



“Building blocks to impact”

Improving patient communication

healthwatch
Brighton and Hove

Services reviewed and aims of this work

Services reviewed: Patient communications, outpatients' transformation, hospital receptions.

Aims: To improve communications with patients, including comms about their outpatient appointments.

Why we did this work

- Feedback/insight highlighted poor quality referrals/ patient experiences.
- Sussex Outpatient Transformation aims to give patients greater control and convenience. Our work has shown that good communications support this, empowering patients & reducing missed appointments.
- Our work highlighted that good communications were key to delivering system improvements and change, and we wanted providers and commissioners to embed this into their work.

Why change was needed

We know that communications need to be personalised, use plain language, be honest about delays and cancellations and include supporting information.

- 52% of BH residents told us they were dissatisfied with communications about outpatient appointments (* a third satisfied). People highlighted the impacts of unhelpful advice or support from receptionists.
- Top of people's wish list are good comms & interpersonal skills, clear info, being kept informed, comms that meet personal preferences/needs.
- Around 1 in 5 people locally fail to attend an outpatient appointment, linked to poor communication.

6 Residents told us:

"the receptionist failed to advise the Dr I had arrived meaning that I lost my appointment slot and had to wait a further 6 months."

"Reception staff attitude can be poor – not good when people are not well"

"I never know what's going to happen at appointments ... what I thought was a 15-minute consultation was an invasive hour-long appointment."

"Communication is key. I want to be told why I am having tests, when ... what ...how long they'll take."

"I want to receive accurate and timely information with simple explanations."

What we did ‘building blocks’

- Work by HWBH in 2021, going into 2022/23 partnering with Sussex HW teams. Impacts achieved in 2023.
- **‘Block one’** - HWBH started by interviewing health inequality(HI) groups about Community Diagnostic Centres, working with VCSE.
- **‘Block two’** - Results led HWBH to review outpatient experiences (surveys/interviews/Hi groups). A review of letters & messages. Two reports were produced.
- **‘Block three’** - HWBH discussed our recommendation to create a ‘patient comms charter’ with our acute trust.
- **‘Block four’** – HWBH discussed with commissioners leading outpatient transformation and presented at Exec Boards including Planned Care. Discussed our recommendation to create a working group. Commissioned to deliver deliberative engagement workshops, pan-Sussex and a collaboration with **HW East Sussex & HW West Sussex**.

Impacts

Collaboration across Sussex HW teams

Hospital:

- Our acute trust used our patient charter to pioneer 'patient first' and new welcome standards for staff in greeting and communication roles.
- All front facing staff are trained in these standards.
- HWBH and **HW West Sussex** now validate and support accreditation.
- HW secured funding from trust's charity to mystery shop standards in action, providing a continuous feedback and improvement loop.
- Following validation, a kitemark is displayed for patients and visitors to see that patient service excellence criteria has been met.
- The patient's voice directly reflects how the Trust assesses 'good patient experience'.
- We were shortlisted in a national customer service award recognizing our partnership working with our acute hospital.

Impacts

A video produced by University Hospitals Sussex demonstrates the value of the new training on Welcome Standards. This includes a special thanks to Healthwatch for being the co-creator and reviewer of the Welcome Standards

<https://www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/welcome-standards-video-story/>

Special thanks to the generous support of our funder...

my University Hospitals Sussex

And to the co-creator and reviewer of the Welcome Standards...

healthwatch

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Find out more about the Welcome Standards...

Impacts

Outpatient transformation

- Patient notes are being shared across all providers within Sussex, so that patients should receive consistent care wherever they receive it.
- Maps and links to hospital websites are being included in patient letters, to simplify and provide visual aids.
- Feedback was reflected in DNA sample letters, particularly the use of language and tone.
- NHS Sussex is working with the hospitals across Sussex to ensure information is available in a range of formats, including overseas languages, and to ensure that information about any changes is provided clearly.
- Adverts about initiatives were designed and promoted.
- HW Sussex poll (Oct 24) showed 64% satisfied with comms about their outpatient appointments.





Director Patient Experience, our acute trust:

*“we have been exploring the next steps for our Welcome Standards programme, **which was borne out of the communication charter developed by Healthwatch B&H. It is now a significant programme of training and self -evaluation around a set of criteria. We have been able to deliver demonstrable and quantifiable improvements as a result.**”*

Outpatient Transformation team:

“These workshops were well attended with all participants making a valuable contribution. **The discussions and points raised were of huge value to our programme plan going forward.** Overall, the workshops and deliberative engagement process exceeded our expectations and we are incredibly grateful to everyone involved.





“At the end of my last outpatient appointment, I was given the letter and it was explained to me what grounds I should visit. Excellent, terrific! I had a check-up that I would usually wait 2-3 hours to see an ENT specialist for. Now I can phone up and get direct to the ENT. This direct contact is valid for 12 months and saves me from waiting in A&E.”

“Overall, it’s a good letter, information you need is at the top, well structured.”

“I received a concerned and kind response, with full eye contact, from a very helpful receptionist, who confirmed the ward was called Cardiac Ward, and tried hard to establish the admission, including checking on the hospital system.”

“I was very impressed with the competencies of the receptionist who helped me.”



For more information

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