

healthwatch

Brighton and Hove

Patients' perspectives of the Rheumatology Outpatients Department at the Royal Sussex County Hospital



1 Introduction

The visit to the Rheumatology clinic was conducted by authorised Healthwatch Enter and View Representatives.¹ The Healthwatch representatives carried out two visits and interviewed a total of seven patients. We used a semi-structured questionnaire which covered patients' experience with their appointment, the referral process to the clinic and their consultation with the specialist. Representatives asked about the hospital environment, privacy and confidentiality, the reception areas and the quality of their experience. We sometimes found it difficult to get responses about experiences in consultations as patients often did not want to be delayed after the appointment. We also carried out 'Sit and See' observations.

We revisited on the 18th August and fed back our findings to management.

2 Summary findings

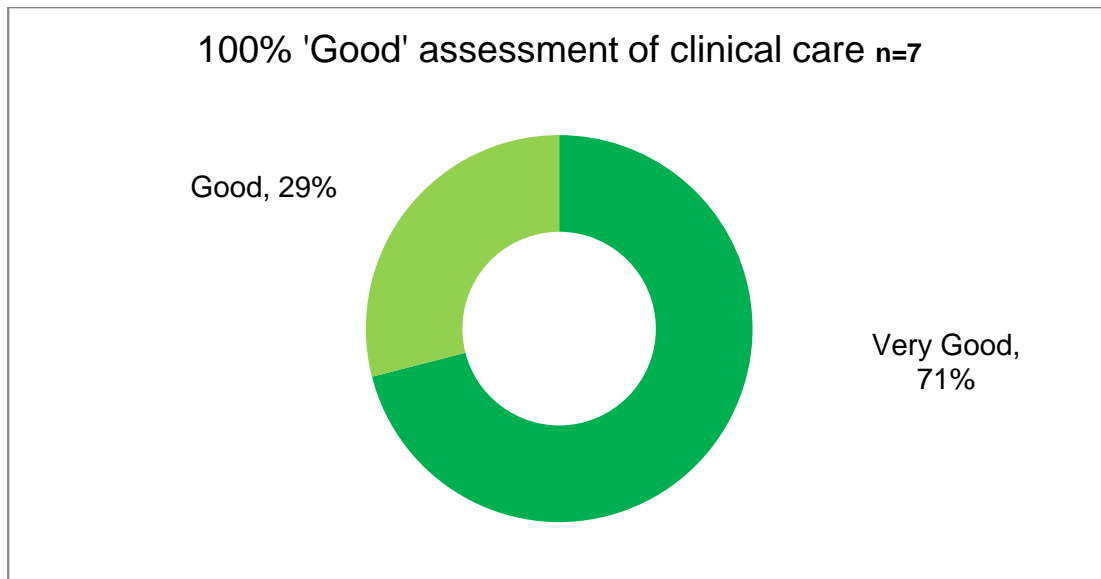
The review found patients mainly positive about the quality of care. Appointments appeared to be fairly well managed with only one person reporting a previous cancellation. However, some people had not received appointments for anticipated six month follow ups. Delays were experienced on the day of appointment with about half of patients (57%) not seen on time.

Key findings

good clinical care

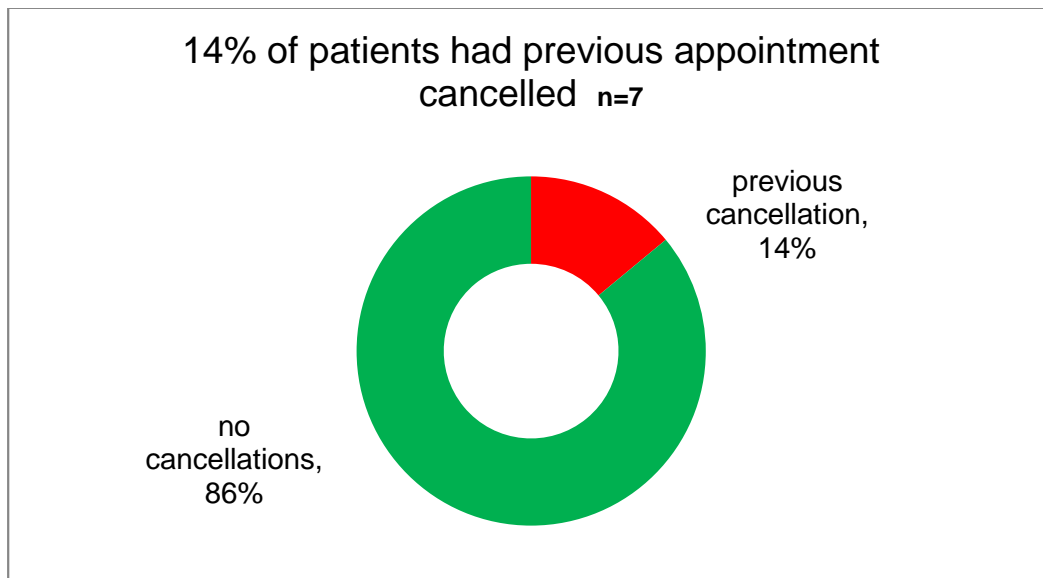
The review found patients using the Rheumatology clinic were complimentary about the quality of care provided at their consultation. All patients reported that their overall experience had been 'very good' or 'good' and positive assessments were made about various aspects of the consultation (personal notes and relevant information available, opportunity to ask questions, and choices of treatment offered and explained). Patients often praised the quality of care provided by clinical staff.

¹ Enter and View authorised representatives.



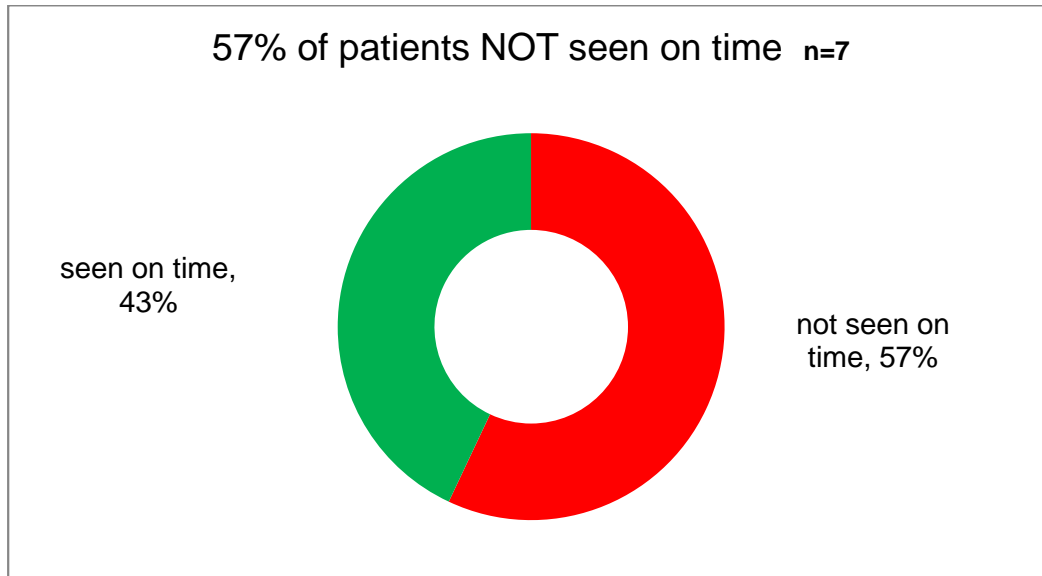
referral process

Only a few patients (14%) reported that a previous appointment for their condition had been cancelled, lower than the OPD average of 22%, but some people had waited an excessive time for their appointment.



appointment timeliness on day of consultation

Over half of patients (57%) reported they were not seen on time on the day of their consultation, higher than the 41% average for OPD overall.



waiting environment

No patients rated the overall environment as ‘very good’ or ‘good’ and a third (33%) rated it as ‘poor’. This is significantly lower than the 75% positive rating for OPD overall. Only ‘lighting’ and ‘availability of drinks’ received a majority of positive ratings. There were insufficient seats and one lady remarked “Some of the seats in the Latilla Building are broken and you sink into them.” Although the numbers of people we spoke to were small, 29% of them said the seats were poor, in comparison to a 4% average for all OPDs we visited. Most people also said there was insufficient seating. When we visited on the 19th August we were assured that the chairs would not be transferred to the new location.

good customer relations

All of the patients surveyed reported they had been made to feel welcome when arriving at reception. This figure is higher than the OPD average of 95%.

3 Observations

First Impressions

It is difficult to believe when approaching the Latilla Building that it is functioning as a hospital service. It was dilapidated and is due for demolition. It has been in this condition for some time. We were told that the Department is moving to the temporary Hanbury Unit in September. We carried out two observation visits and spoke to seven patients. We attempted to interview patients on a separate occasion but there was no clinic.

Although there is a sign outside saying it is the Physiotherapy and Rheumatology Department, it is not very noticeable and partially obstructed by a parking machine. There is no sign on the door to suggest the building is open. Fewer people than average found the building easy to find, 28% found the building difficult to find in comparison with 9% on average across all departments.

There are numerous parking spaces for disabled patients outside the building. Nevertheless, one person had to park a long distance away and was very distressed and flushed when she arrived for her appointment. Another patient, who was a wheelchair user and has a blue badge, found it very difficult to get a parking space. We have concern about the retention of the same number of parking spaces when the Latilla Building relocates.

Once in the building, the condition of the foyer varied from clean and tidy to unclean with what appeared to be discarded equipment in the area. There were hand sanitisers, but they were not well signed and we did not see anyone using them.

We have made some recommendations but we are aware that some of the problems may be resolved when the service relocates.

Recommendation

Attention needs to be paid to ensure the foyer is always clean and tidy.

Recommendation

Given some of the comments generally about getting a disabled parking space, more direction to spaces for patients with blue badges could be helpful to them. Healthwatch would like assurances that the number of parking spaces will be retained when the services in the Latilla Building are relocated.

Recommendation

The Rheumatology Clinic is adjacent to the Physiotherapy Department and consideration might be given to using the seating there as it is rarely full. Patients suggested some magazines, toys for children, background music and a phone signal would be welcome. Soft music was also favoured.

Reception Area

Staff were very welcoming and the records were kept in a separate area behind a glass screen. Patients reported that they were made to feel welcome when they arrived at reception. They also reported that no confidential information could be overheard when discussed at reception.

The place was hot and stuffy and overcrowded, and the ventilation was described by one person as 'dire': 43% of the patients said the ventilation was poor, compared to an average across all OPDs of 6%.

Whilst we appreciate the availability of doctors is an issue, from the patients perspective more clinics with fewer patients would be less crowded and preferable. Some patients had waited a year for six monthly reviews. There might be potential capacity in the clinic to reduce the waiting times by arranging clinics on days when they are not used.

One patient summed up the situation; "When the building is demolished and there is a new clinic, I hope the reception area is bigger".

Waiting to be seen in the clinic

The clinics we saw were very busy and most patients were waiting beyond their appointment times: 57% of patients interviewed said they were not seen on time. Only two people said they were informed about delays. We were informed that the patients in this clinic often have complex needs and require longer consultations and get a full appointment with drugs prescribed. They are under a lot of pressure to meet targets on referrals and sometimes queues build up.

Recommendation

Given the environment, the delays in appointments are particularly serious for these patients. At the minimum, patients need to be informed about delays when they book-in and during waits. Patients also suggested that there should be a screen updating waiting times.

Referral process and follow up

Problems with the booking and referral processes were evident.

Sally had an appointment for July 2015. It was rescheduled five times and at Christmas 2015, she received a letter to say it had been completely cancelled and when she phoned was told there was 'no capacity'. Sally had a serious condition and was 'appalled'. She was eventually given an appointment in July 2016 with a doctor who had only been in post for two weeks. Once she got this appointment, she was very pleased with the results.

George (wheelchair user) said, "each time I come - 5 times already- I see a different doctor and have to start again with my story-all have different views about my treatment. Last time, the registrar told me to think myself well. Not sure what the outcome will be."

Recommendation

Cancelations and delayed follow ups and the way patients are being informed about appointments needs to be reviewed.

4 Conclusion

The department is severely compromised by its location. There were significant complaints about the environment and delays in appointment times from patients. Even though the Department is moving shortly, a sign needs to be put on the front door. We would propose that all of the recommendations above are integrated into plans for the new service location.