



news

Winter 2014

Listening to Deaf service users in Islington

In January Healthwatch Islington hosted an event bringing together Deaf service users with staff from the Whittington, Royal Free and University College Hospitals. This was an effort to address some of the negative experiences that Deaf patients have reported when using local hospitals. The meeting was supported by British Sign Language Interpreters.

Deaf service users reported a number of issues relating to a lack of staff training at hospitals, for example Accident and Emergency reception staff not knowing how to book an interpreter.

The standard of interpreting provided also varied a great deal. Service users asked that hospital appointment letters state the name of the interpreter booked. Currently this does not happen.

Other service users complained that appointment letters sometimes did not contain any information about interpreting services at all, or that when you wanted to change a booking you had to do it by

phone, a system that doesn't work for Deaf patients.

There were also difficulties reported when waiting to be seen, "Nobody knows how stressful it is waiting for your turn; I can't relax. I am always watching the receptionist or LED display". The Whittington received praise in this regard as they have introduced vibrating buzzers to let patients know when it is their turn.

Good practice was also shared by the Royal Free, where theatre teams have a meeting each morning to identify whether any of that day's patients have additional needs. They can then make sure these patients are adequately supported.

On what the longer term impact of the meeting would be, [Emma Whitby](#) of Healthwatch said "We're going to make sure that some of these problems get resolved. We can't do it on our own, but we can by working together with our local hospitals."

Healthwatch in the Community

This is a very useful training session. As the NHS is under constant change we need to have similar sessions in the future in order to be able to share experiences and further our knowledge.

Arachne Greek Cypriot Women's Group commenting on their Healthwatch session

Healthwatch Islington's work with community groups is well underway. As of December we had contacted 88 groups, and we expect to have delivered 60 sessions in the community by the end of February. We are training staff and volunteers at local voluntary and community organisations to be better able to access information about health and social care services.

Maria Gonzalez (above right), who with her colleague Sarah Lee (below right) runs this activity, explains how it works,

"Typically we'll begin a session with an introduction to the new NHS structure and the role of Healthwatch. We use videos and other resources to make this complicated subject easier to get to grips with. Then we introduce a number of internet based tools that can be used to access information about health and social care services. The idea is that the participants will then be able to help their client group find services as and when they need them.

The sessions generally last for two hours. We also use the time to go through real life case scenarios and to resolve specific queries on behalf of each group. For example, in December I held a session at a local women's organisation and we looked at how to register for a GP if you cannot provide a proof of address. The issues are different every time we do the training - that's what makes it interesting."

The training also helps community groups to understand and use health and social care data and research. We explain the function of key tools such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the evidence hub.

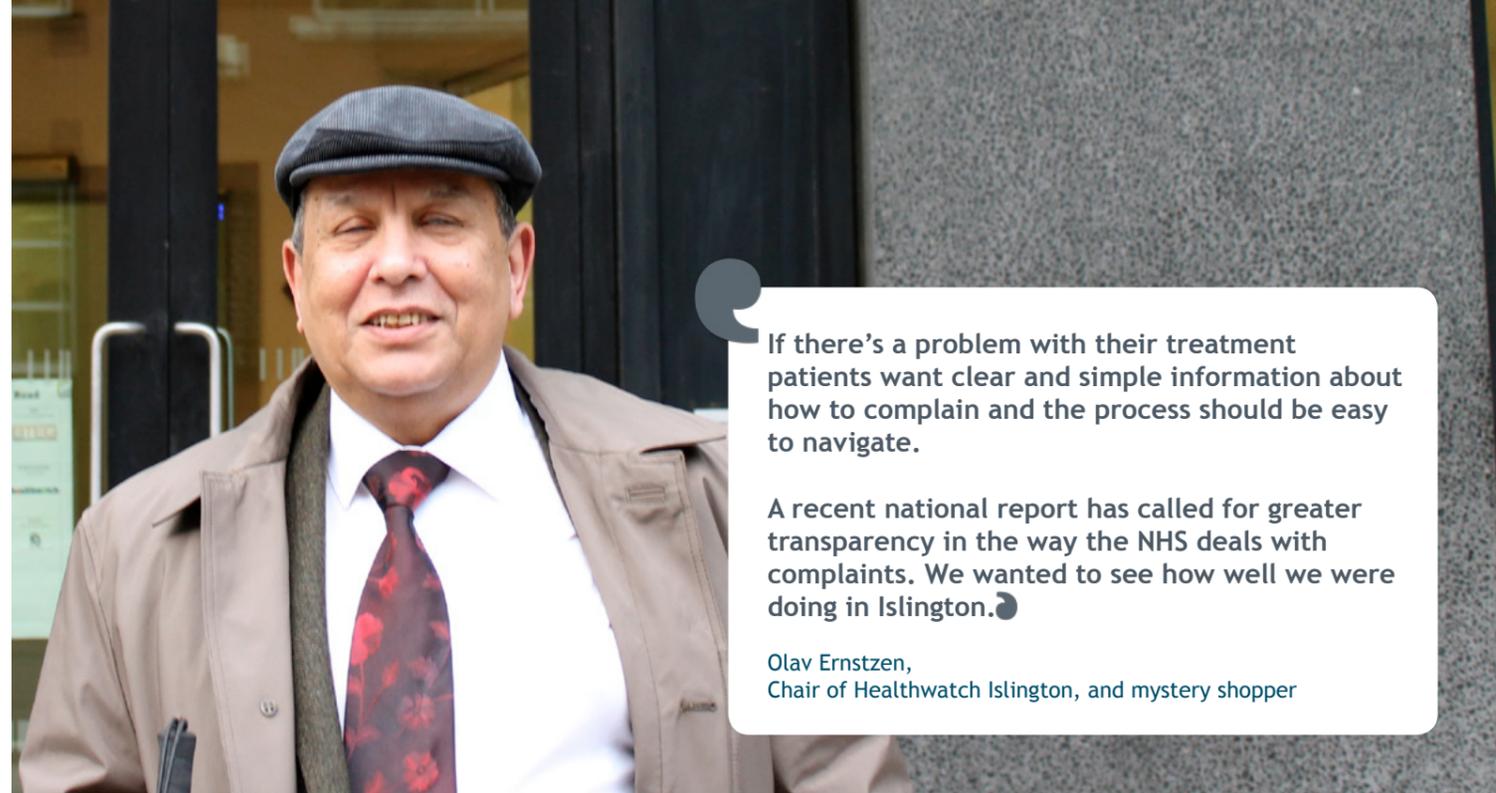
Help for individuals

Healthwatch Islington also provides support to members of the public who need help accessing services. We point people in the right direction, which is why this support is sometimes known as



signposting. Since Sarah and Maria began offering the service last Autumn, they have helped over 100 people. Enquirers have sought information on many aspects of health and care, including specialist GPs, ad hoc carer services, home dentistry visits, stroke support, and complaints services.

If you would like to find out more about the work we do with community groups, or with individuals, contact [Sarah](#) or [Maria](#) on 020 7832 5828.



If there's a problem with their treatment patients want clear and simple information about how to complain and the process should be easy to navigate.

A recent national report has called for greater transparency in the way the NHS deals with complaints. We wanted to see how well we were doing in Islington.

Olav Ernstzen,
Chair of Healthwatch Islington, and mystery shopper

Healthwatch Undercover: Mystery Shopping

Mystery shopping involves trained Healthwatch volunteers visiting local services, posing as customers, in order to assess areas such as customer service and information provision.

In December and January our mystery shoppers visited all 37 GP practices to check if there was clear information available on how to make a complaint.

They checked whether comments and complaints leaflets or posters were available on display in the waiting room. If they were not, they asked reception staff for a copy of the surgery's complaints process.

Some GP centres displayed complaints information very clearly, with the Elizabeth Avenue and Hanley Road practices amongst those that our volunteers found to be particularly good. However, we also uncovered inconsistencies, out of date information referring patients to bodies that no longer existed, and variable levels of support offered by GP reception staff.

We found information about how to make a complaint displayed in the waiting area either in the form of a poster or a leaflet in 26 of the 37 practices.

In 17 practices mystery shoppers felt encouraged to make their complaint, either because of the way

information was worded or the way staff spoke to them. In 15 practices shoppers did not feel encouraged.

Of the 34 practices which had a web-site we found only six displaying their complaints procedure, four of these were easy to find.

We found three practices where we could not find a complaints leaflet, a poster, a copy of the complaints process at reception, or information about how to make a complaint on-line.

We will be making a number of recommendations to Islington Clinical Commissioning Group, to NHS Choices (the NHS information service), and to the GP surgeries themselves. We have included these in the report on this first mystery shopping exercise, which has now been published. You can [download the report from our website](#).

Paul Grant, the volunteering co-ordinator at Healthwatch Islington, had this to say

"Mystery shopping is a great way for local people to see how the health and social care system works at first hand. You learn a lot.

This year we won't just be looking at GP practices. There are dental surgeries, pharmacies, and mental health services that we plan to visit."



Get involved

The best thing about volunteering here is connecting with people from different backgrounds living in the borough, and looking at Health from the perspective of a community as a whole rather than that of an individual person.

Priyanka Bhatia, Healthwatch community ambassador

Would you like to volunteer as a Healthwatch community ambassador? You would gather local people's views about health and social care, visiting venues all over Islington.

We are also looking to welcome new members to the steering group. This is an elected role and if you would like to stand please let us know by 17 February. Steering group member Phillip Watson explains how he has benefitted from being involved

“Membership of Healthwatch Islington and being on the steering group means that I am kept up to date with developments in health and social care. This means that I can keep the people and groups I work with informed. It also means that there is the opportunity for the groups I work with to utilise the structures and statutory powers of Healthwatch Islington to influence commissioners and providers and to highlight issues and concerns. The more we can strengthen this two way process the stronger our voices can be.”

Contact [Paul Grant](#) on 020 7832 5821 to find out more about all our volunteering opportunities.

Get in touch

At the moment we are especially interested in hearing from people with long term conditions. For example, we would like to hear from you if you have asthma or diabetes, or if you cope with depression, or manage a heart or lung condition.

We want to find out whether you think enough support is being provided for long term conditions by GPs in the borough. Call [Emma Whitby](#) on 020 7832 5814 to take part in this survey.

Our previous survey, looking at the care people receive in their own homes, has now been completed. Overall those that took part in the survey were fairly satisfied with services. [The full report on our findings is up on our website.](#)

We would also be happy to hear your views on health and social care in general. You can [comment via our website](#), or you can phone, write, or come in and see us. We will make sure that your views are carried back to the committees and boards that take decisions on how Islington's services should look in the future.

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