

# **Healthwatch visits to University Hospitals Sussex NHS Trust as part of the PLACE program**

**March 2024**

**Healthwatch Brighton and Hove conducted visits to various sites run by the University Hospitals Sussex NHS Trust (UHSx). Ten of our trained volunteers conducted these visits in October 2023.**

**Our visits to the Royal Sussex County Hospital, the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital, the Eye Hospital and various wards across the estate were part of PLACE or 'Patient-Led Assessments of the Care Environment'. This report provides a summary of our observations from the visits. PLACE is delivered as a national programme, and all data is collected and formally analysed by NHS Digital. They will publish detailed reports after the program has ended.**

## **What is PLACE?**

PLACE assessments focus on the environment in which care is delivered to people, such as hospital wards. It does not look at clinical care or how well staff are doing their job. PLACE visits were last carried out in 2022.

Good environments matter. Every NHS patient should be cared for with compassion and dignity in a clean, safe environment. Where standards fall short, this should be drawn to the attention of managers so that improvements can be made.

Assessments involve local people (known as patient assessors) going into local hospitals to assess how good the environment is.

## **What's it like to be a patient assessor?**

PLACE gives patients and the public a voice to have more influence over the way their local health and care services are run.

Our volunteers who are acting as patient assessors are given training and supported by Healthwatch, using materials produced by the NHS. They visit different wards, clinics and communal areas and assess how well patients' privacy and dignity are respected, overall cleanliness and general building maintenance. They also look at the extent to which the environment can support the care of those with dementia or with a disability. Lastly, they undertake food tastings and, where possible, observe how meals are served to patients. You can read more about the PLACE programme by clicking [here](#)

## Thank you

Healthwatch would like to express its thanks to the Trust for inviting us to participate in PLACE. This allows us to assess the patient environment first-hand and share our observations.



*"The report offers fantastic, credible, balanced insights into the experience of our patients attending our sites for care in a highly readable and accessible format – thank you.*

*The report will be taken to the Trust's Patient Experience and Engagement Group in March to be discussed and so that actions can be tracked. The report will also be shared with service leads. The Trust is already taking action in many of the areas identified. For example we will be carrying out routine audits of corridors, the feedback about natural light in the cancer centre is reflective of that we have had from other patients, and is shaping the designs for the new cancer centre and a new nutrition and hydration policy is under development to make clear expectations of staff with regarding to feeding."*



– Nicole Chavaudra

*Director of Patient Experience, Engagement and Involvement*

## Where we visited

Ten trained volunteers visited the Royal Sussex County Hospital over three different days – Wednesday the 18<sup>th</sup>, Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday the 31<sup>st</sup> of October. The volunteers visited the Outpatients Department, the Maternity Unit, the Eye Hospital, the Cancer Centre, the Renal Ward (where they also conducted food tasting), the Royal Alexandra Children's hospital, Cardiology Care Unit and the Emergency department (formally known as the Accident and Emergency department).

## Detailed observations for the visits

### Outpatients Department – a summary of our observations

Two Healthwatch volunteers undertook this visit: **thank you to Paul and Mizzie for their time and contributions.**

## Our observations

- Two check-in machines are placed facing the entrance to encourage patients to check in without visiting reception; this could possibly cause some lack of privacy, but the risk is minimal.
- There is a mix of different shaped and sized chairs in the reception area; the high-back chairs looked a little frayed.
- Dementia-friendly policies have been adopted where possible. There was good signage on doors with large numbers and different coloured (blue) door handles.
- The toilets inspected were all clean, with good hand washing facilities and signage.
- The flooring was of mixed quality and types, it was generally old but clean as far as possible.
- Overall, the cleaning regime was very efficient, and the staff have worked hard to make a friendly environment.

## Areas that we flagged as requiring attention:

- The lighting was of mixed quality; some of the consulting rooms seemed a bit dark.
- There were some signs of water ingress through glass roof lights and walls of one consulting room we inspected showed major signs of water damage (the room was still in use).
- The fire escape for the first floor is via a flat roof, which is unsuitable for patients with limited mobility or phobias.

## The Maternity Unit – a summary of our observations

Two Healthwatch volunteers undertook this visit: **thank you to Paul and Mizzie for their time and contributions.**

## Our observations

- The environment is clean and as tidy as conditions allow.
- The cleaning regime seems to be very efficient and deserves praise.
- Patient storage units are due to be replaced shortly in line with units in the new hospital.

- It was recently redecorated/painted, so it looks clean. In some areas, the lower wall covering was replaced with plastic sheets to make cleaning much easier.

### **Areas that we flagged as requiring attention:**

- There is minimal storage space, which means too much "stuff" is held in corridors, such as mattresses for partners to sleep on.
- The bathrooms and toilets inspected were all clean but show signs of age. There are some old-fashioned Perspex sliding door units that are difficult to clean and lower tiles often have mould which cannot be shifted without regrouting.
- The only patient toilet (in the Assessment Unit) is in a room used by staff as an office, which may make some patients very uncomfortable despite attempts to screen off with a curtain.
- There is lots of signage and information. Some are aimed at mums-to-be and others for staff – it was felt this could be a bit overwhelming.
- The waiting area is a corridor with a long row of chairs – this did not seem patient-friendly.
- The shared wards are cramped and can be noisy; we were told it can be very difficult to rest and sleep so new mums may want to get home as soon as possible.
- The flooring is also old in places. We noted that flooring in corridors was replaced earlier in the year, but wards and bathrooms were largely left unchanged.

## **The Eye Hospital – a summary of our observations**

Four Healthwatch volunteers undertook this visit: **thank you to Vanessa, Connor, Sue and John for their time and contributions.**

### **Our observations**

- The ward was clean and tidy, and although it is old, the patients and their families could not speak highly enough about the care or their experiences on the ward.
- A family member we spoke to was with her husband who had been in and out of Pickford Ward, and on each of their visits was always happy with the level of cleanliness, facilities and care.

- Although an old building, everything was calm and organised. The Matron gave us a really good tour of the site.
- From the volunteer's observations, it was everything you would want.

#### **Areas that we flagged as requiring attention:**

- It is not particularly well signposted, but that is part of the inherent problem of the age of the building.

### **Cancer Centre – a summary of our observations**

Two Healthwatch volunteers undertook this visit: **thank you to Vanessa and Connor for their time and contributions.**

#### **Our observations**

- On the first floor, the floor is sloped and has rounded handrails to aid those with disabilities.
- Due to the layout of the building some rooms do not have natural light, even so they still are light and bright.
- As treatments were being undertaken, we went into vacant rooms. The ones we observed were all satisfactory.

#### **Areas that we flagged as requiring attention:**

- The flooring in the main reception area is light oak wood and continues into the corridor areas, then it changes randomly into linoleum. This could be confusing for those suffering with dementia.
- On the ground floor, there is a large unused area to the right of the building that could be reused or should be closed off.

### **Renal Ward – a summary of our observations**

Six Healthwatch volunteers undertook this visit: **thank you to Paul, Mazzie, Vanessa, John, Sue and Conor for their time and contributions.**

### Our observations

- We visited the Renal Ward as a large group and were whisked around.
- We said that we couldn't complete the PLACE form for Renal as we hadn't been given the time to look carefully and answer the questions.

### Areas that we flagged as requiring attention:

- Volunteers noticed an area for wheelchairs and other equipment that had a clear notice showing how things were to be stacked, which was not being followed.
- We were able to peep into the wards but not enter the wards, so were unable to complete many of the requirements necessary. We managed to view one toilet which was fine, and the general communal area was quite busy.

## Food Tasting (conducted in the Renal Ward)- a summary of our observations

Six Healthwatch volunteers undertook this visit: **thank you to Paul. Mazzie, Vanessa, John, Sue and Conor for their time and contributions.**

### Our observations

- We undertook a food tasting as large group. We found that the food served to patients was generally tasty and at the appropriate temperature.
- The food options included good heartwarming food, such as, sausage casserole, chicken pot pie, macaroni cheese, mashed potatoes, green beans, chips, carrots and treacle sponge and custard.
- There were food options for special requirements, including a vegetarian, vegan and halal option.



*"The vegetable bake and halal options were lovely."*  
- **Healthwatch**



### **Areas that we flagged as requiring attention:**

- As part of the PLACE visits Healthwatch volunteers were required to observe how the food is served to patients, unfortunately, they were not shown this so we were unable to complete this part of the assessment.
- On further discussion it was explained to Healthwatch volunteers that the catering staff take food to the patient on the ward, it is then the responsibility of the healthcare assistant to support the patient if required and the catering staff collect the plates at the end.
- This highlights an area of concern for those patients who may be less able, for whatever reason, or maybe sleeping when meals are served, leading to a situation whereby a meal is left and then taken away, thinking it is unwanted.

## **Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital – a summary of our observations**

Two Healthwatch volunteers undertook this visit: **thank you to Elaine and Leah for their time and contributions.**

### **Our observations**

- We were guided by informative and helpful hospital leads who enabled our observations of the Children's Ward.
- The Children's Ward felt bright and airy.
- The ward was spotlessly clean.
- With regards to privacy and dignity the ward was quite open, however, the volunteers felt that this was necessary considering the patient's needs and ages.
- The volunteers felt that this ward would support disabled patients well, with for example, wide corridors.

### **Areas that we flagged as requiring attention:**

- The writing on the signage was small and hard to read. It would benefit from being bigger.



## Cardiology Care Unit – a summary of our observations

Two Healthwatch volunteers undertook this visit: **thank you to Elaine and Leah for their time and contributions.**

### Our observations

- The Cardiology Care Unit is in the old building and felt claustrophobic due to the physical set-up of the walls, corridors and low ceilings.
- The ward was very clean.
- The ward was cramped and packed. It was a busy ward restricted by the physical building design.
- The staff worked extremely hard to maintain the patient's privacy and dignity.

### Areas that we flagged as requiring attention:

- Due to the cramped nature of the ward, Healthwatch volunteers felt that the ward did not support disabled patients. However, the staff attitudes were helpful.

## The Emergency Department (formally known as Accident and Emergency) summary of our observations

Two Healthwatch volunteers undertook this visit: **thank you to Sue and John for their time and contributions.**

### Our observations

- The staff were doing their jobs, but they could hardly move between the very overcrowded areas.

### Areas that we flagged as requiring attention:

- The small waiting area was jam-packed with people sitting on chairs, on the floor and queuing to get in the door.
- The treatment rooms were full, and the cubicles were full.

- There were ten wheelchairs and many trolleys filling the rest of the area.
- Some patients were seen groaning in pain – there was very little dignity or privacy.



*“It really upset me that a patient or member of staff should be there in those conditions.... the stark contrast to the new Louisa Martindale building was unbelievable.”*



- **Healthwatch**

## Overall observations from the whole series of PLACE visits

Ten Healthwatch volunteers undertook the PLACE visits: **thank you to Sue, Vanessa, Mazzie, Conor, Leah, Elaine, John, Paul, Sylvia and Finnur for their time and contributions.**

### Our observations

- Mobile phone and wi-fi coverage is very patchy in the new Louisa Martindale Building, including the new café area.
- The signage is very sparse in the Louisa Martindale Building and not patient-friendly – it is reliant on colour schemes and themes, which is fine for staff working at the hospital or regular visitors but not for new visitors.
- The nursing staff encountered during visit were clearly very positive about their work and focussed upon improvement of all aspects of the patient experience.
- The facilities in the Louisa Martindale Building were all brand new and state of the art, everything was clean and un-cluttered, and the patients all looked to be well looked after with plenty of space in facilities that preserved their dignity.

### Areas that we flagged as requiring attention:

- Some volunteers reported that some of the PLACE visits seemed a little rushed at times.
- Some volunteers reported that they felt they did not have the time they needed to complete the PLACE forms.

# Contact us



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