



North East and North Cumbria

NHS North East and North Cumbria
Integrated Care Board

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RE: Non-complex Adult Hearing Services Review report

Good afternoon Lisa,

Thank you very much for your support in our review of non-complex, age-related adult hearing services in the Tees Valley. Healthwatch South Tees' support in promoting opportunities for patients to give their thoughts on these services provided lots of useful feedback for us to consider when designing the future model of this service for 2023/24.

We have considered the findings from survey participants who were from Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland, as well as the feedback gathered at Healthwatch-led focus groups (featured in this report) in our amendments to the service specification for this contract.

Issue / Recommendation	NENC ICB Response
<p>There was a lot of confusion regarding which branch patients initially need to contact in order to book an appointment at their chosen location.</p> <p>Recommendation: <i>This requires better promotion including the reasons for this e.g. the diary is held in a central location, or at least an offer from the other locations to ring the main branch to do this on behalf of the patient.</i></p>	<p>Specific feedback has been provided to individual service providers who run a branch-clinic model and has been discussed within existing contractual discussions.</p>
<p>The majority of people spoken to who were 'house-bound', had a registered disability or mobility issues weren't offered or were aware of the home-visit appointments.</p> <p>Recommendation: <i>Better promotion and identification at the initial appointment booking stage, whether a patient requires a home visit service.</i></p>	<p>There is a requirement for all providers to offer home visits for suitable patients and this has been included in the service specification. We can work with providers during mobilisation to promote this aspect of the service.</p>
<p>There was confusion about how this NHS service can be accessed and if there is a</p>	<p>The service does require referral by a GP, this is to ensure patients are referred when</p>

<p>cost associated with this. Some attendees thought you needed to be referred by your GP and others had accessed the service themselves.</p> <p>Recommendation: <i>Promote this service is free, and what is included, needs to be considered not just through digital platforms as many of these patients using this service are not digitally included.</i></p>	<p>they are clinically optimised and to a service that best meets their needs. We will work closely with providers during mobilisation and beyond to market their NHS service effectively, plus make access routes to the service clear.</p>
<p>People felt their NHS-provided hearing aid did not meet their needs due to factors such as wearing glasses, flimsiness, ear shape and interference / background noise.</p> <p>Recommendation: <i>Consider options for providing a range of different hearing aids to suit the needs of a variety of individuals.</i></p>	<p>Providers are able to offer a wide range of hearing aids as part of this service to meet the needs of patients. The service specification ensures that patients are offered a follow up appointment after fitting so they can discuss whether the aids are of benefit, and patients are offered (at least once a year) access to ongoing aftercare so any issues thereafter can be addressed.</p>
<p>There was lots of discussion during the focus groups regarding the lack of reasonable adjustments that were not being made regarding the preferred way patients required communication from this service.</p> <p>From 1 August 2016 onwards, all organisations that provide NHS care and/or publicly funded adult social care are legally required to follow the Accessible Information Standard. The Standard sets out a specific, consistent approach to identifying, recording, flagging, sharing and meeting the information and communication support needs of patients, service users, carers and parents with a disability, impairment or sensory loss.</p> <p>Recommendation: <i>Include the Accessible Information Standards as essential within the service specification and monitor this as part of the contract monitoring process.</i></p>	<p>This requirement is included within the NHS Standard Contract. The commissioner also has the ability to undertake audits and quality visits to ensure care is accessible amongst other areas and these will be enacted when the new service goes live.</p> <p>As services are legally and contractually required to adopt AIS principles, and this is monitored by the Care Quality Commission to ensure that they are being met.</p>
<p>Feedback indicates that patients don't have any problems getting batteries replaced for their hearing. However, when there is a more complex problem that requires support, it doesn't appear to be as easy to resolve (e.g., repairs, cleaning).</p> <p>Recommendation: <i>At the point of hearing aids being issued, maybe there needs to be clear information regarding what to expect from aftercare and how to access this element of the service.</i></p>	<p>The service specification places duties on providers to offer comprehensive aftercare, and they also have a responsibility to regularly undertake patient feedback surveys/audits to ensure their needs are being met. This will be tested as part of the evaluation process to award new contracts as part of the upcoming procurement.</p>

<p>Many focus group attendees highlighted the problem they were having with accessing ear wax removal treatment, which has an impact on the service they are offered during their hearing appointments. Some people said they can have this done at their GP surgery and others can't, which is confusing.</p> <p>Recommendation: <i>Provide information to the Adult Hearing service deliverer which GP surgeries offer ear wax removal and a list of external providers who can offer this, and the cost of this so patients can make an informed choice, and consider if ear wax removal could be offered by Adult Hearing service providers as part of their contract.</i></p>	<p>This can be picked up with primary care and the providers during the mobilisation phase.</p> <p>'Aural care' (ear care) is one of the enhanced treatments listed in the Local Improvement Scheme we commission from general medical practices. This involves the provision of self-care advice and removal of ear wax as per NICE Guideline 98.</p> <p>Patients are also able to access ear care support from pharmacies, be supported to self-care where applicable, plus be referred to secondary care services where needed to assist in ear wax removal.</p>
<p>A patient was unable to get details of a Comments and Complaints process for a provider as it wasn't visible on their website.</p> <p>Recommendation: <i>Ensure that all commissioned services clearly have their complaints and comments process visible on their website with clear timescales for response so patients know what to expect and what the process is.</i></p>	<p>This has been addressed directly with the provider concerned.</p>

We also note that there were recommendations made within the report relating to promotion and awareness raising in terms of service access, cost and provision, which will all be taken into consideration as part of new service mobilisation planning.

Thank you again for Healthwatch South Tees' assistance in this engagement exercise and for providing this report and recommendations. We value the feedback received from patients and this will undoubtedly lead to a more accessible and improved service for everyone who requires its support.

Kind regards,

Karen Hawkins – Director of Place, NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

Cc: **David Gallagher** – Executive Director of Place (Tees Valley and Central) NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board