

Patient Experiences of Pharmacy Services

1st April 2022 – 30th September 2023

October
2023



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Introduction

Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth & Torbay (HWDPT) are the three local independent consumer champions for people using health and care services across Devon. HWDPT listens to what people say about services – what works well and what could be improved and shares what we learn with those who have the power to make change happen.

People's experiences of primary care services are what we currently hear about the most. Last quarter we noticed that more people were contacting us about pharmacy services, so we decided to look into this further.

Background

Our national partner Healthwatch England recently found that people are experiencing serious issues when trying to get their repeat prescriptions.

[Their report](#) highlights concerns raised by the public around:

- Shortages of medication
- Delays in getting repeat prescriptions issued
- Shortages of staff
- Closed pharmacies.

Recently, Community Pharmacy England announced that:

*“the latest [‘Pressures Survey’](#) confirms that **rising costs, patient demand and medicine supply issues** continue to grip community pharmacy.”*

In addition to this, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) has published the [Pharmacy Workforce Wellbeing Roundtable Report](#), which sets out practical long-term solutions (on page 9) to address some of the issues affecting the workforce and the public's perception of the service, including:

- Public facing campaigns involving patient groups to raise awareness of pharmacy practice and

- Further research to understand the pharmacy team workloads and system stressors, such as medicine shortages and how these can be mitigated.

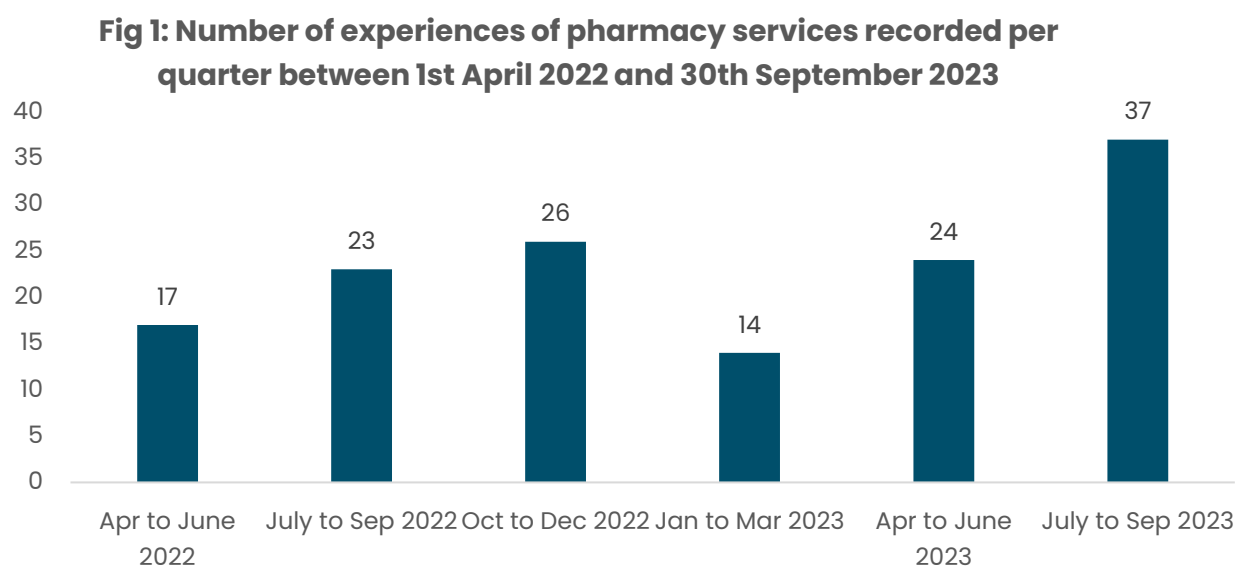
Further to contributing to the [Devon Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment 2022 – 2025](#) and publishing our 2022 report of [patient experiences of pharmacy services in Devon](#), we recently reviewed our data and found that the national findings mirror what we continue to hear from people in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.

This latest HWDPT report sets out what patients and their relatives have told us about their experiences of pharmacy services across the county between 1st April 2022 and 30th September 2023.

Our findings

This HWDPT summary report draws on the patient experiences that we recorded over the last 18 months. Feedback was received either via one of the three HWDPT websites, or through telephone calls and emails, or via our contact centre web chat facility. Over time, we noticed that the same issues were being raised – **access to services, waiting times** and **medication delays**.

On closer scrutiny we also saw that the numbers of experiences we recorded had increased slightly at the end of last quarter compared to the previous quarter. Fig 1 shows the number of experiences we have recorded in relation to pharmacy services each quarter, since 1st April 2022.



Overall, we recorded a total of **141** experiences about Pharmacy Services across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay during the 18-month period. Fig 2 provides a breakdown of the feedback recorded within each locality by sentiment. **109** experiences shared with us (77%) were negative in sentiment and of those **82** experiences (75%) recorded related to pharmacy services in Plymouth.

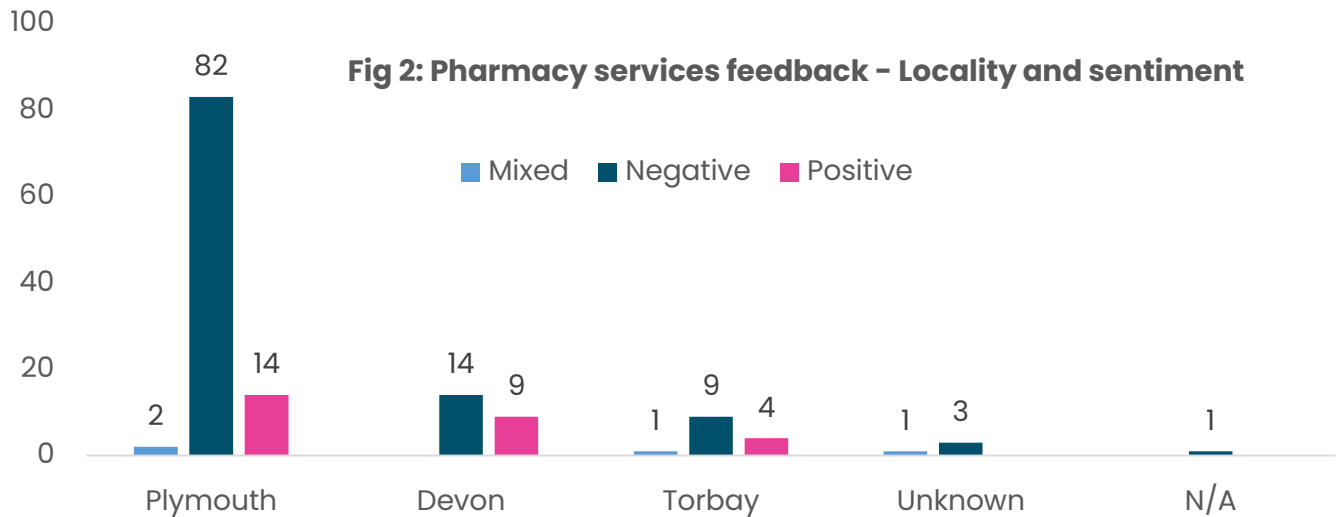


Fig 3 provides a breakdown of the feedback recorded in relation to the relevant provide network.

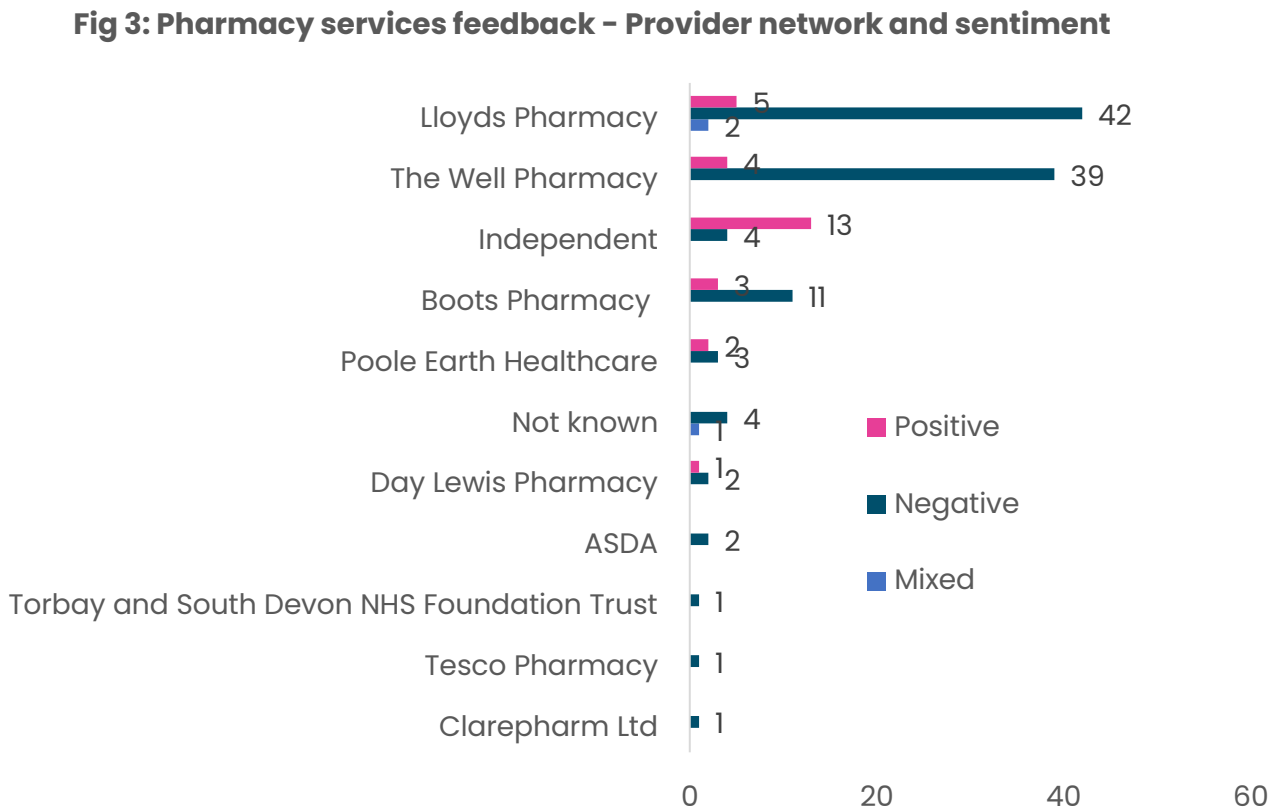
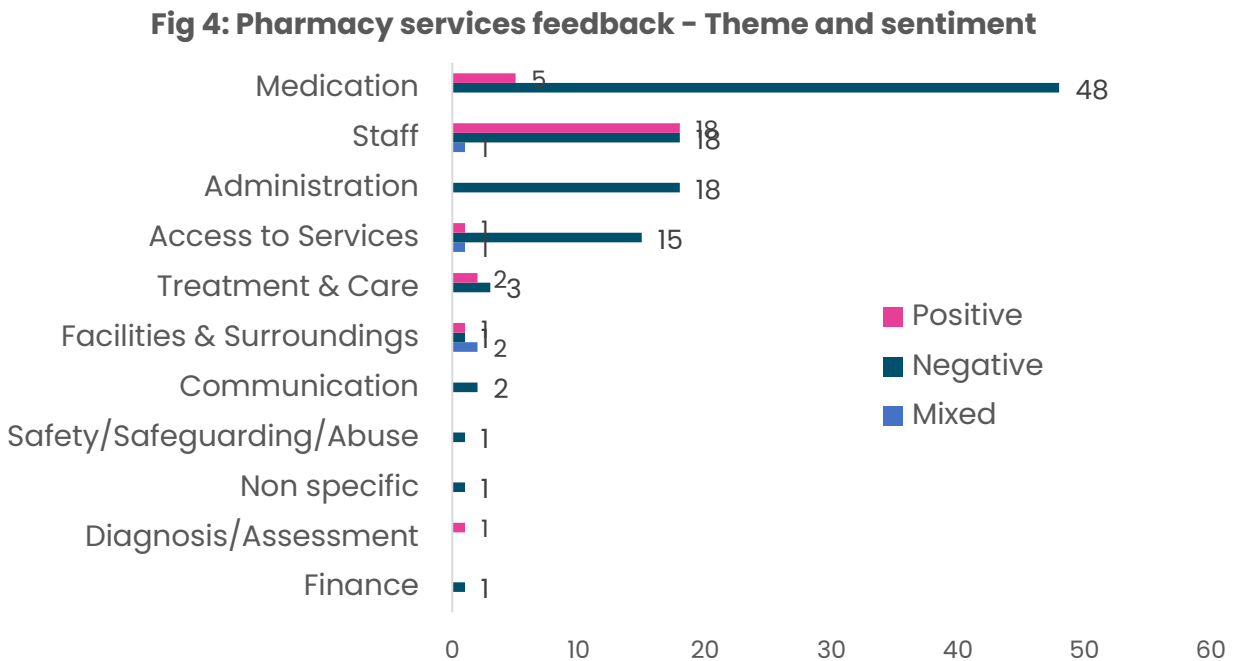


Fig 3 shows that Lloyds Pharmacy network received the most feedback overall, across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay (49 experiences, 35% of all feedback), with most of the feedback relating to the Lloyds Pharmacy, at Derriford Hospital (31 experiences, 22% of all feedback), possibly due to a higher number of people accessing this service compared to community pharmacies. As Lloyds Pharmacy at Derriford Hospital is contracted by University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust, this feedback will be discussed separately in the appendix of this report.

The Well Pharmacy network received 30% of the overall feedback (43 experiences in total), with all but 1 experience relating to 14 different Well Pharmacies in Plymouth. 1 experience related to a Well Pharmacy in Devon. 12 experiences (9%) related to The Well Pharmacy at Tesco Transit Way in Plymouth, 6 experiences (4%) related to The Well Pharmacy at Stirling Road, and 4 experiences (3%) related to Well Pharmacy at Knowle House Surgery. The remainder received 1 or 2 comments.

Emerging themes

Fig 4 provides a breakdown of the number of pharmacy experiences recorded for each theme and sentiment across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay combined (including Lloyds Pharmacy at Derriford Hospital).



The most common themes (89% of all experiences) discussed by people are:

- **Medication** – 53 experiences (38%)
- **Staff** – 37 experiences (26%)
- **Administration** – 18 experiences (13%)
- **Access to services** – 17 experiences (12%)

The next part of this report will focus on the top four themes and related commentary in more detail. Where commentary has been included, comments in pink are positive in sentiment and comments in blue are negative in sentiment.

Medication

Most of the experiences of pharmacy services we recorded that are themed under 'medication' relate to the collecting of prescriptions or repeat prescriptions. 48 of the 53 experiences recorded that were themed as 'medication' were negative. In many cases the problems related to patients experiencing stock issues when they went to collect their prescriptions / repeat prescriptions. In some cases, patients reported that only part of an order was able to be fulfilled, meaning the patient, or the patient's representative had to either return to the pharmacy later or on another day to collect their prescription, or attend another pharmacy.

Some patients commented on how this issue had impacted on them, either in terms of travel costs and extra time being taken to collect the remaining medications, or that the delay caused them concern for their health, as they rely on their prescription medication to manage their health conditions and to help them to stay well.

There were some positive comments which include:

"I live in the next village and do not have a car, they deliver our medication quickly and nothing is too much trouble."

"When I come to the area on holiday this pharmacy has been fantastic. I once came away without my daily medication and this pharmacy really stepped in and sorted everything out."

The following commentary illustrates some of the concerns raised relating to medication, broken down into two sub themes – **supply issues and waiting times**.

Supply issues

Many patients commented that they had been advised of a supply issue and that their prescription was not ready for them to collect – either at all or in part- despite some patients waiting several days more than they should have.

Comments include:

"I AM SUPPOSED TO HAVE MY BLISTER PACKS DELIVERED EVERY 4TH MONDAY. FOR SEVERAL MONTHS NOW THIS HAS NOT HAPPENED. I AM LEFT WITH NO MEDS, YOU CAN NEVER CONTACT THEM BY PHONE, STAFF ARE STRESSED"

*"Since 2007 when I had double bypass, I have collected my prescribed medicines pack from Okehampton's Lloyds Pharmacy every four weeks tablets for angina, painkillers like Codeine, glaucoma eye drops, blood pressure tablets, GTN spray, etc. But lately there's a delay in everything. I keep getting told that it is "supply problem." That does not help my angina pains. My GP prescribed a painkiller cream on 12th August, and I still haven't got it. * I overhear other patients on premises who have similar problems. This must be attended to right away please. I'm 81, I'm tired of all this."*

**Feedback was provided 22nd August 2022.*

"Never have enough stock of HRT patches."

"Total nightmare. Had text to say meds ready when I got there, they couldn't locate it had to reorder. It's always the same. Unwelcoming."

"They never have all my medication and I have to wait days for them to get it in we are talking about heart meds and psychiatric meds."

"Trying to get hold of the medication I need and when I need it is ridiculous. I put my prescription in with plenty of time, yet I still run out because the pharmacy cannot get my tablets from the wholesaler."

"Every time and I mean every single time without exaggeration or fear of contradiction, I have been to this Pharmacy there has been a problem. First, they can't find you on the system. Then they don't have the drugs in stock. Then they ask you to come back later. Or they say they will call you later. When you go back later matters are not resolved and you must come back tomorrow. Not once have I been called when they said they would. You then have to escalate matters to get what you need. Why are drugs not in stock? Why are doctors prescribing drugs that are not in stock and why are you causing patients unnecessary anxiety through not providing

what they need and not following up on what you will say that you will do? When I spoke to somebody in the Pharmacy about this response and I quote "That's NHS!"

"Collected a prescription to be told it was all there. Found something missing. Tried to call constantly engaged. Went all the way back to be told item is out of stock and have had to order in. They could have told me when I collected the first time. Mentioned the phone to say they have a technical issue. They have had the issue for such a long time you think it would have been sorted out by now. Now I have to go back to see if in stock and waste of petrol."

"She suffers from severe asthma and has repeat prescriptions for medication which are put in 28 days in advance. Every time she is due to collect the new package, there is a problem, i.e., the medication is not available, or prescription has not been processed. If there is another brand available, she has to go back to her GP to verify and ask him/her for an amended prescription. She points out that it is not a last-minute request, they have 28 days to process the order. She has called the customer service team to complain but the phone does not get answered."

I visited the pharmacy to collect my son's medication which was 2 weeks late in arriving (not pharmacy fault) to then I suggest when the medication did arrive could they put in the next prescription as we would be 2 weeks behind in meds and have run out 2 weeks ago which will continuously leave us short.

Waiting Times

Another frustration that patients shared their experiences about were waiting times for their prescriptions/ repeat prescriptions. In some cases, patients had not received their medication when they were told they would, or that they had been advised that a delay was due to a system or stock issue, or that the GP had not sent across their prescription request. Delays in obtaining prescriptions in some cases had led to patients becoming unwell and experiencing withdrawal symptoms. Comments include:

"Slow - prescriptions not ready-not answering telephones-can't find if prescriptions ready."

"My psychiatric medication was not there for 4 days my heart meds were 3 days without more, often I do not get all my medication, often short of staff using excuses of switch over to update of computer system, the pharmacist was having a hissy fit and

closed the door she was stressed and made sure all the customers heard this is not a one-off they will blame the doctors surgery. They know regular medication for the area they should make sure they have enough medication for their customers."

"Having to wait 50 mins for prescription even after allowing 10 days from taking request to doctors."

"Since this place was taken over at the start of the year it is the most hideous place to deal with. Having to queue for 45 mins in the rain to get served, only to be told to come back and endure the queue again 1hr later. This place never answers the phone either. Yet again this morning I have phoned 18 times. I wish I didn't have to deal with this place but asking to change pharmacy 3 times I feel kind of trapped."

"Up to 30 minutes late opening on a regular basis. Some staff are really blunt to the point of being rude. Disorganised. Prescriptions barely ready even after waiting a week as recommended (!!!!!) Turnaround of prescription is a joke."

It's been nearly 3 weeks since my prescription and they still don't have it or I have to go to the store instead of ringing to check and my time being wasted because it's not there. Awful service."

I have one repeat prescription, my doctor sends it 1-2 weeks early to give them time and yet every month without fail I am left going through withdrawals. Lloyds never have my medication ready on time, every time I call them, they tell me they never received my prescription, magically 1-2 weeks later they tell me they received it weeks ago and they are not sure why I was told they didn't. I am beyond fed up, I need this medication to function and instead I am spending 2 weeks a month with no medication and a bunch of "we don't know". communication is terrible, service is worse.

"Mess ups on medication, say they will deliver it due to my poor health then don't turn up. This is not the first time. I've run out of some of my medication now and run out of my blister packed medication tomorrow which is crucial to allowing me to live independently, without it I'll be in severe pain, suffering muscle spasms and won't have my blood pressure tablets."

"I was told on Thursday 26th August that my prescription would be ready on Friday 27 so I went up about 11 am to be told it would be ready after 3pm I got there late so the chemist was closed -so decided to get it picked up Tuesday 29/08/2023 and yes they haven't done it and maybe get it on Wednesday-this is for diabetic pills."

"I have been taking my medication for over 5 years now. And it is continuously messing my prescription about say they are ready to collect but when one of my children go to

collect, they either tell them they aren't there or only give them half of it. They have stated to myself and my children that we have to say whether it's our weekly or monthly that they are collecting which they have a yet the pharmacy still get it wrong. I am sick to death of this pharmacy not doing their job properly and forever making mistakes. I will be taking this further. I am on 26 tablets a day it is no joke that they can't do their job properly."

"She made a partially sighted elderly lady in front of me very distressed and refused her medication. I was collecting heart meds owed to my husband since last week, but she refused them saying they only had a small amount and were keeping them until their next delivery arrives. I explained that my husband's meds would run out on Saturday (they are closed Saturdays). She replied that he would be ok to miss them for a few days. He should wait to receive text. I gave her his mobile phone number (which they had never asked him for) then she dismissed me by turning away from the counter."

"I live in Axminster, Devon. There is a family-owned pharmacy in Axminster, they are excellent. They have recently taken over two Lloyds Pharmacies in Chard which were struggling, again the service they offer is excellent. Places like this really deserve recognition. Nothing is too much trouble. You phone and they answer immediately."

Staff

This theme relates to the service provided to patients by staff and staffing levels and availability. We see from many of the experiences shared with us that patients acknowledge that there are staff capacity issues, yet despite this, they can see that staff are working very hard to try and meet demand. Positive comments include:

Positive commentary

"I visited the pharmacy in considerable discomfort for advice. After thoroughly discussing the problem, the pharmacist rang Bampton Surgery who agreed to see me immediately. This is typical of the exceptional care I always receive there. We are so lucky to have them."

"Have always had good service from our local well pharmacy. We recently bought a blood pressure monitor and the pharmacist came straight over and showed us how it worked and explained it's functions and what the readings meant. He was busy at the time but gave us great customer service well done!"

"Staff always polite, friendly, and helpful. Happy to give advice and seem to really care about their clients."

"Staff here amazing nothing too much trouble they have always helped with my elderly dad's meds and pulled out stops to get them delivered really polite and friendly."

"Lead pharmacist and his team work very hard and the text to tell u medication ready to collect works really well."

"I can't thank the staff there enough! We were let down by another pharmacy in getting covid tests and were desperate ahead of an imminent Plymouth ferry departure! Time was running out and they went above and beyond the call of duty to save the day! Highly recommended and very much appreciated!"

"[Name] is amazing! She always makes sure myself or my partner is okay with our prescriptions. She always seems happy and bubbly. Best member of staff in the pharmacy."

"I went into the pharmacy to ask for advice about a minor injury. The pharmacist I spoke with was so kind, helpful and reassuring. A great service that was much appreciated."

"The Pharmacist and his Team are always Friendly Approachable Professional Supportive & a Valued Member of the Elberton Village Community. I have accessed Springfield Pharmacy since it opened; I have found them Exceptional at delivering a Reliable & Respectful Professional Pharmacy Service. I appreciate all the Efforts made by each Staff Member; Especially the Pharmacist who I find to be Sensitive & Compassionate to his Customers Individual Needs Knowledgeable & Easy to Communicate with. A True Gentleman with a Dedicated Team. Highly Recommended."

"Yesterday I popped into the Lloyd's pharmacy inside Sainsbury at The Willows, as I had a sore eye. The pharmacist was really helpful, she listened and asked pertinent questions, and was non-judgemental when I explained what I had already tried for my eye (it was my horses eye ointment)! She recommended an alternative and discussed what to do going forward, plus explained what was in the medicine that I had tried and why it wasn't a good idea to use it. My eye is now back to normal and I'm really comfortable. What a great service. Thank you. (It's a shame they are closing)."

"I get regular prescriptions from here and can't fault them. I've also needed the advice of the pharmacists on more than one occasion always receiving excellent information and signposted to appropriate services if needed. Highly recommend them to anyone"

in need of a pharmacy.”

Despite being overrun with insufficient numbers they provided a very good and kind service with a smile. The delays are down to understaffing.

“This is a very friendly, efficient, and flexible service. They are often available on the phone and are very helpful both on the phone and in person. Quite often the staff remember their patients/customers and that is a wonderful thing in this day and age. They are very helpful in trying to find solutions for prescription and minor ailment queries. No problem is too difficult! I have used this pharmacy for maybe 15 years now and find it a lifesaver.”

“I live in Axminster, Devon. There is a family-owned pharmacy called Morton's in Axminster, they are excellent. They have recently taken over two Lloyds Pharmacies in Chard which were struggling, again the service they offer is excellent. Places like this really deserve recognition. Nothing is too much trouble. You phone and they answer immediately.”

“They get there in the end.”

Negative commentary

Others felt that in their experience the quality of service they received and the way that staff communicated with them could be improved. Comments include:

“They look and see you are there and carry on as if you hadn't existed.”

“Medication not ready. Rude staff. Closed when they say it is open, huge queues with unhappy customers. Don't bother ringing they never answer the phone. In fact, just go somewhere else they are not worth the stress.”

“The pharmacist is always late; they never answer the phone and can't seem to get all medication ordered and then lose your prescription!”

Queues are terrible, prescription never ready, not enough staff, staff not enough knowledge. (I understand this isn't the staff's fault as not enough training and not

enough staff).”

“My husband waited outside the store with other customers whilst the staff were inside despite being within opening hours, staff are unhelpful, disinterested and not organised. After my husband had waited for almost an hour for his medication, he was given the wrong person’s prescription! So had to walk back to get it changed to his own.”

“Usual rummage through stacks of orders to locate. No system to find easily? Never answers phone.”

“The staff are always chatting amongst themselves. The queue can be almost out the door. They hold onto your prescription for 48 hours after it’s been sent up by the GP. Was told to come back 90 minutes which was not convenient. Would not recommend this pharmacy.”

“Person carried the needle through from the back of the pharmacy to the room in his hand with no cover on. He did not ask if I had any allergies and I had not given this information prior to the visit. He kept stopping and starting when giving the injection which made it painful. A technique Unlike any other injection I have been given. When I tried to speak to the manager on that day, she became defensive and was unhelpful.”

“No eye contact, no facial expression, and no communication skills (other than a grunt). Hello...we are customers not something you trod in Will never set foot in there again.”

“They don’t get prescriptions ready on time. Lie on the phone and say it’s ready turn up to pick it up and they say no it’s not and nobody said that. Make you wait half an hour with 5 other people waiting too. Staff work with sunglasses on their head. Are snobby and rude when you talk to them. Made my mum feel so uncomfortable that she won’t pick up her own prescription anymore as the staff were so rude to her.”

I was told initially that my prescription would be ready in half an hour, they had a system in place where they dealt with prescriptions as they came in and gave everyone a number. I enquired on multiple occasions as to the hold up with my prescription, as people that had come in long after me were being attended too, I was told on more than one occasion that the manager was bagging up my prescription. I waited well over an hour! The staff are incredibly unprofessional, calling clientele “love, darling, sweetheart and honey”, [...] I’m left wondering are the staff so lax, lazy, and useless because people coming to them from the hospital are left with no other option

other than to use their service? When I was there, they gave a man picking up his relative's prescription, something that he was allergic too. They then proceeded to take it back leaving the man with no pain relief! Is this really the human and compassionate side to the NHS, this pharmacy is in desperate need of a manager who can manage, and staff that are at the very least barely competent!"

"Terrible telephone experience with a female member of staff at this pharmacy. I only called to ask if there was any possibility of my medication being delivered as I'm currently housebound due to my illness and had no one available to collect my medication for me. I was brushed off immediately without explanation as wasting their time and was made to feel inadequate. She hung up on me when I confronted her with regards to her awful telephone manner, says it all!"

Access to services

Access to services – either by telephone or in person – was a common theme identified from the experiences shared with us. Experiences mainly focussed on **pharmacy closures** and **unanswered telephone calls**.

Pharmacy Closures

Several people commented that they have found pharmacies to be closed at short notice when they have arrived to collect their medications. Comments include:

"I have walked up to struggled up to [branch name] Boots on numerous occasions lately only to find they have been closed in the morning due to staff shortage sickness and to come back in the afternoon."

"Phoned to check on prescription and told it was ready Arrived at 4pm to find it closed and no info when it would be open."

"Closed for whole afternoons without warning very inconvenient."

"Lloyds pharmacy closed without notice or informing patients or neighbouring pharmacies. Causing additional pressures on other providers and on GP surgeries. They have a contract with the NHS to provide pharmaceutical services during these

hours, yet NHS England do nothing to ensure Lloyds fulfil this contract leaving patients unable to access their medication.”

“Appalling service at Lloyds chemist in [town] 2 branches in town, regularly shutting for days, unable to get prescriptions this is an ongoing problem how are residents supposed to obtain their medications, it is causing severe distress when we run out of meds and unable to access chemist despite several visits, staff don't seem to know what is going on and just say to try another day!”

“Honiton surgery has up to now had a pharmacy next to surgery which has been very convenient for both patients and the GP surgery. They have now moved to New Street close to the railway station, which makes it much harder for patients visiting the surgery to get their prescription and I am sure it is not convenient for the GP surgery either. Why do they make changes which is making life more difficult for all rather than easier? Lots of the patients are elderly who rely on Trip Community transport for the GP surgery, this now means they have an extra journey to the pharmacy before they can collect their prescription.”

Unanswered telephone calls

Many people commented that they had tried to phone their pharmacy, but their call had not been answered. Comments include:

“When I ring, I never get an answer tried 26 times in one day end up going there and there's a massive queue and then get told have to half an hour if they answer the phone, it could be done but they don't.”

“Shambles of a service, never answer the phone, long queues in store, not enough staff working.”

“Why oh why can I never contact this pharmacy by telephone just to ask a simple question where the rest of my prescription is.”

“Never answer the phone. I don't know why this chemist is there I have already complained to them, but they don't take any notice.”

“My mother doesn't drive, and her hearing is poor! She relies on myself for her caring needs! I tried phoning the Pharmacy and they don't pick up phone! My mother needs delivery service for her meds.”

"Never answer the phone, rude, not organised, not helpful never get the prescription right, always left short."

No answer from pharmacy team even though I needed to know about a script. I had to call my GP if script not there by 4.30. Can't even get hold of manager or customer service."

"I have waited over a week from my GP sending my script to the pharmacy and cannot get the pharmacy to answer the phone this has been happening for ages. Last week I sent a taxi to pick up my script to be told not ready until the next day, so I was ten pounds out of pocket if the pharmacy had only answered the phone."

"Need to know if prescription ready but no one answers the phone. Have tried many times."

"Seem unable to order prescribed medications and when phone to check if they are available don't answer phone at all."

"They never answer the phone hard to pick your prescription up as always shut when I drive past."

Administration

Patient experiences that occur within the theme of 'administration' generally relate to the administrative systems that pharmacies use or protocols that staff must adhere to. Comments include:

"Prescriptions not requested when ticked for repeat. Having to go to 111 to go to urgent pharmacy. Some pharmacies refusing to take the 111-reference number (Tesco pharmacy in Crediton) and having to do another online urgent medicine request."

"I had a phone call saying prescription was ready. Went to collect. Waiting for ages to be attended to. Customers are of no importance to staff. Then to top it off they could not find my prescription. And came away empty handed. Being told to return the next day."

“My partner who is end of life recently had his “Just in case” medication replaced because one or two items was out of date instead of just replacing the two items, they replaced everything. I had to go to 2 pharmacies before I found one who had the medication in stock. What a waste of medication, although I was told it does not cost very much!!”

“Prescription was sent on a Friday, appeared to be lied to on Monday morning being told it's not showing' which is rubbish as when I got home, I could see the prescription dated for Friday on the NHS App. Leave it until Tuesday to return (This if for an acute prescription not repeat btw) and I'm told they're only just printing it. I asked if I could wait as there was only 2 of us in the pharmacy and was told categorically it won't be done today. When I asked when it would be I was told 'maybe tomorrow'. I have wasted 2 journeys and still know nothing about when I can pick up my medications. What happened to triage and looking after those who are physically in the pharmacy waiting! Absolutely POOR service, poor attitude. I would have ordered from Lloyds Direct as it's quicker even with 2nd class postage, but my GP wanted me to speak to the pharmacist to check a contraindication - I have no faith this will even be possible!

“Slow -prescriptions not ready-not answering telephones-can't find if prescriptions ready.”

“It was unfair by all means. I purchased a 32-tablet pack of Solpadine Max soluble tablets on the date of 1st of November. Since my husband has also brought another pack on the same day from Boots pharmacy. I wanted to return the unopen pack with the bill today and asked for a refund. To my utmost surprise and disappointment, they refused to refund it.”

Observations from our 2022 Pharmacy Services Summary

In our previous [report about Patient Experience of Pharmacy Services](#), which covered the period 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022 we observed the following from the feedback we received:

‘Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the last 24 months have been like no other in recent memory for individuals, NHS and Social Care services, business, and the nation in general as we all came to grips with lockdown requirements and the

uncertainty of day-to-day life that saw many of us impacted in various ways by this virus.

NHS and Social Care services have had to adapt at pace to tackle the virus, keep people safe and where needed provide treatment for not only Covid-19, but for other illnesses and conditions be it routine or emergency.

Pharmacies have been vital in providing medication for patients and more recently for helping to deliver both Covid-19 and flu vaccines. However, it is clear from patient feedback that service delivery has not been easy, especially around prescribing/repeat prescribing where timelines appear not to have been met, staff attitudes to patients/customers have not been as they should have, and short notice closures and apparent non answering of the telephone enquiries have exacerbated the situation.

Healthwatch accept the pressures that staff have been working under due to the pandemic, especially where staff have been following national guidance around self-isolation leading to reduced staffing, but the number of comments around negative staff attitude is a concern. There also seems to have been a breakdown in other communication methods as well (text service and telephone enquiries). Shortages of staff for pharmacies in North Devon has also been raised to us by one of our Healthwatch Assist Groups (Devon Carers).

Issues around medication have also been raised with prescriptions not received or not being fulfilled – pharmacies may know there has been a supply issue for certain medication but was this fully relayed to the patient?

Even before the pandemic there have been concerns raised by patients around the prescription/repeat prescription process between GPs and Pharmacies that has left patients having to shuttle between the two to try and find out what has gone wrong as each service apparently blamed the other. Once the patient has tried to collect a prescription from the Pharmacy and an issue has been highlighted, surely this should be dealt with by process and not the patient ending up as 'the go between' to get the issue resolved?

Anecdotally we are becoming aware that dependent on how a repeat is requested (i.e., via a request handed into GP reception, request via the GP website or through the NHS App), differing times are occurring between requesting

medication and it being ready for collection. Patients need to be fully informed about the ways to request medication and the period between requesting and when medication will be available to collect so that an informed choice can be made. We have heard that ordering a repeat prescription via the NHS App will generally mean it is ready for collection 'next day' rather than 4 to 5 working days. Finally, as Pharmacies are asked to do more under the Community Pharmacy Framework and where patients are being signposted to Pharmacies before seeing their GP or referred into by other services, there is a concern that demand is outstripping capacity. By doing this without ensuring suitable resource is available are we not just kicking the problem down the street?'

Summary of our latest key findings

Looking at the patient experiences set out in this report, some of our observations from the previous report remain valid. Feedback continues to focus on medication delays and supply problems that affect the prescription/repeat prescription service, leading to longer time periods from requesting the medication to being able to pick it up. Other areas for concern include patients not knowing when their medications are ready for collection, phone calls going unanswered when patients attempt to enquire as to the status of the prescription within the system and temporary short notice closures due to staffing levels, all of which continue to leave patients feeling frustrated.

In addition to what patients have shared with HWDPT in this report, HWDPT are concerned that announced closures of instore Lloyds Pharmacies at Sainsburys across Devon and the announcement in June 2023 by Boots UK to consolidate their stores, which would see the potential closure of around 300 branches across England, may result in greater pressure being put on the remaining pharmacy services, particularly when the message being promoted to the public is to 'Think Pharmacy First'. [The Community Pharmacy Framework](#) set up to support the delivery of the NHS long term plan, to help to take the pressure off GP services may become further stretched to capacity if pharmacy services close as described above. Depending on where the Boots closures occur, it may cause further issues around patient access, particularly for patients in more rural locations.

What HWDPT has done so far

We have escalated our concerns around pharmacy services and particularly the potential effect to Community Pharmacy Services to NHS Devon, specifically to The

Primary Care Commissioning Committee, Quality and Patient Experience Committee and to The System Quality & Performance Group in July 2023.

We have raised the same concerns with the Devon Local Pharmaceutical Committee at an online meeting. Additional discussions continue to take place with NHS England Southwest and NHS Devon around our concerns and actions that are taking place to mitigate some of the issues affecting patients described in this report.

We have also shared the intelligence we have gathered from the public with our national partners Healthwatch England, so they can continue to monitor the national picture and raise any concerns nationally with their partners, including the Care Quality Commission.

Our Recommendations

Considering the concerns raised by patients and their families in this report, we recommend the following:

1. That NHS stakeholders in Devon respond to the experiences presented in this report and our findings and that their responses provide details as to how the issues raised in this report will be addressed.
2. Where pharmacies do not have capacity to answer telephone calls, they could consider introducing either an answerphone or a message facility so that patients can have their queries responded to as soon as possible. Not all patients use mobile phone apps (or are confident in using them) so being able to contact a service by telephone and to receive a response is important to patients in enabling them to be kept up to date as to when their prescription will be ready to collect, particularly if they do not automatically receive a text message when their prescription is ready for collection.
3. That NHS Devon considers the experiences and concerns raised in this report and provides HWDPT with a response as to how the issues highlighted by patients in relation to current systems of service delivery will help to inform future strategy development.

4. That in line with [Healthwatch England's recommendations](#), NHS Devon and NHS England Southwest plans how to develop capacity of the existing pharmacy workforce within the more comprehensive primary care teams across the NHS as set out in the [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#) and that Healthcare Leaders locally and nationally should urgently consider how to tackle medicine shortages for the longer term.
5. That University Hospital Plymouth NHS Trust considers working with Healthwatch Plymouth in monitoring patient experience feedback once proposed changes to the Outpatient Pharmacy service are fully implemented.

Responses from NHS Devon, Devon Local Pharmaceutical Committee and University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust

NHS DEVON

"NHS Devon would like to thank Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth and Torbay for this comprehensive report, and for ensuring that people who use the pharmacy services across the county have their voices heard.

We recognise and welcome the reference to the work done by Healthwatch England that supports the findings in this Devon report over an extensive period of time. The report highlights emerging themes around access to services, waiting times and medication delays. These findings are key to informing the future development of pharmacy services, as it enables commissioners to respond to the issues people are reporting and the impacts on their experiences.

In response to the recommendations, NHS Devon will use the outputs of this report to directly inform the development of its Pharmacy strategy, which is currently in development (2023/24) enabling us to show how the experiences of patients in Devon have been used to develop and improve services for pharmacy services and patients. We look forward to working with Healthwatch on this strategy as it develops."

Community Pharmacy Devon

“Community Pharmacy Devon would like to thank Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth and Torbay for their commitment to ensuring patient experience in relation to pharmacy service is heard. The report highlights many of the issues faced by pharmacies across Devon and how they have a direct impact on patient’s experiences.

Community Pharmacy Devon will review all recommendations made by the report and ensure that they are considered in full as part of processes for developing and improving pharmacy services, with the providers and the commissioners in Devon.”

University Hospitals Plymouth

“On behalf of University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust (UHP), I would like to apologise for the poor service patients and families have experienced recently whilst using the outpatient pharmacy that is provided in partnership with Lloyds Pharmacy. The level of service that people have received is well below the standard that both ourselves and Lloyds pharmacy expect and aspire to deliver. I would like to take this opportunity to explain some of the current issues we are facing and most importantly, what we are doing about them so that all our patients can receive a better service in the future.

As an NHS Trust, the number of patients we are treating has now returned to pre-pandemic levels and beyond as we try to recover from the impact this had on waiting times for patients. This has meant that we have simply outgrown the current outpatient pharmacy, leading to us not being able to provide a service that we are proud of and this, at times, is resulting in long waiting times for people to hand in and collect prescriptions.

I am delighted to say that we have just concluded the procurement of a new outpatient Pharmacy and by April 2024, we will have moved our outpatient pharmacy to a new on-site location that will be more than triple the size of the current premises. This will allow for a wide range of changes to take place such as:

- *the recruitment of more staff*
- *the increased use of automation*
- *using this opportunity to offer the most recent innovations around our service.*

We will be including some aspects of a home delivery service for patients who meet certain criteria as well as looking to maximise the use of local pharmacies where possible. All of which is aimed at improving the patient experience and shortening waiting times.

I hope this outlines our plans for the medium to long term, but I also wanted to provide you with some assurance about actions that we have already implemented. Lloyds have increased the number of staff in the store as much as space allows to speed up the dispensing process. They have introduced temporary seating, as well as shelter from the rain. We are working closely with Lloyds Pharmacy to do everything we can to provide additional support for our most vulnerable patients including clinics arranging for medications to be couriered out to patients' preferred home addresses at a convenient time for them, to prevent any delays whilst waiting for their medications."

Chief Pharmacist – University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust

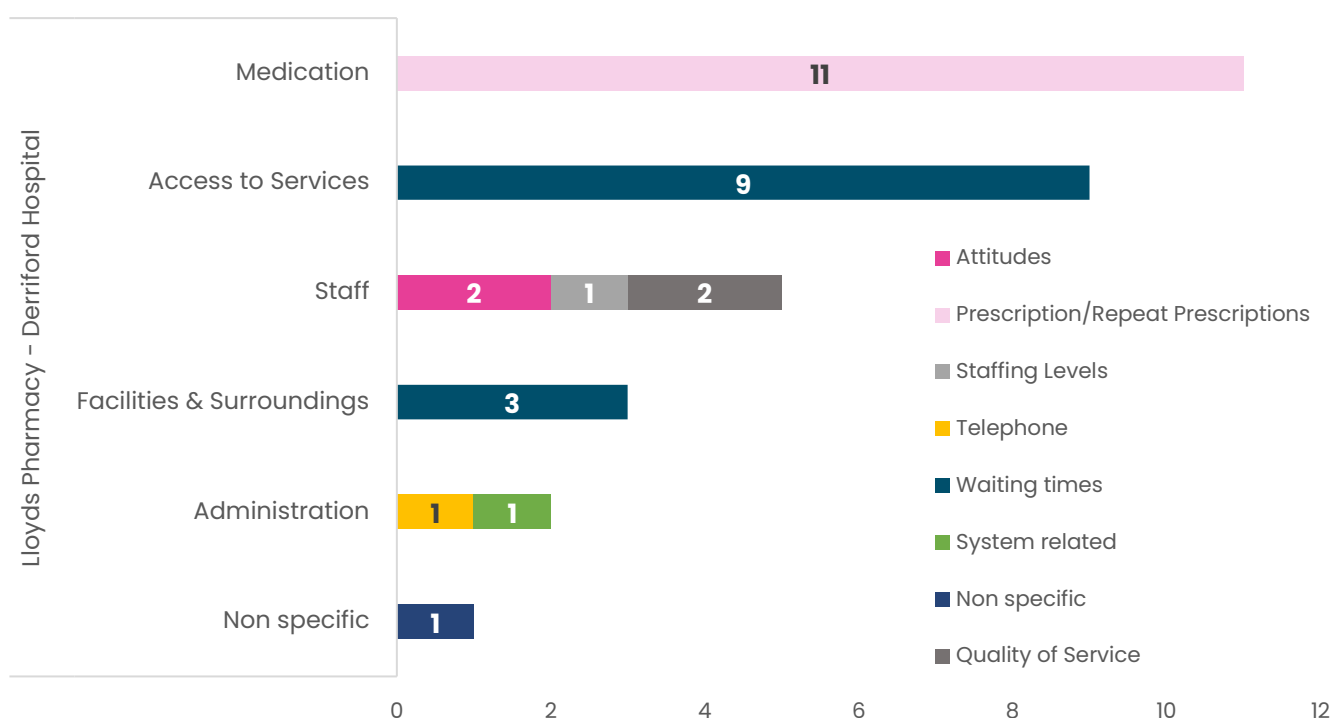
Appendix 1

Lloyds Pharmacy, Derriford Hospital, Plymouth

Lloyds Pharmacy are contracted by University Hospitals Plymouth (UHP) to deliver Outpatient prescription services for patients of Derriford Hospital and therefore the data we held in relation to this service was analysed separately in this section.

Of the 31 experiences recorded (22% of all patient feedback across Devon) in relation to Lloyds Pharmacy at Derriford Hospital, over half of the experiences relate to waiting times at the pharmacy, with several mentioning that they had to queue twice – once to hand the prescription in and again to wait for their prescription to be prepared. Fig 7 below summarises the themes that people's experiences relate to.

Fig 7: Lloyds Pharmacy, Derriford – feedback themes and sub themes



Waiting times

Access and waiting times were the most common issues that people shared with us in relation to their experience at Lloyds Pharmacy at Derriford Hospital, which people observed was due to several factors – the queuing system, handling of

paperwork and lack of stock to fulfil people's prescriptions in full. People also described concerns around the size of the waiting area, staffing levels and telephone calls not being answered.

Comments that people shared with us in relation to prescription waiting times include:

"Horrendous waits for very sick patients, in a tiny shop. Long queues out of the door in boiling heat."

"Bad, I don't need to wait 20 minutes outside in the cold just to hand in a script then be told to come back in 45 minutes to collect the meds. Then to have to wait in very small, crowded room. TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE."

"Long queues for prescriptions, no options to go to community pharmacy; told to wait out in cold as nowhere to wait."

"The place is a joke. There is no system, we waited 1 hour and 40 minutes for a prescription."

"Waited hours for prescription is too over run need more staff.... I'd take the day off if you have to collect your script from here."

"I amongst 30-40 other patients waited hours outside and inside the Pharmacy for our medication to be handed to us. It was chaotic, especially for elderly patients."

"My son's medication is consultant led. I am fed up with waiting sometimes 1-2 hours."

"Once inside told half hour wait. TERRIBLE SERVICE."

"Did not acquire correct eye drops, finally collected them after 16 days. Long queues but cannot stand as use an elbow crutch. Better organisation of queues needed, one for handing in, one for collection. Paperwork in too many trays. Please streamline system."

"Staff unable to locate prescription submitted by clinic late the previous day. Located prescription after ten minutes. It took a further twenty minutes to partly fill prescription. A phone call was received next day to say that the outstanding item was available. I enquired whether this could be delivered (it used to be possible) and was told that it

would have to be picked up. This meant that another journey was required from the outskirts of Plymouth with associated costs of time fuel and parking (always problematic at Derriford). In the half hour that I was waiting two other patients had missing items which they would have to return to pick up."

"I went to pick up two items which had been prescribed from the hospital one week previously. I should have been able to go into the shop, ask for it and have it taken from the shelf. However, after queuing outside the shop for one and a half hours I reached the counter only to be told that it was not done yet and I would have to queue for at least another half an hour to get it. I left with my prescription after two and a quarter hours. This is totally unacceptable."

"I was relatively lucky in that I only had to wait 15 minutes to hand in my prescription this time, many wait considerably longer. I chose to wait, another 30 mins. In that time about 4 or 5 patients were told they couldn't fulfil their prescription. My turn came, and alas same for me. I have severe macular oedema and these eye drops are a sight saver. They offered to mail them to me it's now been 5 days and still no sign of them. Problem is they have the monopoly, and you cannot take the hospital prescription anywhere else. So here I am progressively going blind in one eye."

"Queuing up outside in the cold for 30 minutes only to be told meds are not ready for another 40 minutes. The pharmacy is physically too small and the staff very overworked."

"After several attempts to call I found the whole experience very rushed couldn't get me off the phone quick enough."

"Went yesterday to pick up my paid for medication told didn't have them in, meant to start taking them today and still no tablets said would be there today and will call me but haven't heard anything, tried calling numerous times but no one answered I need this medication for my arthritis, also paid for this prescription and also I live miles away!!!"

Impact on patients

Several people described the impact that the waiting time had on them. One person said they received a £50 parking ticket due to waiting over an hour, even though they said they were advised it would be 15/20 mins. Another, who had not long had knee replacement surgery so unable to stand for long periods only had

10 minutes left to park so abandoned the wait without the prescription.

Patient Choice

Comments were also made in relation to patient choice and why patients cannot collect their prescriptions from other pharmacies. Comments include:

"It was chaos and the staff, Pharmacist and all customers, especially the elderly, were very frustrated and could not understand why, having received a prescription, they all are obliged to use the Lloyds Pharmacy next door to the Main Hospital Entrance. Why can't our prescriptions be sent to our own Pharmacies in our own locations?"

"Is there a reason why I have to pick up my prescription medication from Lloyds Pharmacy instead of my local Pharmacy?"

"On discharge from Emergency Dept, was given prescription for pain relief to take to Lloyds Derriford Pharmacy but they were closed for 2 days! Unable to take prescription elsewhere (my own pharmacy, who said they were unable to give medication, as the prescription form showed it could only be taken to Lloyds Derriford Hospital pharmacy. Not good enough! "

One person described their experience and how they were able to resolve their issue by contacting their GP:

"Following a consultation, I had a prescription that could only be obtained from the Lloyds pharmacy at Derriford hospital. I waited for my turn only to be told that they would not accept the prescription because my name and address were on a printed sticker stuck on rather than handwritten. Other people around me had stickers but they accepted their prescriptions! I went back into the hospital to have the prescription handwritten! I returned to Lloyds and handed it over. I was then told that because one of the items was a controlled drug (it was tramadol) I had to collect it from level 7.

I was given directions on how to get there. I arrived on level 7 and no one up there had any idea I was sent there. I was advised to try level 5 as this was the in-hospital pharmacy. They advised that all Lloyds prescriptions need to be collected from Lloyds. I eventually arrived back at Lloyds (no mean feat as I wasn't in the hospital for the fun of it!!) and was then told they didn't have any tramadol and I would have to

go back the following day after their delivery arrived. I am not very local, so this is very inconvenient. It can't be sent to another Lloyds to be collected either. It must be from there! Came home and called my doctor and prescription was waiting for me in my local pharmacy within the hour! Why make it so difficult!"

Staffing levels

Patients who shared their experiences with us acknowledged that staff are under pressure, which was reflected in the feedback they provided:

"Staff friendly but too stressed."

"Had a prescription to fill from maxillofacial and despite being almost overrun by the sheer weight of patients the staff here provided exceptional service, they didn't have the items, but they arrived by post at my home in a timely manner, big thank you."

"Hugely understaffed the girls were working as hard as they could and had no hope of keeping up, please improve the situation!"

"Firstly, staff as pleasant as can be expected considering how massively oversubscribed this place is."

Healthwatch Observations about Lloyds Pharmacy at Derriford Hospital, Plymouth

Lloyds Pharmacy is contracted by University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust (UHP) to deliver prescription services for Outpatient Departments at Derriford Hospital. The Pharmacy is currently located in a very small retail area adjacent to the Main Outpatient Department entrance. The current contract means that medications prescribed from outpatient clinics must be collected from Lloyds Pharmacy. Also, a high proportion of medication prescribed at these clinics is specialised and would not normally be held at community pharmacies. Prescription have generally been in paper form necessitating that patients have to queue twice – once to hand the prescription in and secondly to pick up medication.

As the hospital tackles outpatient waiting lists, the footfall through the pharmacy has increased due to higher demand. Situations as described in the patient feedback above have been exacerbated by medication supply issues, lack of capacity in the pharmacy for patient waiting to include provision of suitable chairs

for those patients who are frail or have mobility issues, and prevalent hot/cold weather conditions. This has resulted in longer waiting times with poor waiting facilities leading to patient frustrations, particularly for those patients who live outside of the Plymouth City Boundary. This has led to patients questioning why they cannot use their local community pharmacy.

Progress to date for Lloyds at Derriford Hospital

During our conversations with the Local Pharmaceutical Committee in July 2023, we discussed the specific feedback for this pharmacy. Subsequently Healthwatch held a meeting with the Chief Pharmacist at UHP to discuss patient concerns and the proposals announced to move the location of the current pharmacy to another site. At this meeting, we discussed:

- A new on-site retail unit which has been identified and is situated on the outside of the multi-story carpark, adjacent to other retail units. The size of the Unit is approximately 4 times the size of the current premises. This will allow for a dedicated waiting area inside the new premises whilst also making staff working conditions better. The multi-story car park is further away from the outpatient's department and there is an upward slope that may make it difficult for patients with mobility/frailty issues. No other existing site has been identified within the main hospital building that is suitable. The new site is scheduled to be open in October/November 2023.
- Healthwatch pointed out that there may be an opportunity to mitigate the current access for those with mobility and frailty issues by using the internal lift within the car park and by footpath markings and signage to allow better access thus mitigating against the slope.
- Future hospital plans will see the development of the current Northwest Quadrant adjacent to the multi-story car park providing new outpatient departments and elective surgery facilities. This will place the new outpatient pharmacy in the centre of these activities and access will be better from a mobility/frailty perspective. As services expand and there are increasing number of off-site locations, there will never be a perfect location for an outpatient Pharmacy. The key, therefore, is a flexible service model for patients rather than the location of a single outpatient pharmacy.

- An outpatient Pharmacy in a hospital does not allow for dispensing of prescriptions written in the community. Conversely, 80% or so of medicines that are 'hospital only drugs' would not be routinely stocked by a community Pharmacy.
- Patients will have a choice around how they receive their outpatient prescription as follows:
 - Attend the Outpatients Pharmacy,
 - Medication to be delivered to their local community pharmacy for collection,
 - Have medication delivered to home address.
- The contract for the outpatient pharmacy service is out for tender with the process due to complete this year. (As an NHS Trust there is not an opportunity to bring Outpatient Pharmacy 'in house' as NHS Foundation Trusts can).
- Further, NHS Trusts have recently been granted access to Primary Care Prescribing software. This will allow prescriptions that are non-specialist medication to be prescribed to a pharmacy of the patient's choice. Currently only 1 NHS Trust has this at present, but this is being investigated by UHP.

As a result of these initiatives, HWDPT can see that steps are being taken to improve the situation for patients who visit the pharmacy at Derriford Hospital, and we will continue to monitor patient feedback as these new initiatives are implemented.

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