Centre, Action on Hearing Loss, Thomas Pocklington Trust and the National Deaf Children's Society) and extensive use of social media. The online questionnaire was available from 25 January to 8 February 2019.

Patients could choose to remain anonymous, or provide their contact details. A selection of patients who chose the latter were contacted again to participate in more in-depth interviews. We wrote these up as case studies.

We also looked at research on the effect of the experience of waiting on patient well-being. Poorly designed, uncomfortable waiting rooms and long waiting times have been found to contribute to a patient's stress and anxiety, perhaps because in addition to physical discomfort or accessibility problems, these spaces send a negative message that patients are a lower priority than the overall hospital system.<sup>1,2</sup> Other issues, such as anxiety, insecurity, thirst and hunger, are not always easily detected by busy healthcare professionals, leading to a failure to offer appropriate and timely patient care.<sup>3</sup> The quality of the waiting experience can also affect recovery times and mental well-being: a therapeutic waiting area design is associated with improved mood and greater satisfaction with healthcare services.<sup>4</sup>

Patients come into contact with the NHS at their most vulnerable, so emotions and negative feelings are heightened. The government's best practice guidance notes that it is important for NHS organisations to ensure that patients' emotional and physical needs are met at all stages of their journey:

**For example, a patient kept waiting for an appointment ... may have a good emotional experience if they feel someone cares about them (that is, they are given regular information about why they are being kept waiting and an update on how long they will have to wait). The same patient left to wait without any information is likely to have a negative experience because they feel abandoned and neglected. Improving patients' emotional experience is about treating people as we would want to be treated - with dignity and respect.<sup>5</sup>**

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 states that hospitals must provide 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled people to enable them to access services more effectively. The more recent Accessibility and Information Standard (AIS) further emphasises the need to ensure that providers are identifying, recording, flagging, sharing and meeting the information and communication needs of service users, for example to support people who have aphasia, autism or a mental health condition that affects their ability to communicate.<sup>6</sup>





# The Royal Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

The Royal Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is one of the largest specialist orthopaedic units in Europe located in Northfield ward, Northfield in Birmingham.

As part of this study Healthwatch Birmingham heard 480 pieces of feedback from people across Birmingham, of which we heard 60 pieces of feedback from people about their experiences of this specialist hospital. Feedback was heard through our online Feedback Centre, Information and Signposting Service and our Community Engagement activities and an online questionnaire. This included feedback on waiting areas in Outpatients, and the Admissions and Day Care Unit.

## What people said

### Waiting times

Most patients who mentioned waiting times said that these were short and that many clinics run on time. However, some people said they had waited up to two hours to be seen by a doctor.

*It's my seventh visit - they are very good, on-time appointments with full information and support. Very good.* (Outpatients Department)

*I rarely have to wait for the consultant and other team members. They are on time, there's good information at the entrance and it's welcoming.* (Outpatients Department)

*In October 2018, I was nil by mouth and arrived at 7am and had to wait until 2.30pm. The receptionist ... didn't want to respond to me.* (Admissions and Day Care Unit)

### Environment

Everyone who shared their experience with us said that they were very happy with the standard of waiting rooms throughout the hospital. They said that waiting rooms are well designed, clean and comfortable, and that access to refreshments is good. Patients visiting Outpatients were particularly happy with the welcoming environment.

**It's my seventh visit - they are very good, on-time appointments with full information and support. Very good.** (Outpatient Department)



***This is my second time here and I can say it's the most organised hospital waiting room I have ever seen. Good facilities with very good staff. Live TV, comfy seating, patient calling system, all good.*** (Outpatients Department)

***This waiting area is good, plenty of seating and lots of natural light.*** (Outpatients Department)

Some patients felt that the hospital needed to improve support for elderly people, people who are very unwell, and those who use a wheelchair.

## Accessibility

Although we did not ask people about parking specifically, we considered this under accessibility because several patients brought the matter to our attention. For those people who mentioned parking, the majority highlighted significant problems in finding parking spaces, with many stating that they had to park long distances from the hospital.

***Finding a parking space is horrible. It took me 45 minutes to get a parking space, which is not acceptable.*** (Outpatients Department)

***This place is good, but it's very difficult to find parking. They need more parking and especially disabled parking.*** (Outpatient Department)

***Disabled parking is very limited today. I was able to park half a mile away on Bristol Road and have walked from there. I'm in a bad shape and very angry.***  
(Admissions and Day Care Unit)

Because the hospital provides specialist orthopaedic services and sees many patients with mobility problems, we made the consideration of parking the subject of one of our recommendations.



**This waiting area is good, plenty of seating and lots of natural light.**  
(Outpatients Department)

## Communication

Most patients who spoke to us about the hospital's communications with them said these are good throughout the hospital. We asked patients about the ease of getting information (for example on waiting times), and about staff attitudes when they speak with patients.

Patients said that the self-check-in is easy to use, and they found the display screen in Outpatients useful to see how long they would have to wait and when it was their turn.

***Very high-tech waiting room, with the best possible patient calling system. I am impressed, from self-check-in to seating, toilets, Reception staff - everything is very good.***  
(Outpatient Department)

***Self-check-in is very helpful if the Reception staff are busy with other patients. If clinics are running late, there is a separate screen which tells you exactly at what time you will be seen.*** (Outpatients Department)

Patients said they appreciate the support offered by hospital volunteers. Most people sharing their experiences said they found staff attitudes to be supportive and helpful, but two patients using the Admissions and Day Care Unit said they were dealt with in an aggressive and unfriendly manner by a member of the Reception staff.

***I would highly recommend [this hospital] to family and friends. Outstanding care all round. Staff are very approachable. Waiting area is a bit crowded, but that's to be expected at peak times.*** (Outpatients Department)

***I am a cancer patient and full support is given to me all the time.*** (Outpatients Department)

***The receptionist was quite verbally aggressive in the way she treated me. She didn't want to deal with my questions.*** (Admissions and Day Care Unit)

## **Dignity and respect**

Many people who gave us feedback referred to the way they are treated during hospital visits. This brought up issues such as lack of privacy and highlighted that staff are generally responsive to patient's needs.

### **Case study**

A female patient, 50–64 years old and who is partially deaf, told us about her experience of attending an appointment in the Outpatients Department. She felt that although the waiting room is adequate, the seating is uncomfortable and the area lacks privacy. She thought that the electronic signage was clear and particularly good for knowing when her turn came.

She told us that the staff are knowledgeable and they support her needs:

***Consultants and medical staff always try to meet my needs after I remind them I have a hearing loss.***

However, she also felt that the staff on Reception need to be more friendly and approachable.





# Recommendations

**Based on the feedback from service users, Healthwatch Birmingham recommends that Trust:**



Reviews the management of appointments for clinics that have consistently long running times, to make sure they are being run in the most efficient manner possible



Considers whether the current parking arrangements adequately meet the needs of patients with mobility problems



Considers providing staff and volunteer support to help people access wheelchairs



Considers sharing identified best practices with other trust's e.g. waiting room environment, use of volunteers and electronic screens



Ensures that staff undertake customer service and disability awareness training annually, and that this is reviewed regularly to ensure staff have appropriate support and training to meet patients' needs and rights (particular focus on reception staff)

**NHS trusts should work with community and service user organisations, and directly with those with disabilities, impairment or sensory loss, to understand what actions need to be taken to improve people's experience of waiting areas. Working in collaboration in this way will ensure actions are patient-centred and meaningful, and will make a difference.**

**In six months' time, Healthwatch Birmingham will track the progress of these improvements, requesting an update from the Trust which evaluates the specific changes made to improve patient's experiences of waiting rooms.**

**Outpatients  
Waiting Area**

# Trust's Response

## The Royal Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust Response

The Royal Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust would like to thank Healthwatch Birmingham for working collaboratively with us to ensure that patients have the opportunity to influence and improve the work that we do. This report is a mainly positive reflection of the huge efforts made by our staff to ensure that patient experience is integral to everything that we do.

We are particularly pleased to see that the work we have undertaken to reduce waiting times in Outpatients has been so positively received by our patients. The Trust undertook a Quality Initiative in the last 12 months to ensure that 95% of our patients would be seen in less than 60 minutes and are pleased to report that this was achieved. As a national specialist provider for Oncology Services, we operate a drop-in clinic to allow any of our patients who need to be seen urgently to attend. We took the decision that this was a more vital need that to meet the 60-minute target we had set and our patients agreed with us.

We acknowledge that waiting times whilst being admitted is an issue that we need to focus on and this is a specific Quality Priority that has been proposed to our Governors for the next twelve months.

Parking is always going to be a challenge for the Trust as we are not able to expand our site footprint and are restricted with Building Regulations applied. We have more than the required number of disabled spaces on-site, but appreciate that many orthopaedic patients have mobility issues. We work continually with our Patient and Carer Forum, the City Council, the Local Business Community, Local Residents and Travel West Midlands to provide as many options to access the hospital as possible.

The Trust has been working with Healthwatch Birmingham on an ambitious new Patient Involvement, Experience and Volunteer Strategy, which will reinvigorate our Volunteer Service. The recommendations made by this report regarding more volunteer involvement will be considered as part of this strategy.

All staff and volunteers receive Customer Service training at the start of their time at the hospital, with more in-depth courses being available to those who require it. The specific concerns raised in the report have already been addressed and we thank the patients involved and Healthwatch Birmingham for bringing these to our attention.

The Trust is more than happy to highlight the work that has been undertaken here and to learn from other organisations about their improvement work. Please contact Lisa Kealey, Patient Services Manager at ROH if you would like to explore this further.





# Healthwatch Birmingham's Response

## Healthwatch Birmingham will request the following information, for inclusion in our six-month follow-up report.

Based on the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust's response, we will ask for evidence of:

- Findings of any reviews undertaken due to recommendations, detailing any changes made by the Trust.
- Current patient feedback heard by the Trust that demonstrates that all the issues highlighted in our recommendations have been resolved.

## References and Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Leather, P., Beale, D., Santos, A., Watts, J. and Lee, L. (2003). Outcomes of environmental appraisal of different hospital waiting areas. *Environment and Behavior* 35(6), pp. 842-869.

<sup>2</sup>Ortega-Andeane, P. and Estrada-Rodriguez, C. (2008). 'Environmental evaluation of hospital waiting rooms: Relationships of psychoenvironmental variables'. Proceedings of the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) 39, 28 May-1 June 2008, Veracruz, Mexico.

<sup>3</sup>Yoon, J. and Sonneveld, M. (2010). 'Anxiety of patients in the waiting room of the emergency department'. Proceedings of the fourth international conference on tangible, embedded, and embodied interaction, 24-27 January 2010, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

<sup>4</sup>Leather, P., Beale, D., Santos, A., Watts, J. and Lee, L. (2003). Outcomes of environmental appraisal of different hospital waiting areas. *Environment and Behavior* 35(6), pp. 842-869.

<sup>5</sup>Department of Health (2005). 'Now I feel tall' What a patient-led NHS feels like: Best Practice Guidance, p. 5. London: Department of Health. At [https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130123205405/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4124475](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130123205405/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4124475)

<sup>6</sup>Accessible Information Standard: Overview 2017/18. At [www.england.nhs.uk/publication/accessible-information-standard-overview-20172018/](http://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/accessible-information-standard-overview-20172018/)

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Birmingham

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