

Statement from Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull on University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust Quality Account 2021/22

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull welcome the opportunity to provide our statement on the Quality Account for University Hospital Birmingham (UHB) NHS Foundation Trust for 2021/22. We are pleased to see that there is an open evaluation of the Trusts performance between 2021 and 2022. There is a clear identification of areas where the Trust has done well and areas where further improvements are needed. We acknowledge that Covid-19 continues to have a significant impact on the Trusts activities. Consequently, the Trust is facing significant backlogs that have impacted waiting times, with patients waiting longer to access care. We would have liked to see this as one of the priorities for 2022/23 as delayed care has an impact on patients' wellbeing and outcomes.

We are aware through our work with the Trust that plans are already being implemented to tackle waits which include increasing the capacity of the hospital sites and transforming the way care is delivered. The Quality Account presents an opportunity for the Trust to show the work being undertaken to improve the care of patients as this continues to be a concern. Indeed, the experiences we have heard point to concerns about waiting times following referral and cancer waiting times.

Having spent 17 months on a waiting list for urgent procedures without any notification of appointment nor indeed any acknowledgement whatsoever from the QE, despite numerous letters from my GP and my Consultant, I've been forced to spend nearly £4000 on private health care.

Very long waiting times for cancer treatment. Poor communication leading to more stress and anxiety.

The individuals daughter has Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia. There have been delays in treatment along the way. Took over six days to receive echo. Phone call wasn't answered when the caller tried to contact hospital for a delayed period of time. Hasn't received chemotherapy yet despite requiring it.

A referral was sent pre pandemic to Urologists. Another sent April 2021. My GP has escalated it 4 times. I received a letter to book. I couldn't. When I finally got through on the phone I was told it was a minimum 52 week wait. Due to the issues I have with my bowel & bladder I am now unable to leave my home & had to engage with the Bladder & Bowel community for help and advice. I am still waiting for an appointment.

However, we also note the excellent work the Trust has carried out during this period and the positive impact on patients. People have shared positive experiences of accessing varied services provided by the Trust.

Sheldon Unit looked after my partner during lockdown, diagnosed with funicular cancer, professionalism beyond reproach, kindness and understanding, explaining everything that was happening. Aftercare and

genuine concern and consideration for both my partner and myself was both heart-warming and much appreciated in such difficult and challenging times.

I had surgery there, 3 days in itu and 2 on a ward. Extremely caring staff no matter what their role. Caring, compassionate and very person centred. Hard working and committed. I could not fault the care I received, I felt confident I was in safe hands from start to finish.

Amazing staff who made us feel completely at ease during one of the most traumatic experiences in our lives when my eldest son nearly lost his life due to undiagnosed type one diabetes. Ever since leaving the hospital they have always been at the other end of the phone no matter what time of the day or night, they also make sure my son is the centre of every appointment and make sure he feels 100% involved in his care. The selection box they sent him at Christmas is just a small thing that meant so much to him. Dr and his whole team are amazing.

Very professional even though they were extremely busy. Made sure I was sent home with all tests clear.

I have been an in-patient for cancer surgery in 2016 and have been followed up regularly every 3-6 months since. At all times the service has been exemplary and I have had excellent care throughout.

Throughout the past year and two months of the pandemic, they have not failed to keep in touch by phone, and to do all they can to maintain my medication regime and their advice and support.

Healthwatch Birmingham agrees with the priority areas for the Trust for 2022/23. We recognise the potential impact these have for patient experience. We note the progress made in improving VTE prevention. We are pleased that the Trust has exceeded the national requirement for 95% of patients having a VTE risk assessment during their admission. In addition, that Trust-level compliance has been above 96% every month during 2021/22.

We are pleased to see continued focus on the 'Freedom to speak up' priority. This is important as the NHS staff survey shows that the percentage of staff that feel safe to speak about their concerns (54%) and those believing that their concerns would be addressed (42%) is much lower than the national average. Staff have also indicated the challenges they face in contacting the speaking up service. We ask that as the Trust continues to monitor the Freedom to Speak Up priority in 2022/23, that there is further engagement with staff. In particular, work together with staff to develop solutions to address the challenges they face. For instance:

- Delays – engage staff to understand what the underlying concerns are with delays (whether they understand the process – in terms of timelines, what can be done as they wait, what information do they need when they are waiting etc.)

Fear of detriment – we note that there is an email contact that is confidential for the Speak Up contacts. The Trust needs to understand if this is providing the confidentiality that staff are seeking. The Trust need to explore with staff what can be done to increase confidentiality and reduce the fear of detriment from contacting the Speak Up service.

In our response to the 2021/22 Quality Account, we noted that there was not much focus on the role of service users in decision-making, implementation, and evaluation of services. We asked to see the role of service user experiences, insight and experiences become more central and evidence of use of this and impact, much better presented in the Quality Account. We note that two focus groups took place with staff as part of the 'communication' quality improvement project that the Trust has been focusing on in addition to the main priorities. The aim was to hear suggestions of how to communicate with patients, relatives, and carers. Although staff perspectives are important, it would be more useful if this was complemented by insight from patients, carers, and relatives. The Trust should consider holding similar engagement with patients.

CQC Rating

Although, we appreciate the massive pressure Covid-19 pandemic has put on the Trust over the past few years, we are concerned that the Trust's overall CQC rating has been downgraded from 'good' to 'requires improvement'. It is worrying that the 'safe domain' still remains 'requires improvement' alongside the 'responsive domain'. Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull will continue to support the Trust in implementing actions to make improvements in these areas. To reiterate what the Chair of Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull said when the CQC report was published *"so many people across Birmingham, Solihull and beyond owe their lives to the care and expertise of people working across UHB's four hospitals. The trust should take pride in what they do, but this CQC report must also be a wake-up call for trust leaders to improve specific areas of care and to address the other concerns that it contains."*

Patient Experience Indicators

We note that similar to the Quality Account report of 2020/21, apart from the VTE risk assessment indicator, the Trust is way below meeting the target in the other five indicators reported in the 2021/22 Quality Account report (p51). We note particularly the 18 weeks waiting time from referral to treatment performance is now at 42.9% (58.4% in 2020/21) against a target of 92%; All cancers maximum 62 day wait from urgent GP referral is at 40.7% (42.6% in 2020/21) against a target of 85%; All cancers maximum 62 day wait for first treatment is at 59.5% (69.6% in 2020/21) against a target of 90%. Whilst we still appreciate the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on these numbers, it is worrying that the performance indicators for these areas continues to decrease. We also note that for A & E waiting times (4 hour from arrival to admission/transfer or discharge) performance is at 57% against a target of 95%, and performance for the maximum 6 week waiting time for diagnostic procedure is at 63.6% against a target of 99%.

As we indicated in our response to the 2020/21 Quality Account, this performance is of great concern to Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull, especially

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considering the impact on outcomes and quality of life of patients. We will continue to work with the Trust and monitor the Trust's action plans implemented to make improvements. We will continue to share with the Trust feedback we receive from service users, carers, and the public on the Trust's services to inform improvements.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Cave'.

Andy Cave
CEO
Healthwatch Birmingham