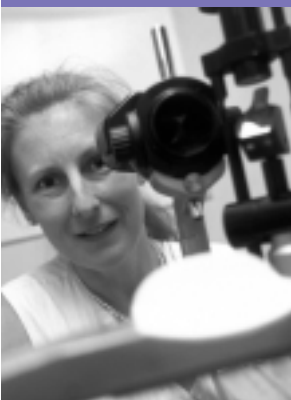


Commission for
Health Improvement

Outpatients
patient survey 2003

CHI 文文



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Introduction



A vital step to improving hospitals and other health services so that they meet the needs of the patient is to ask the patients themselves what they think about the NHS. One way of doing this is by carrying out surveys of patients who have recently used health services. The Commission for Health Improvement is responsible for carrying out national surveys of the NHS. By running surveys across the country and publishing the results, CHI is able to provide important feedback about the experience patients have of their local health services.

During 2003 CHI carried out three national surveys asking patients across England about their experiences of **accident and emergency (A&E)**, **outpatients** and **primary care services**. CHI has now published three reports summarising the key findings from the surveys and describing the patient's experiences of each of these services.

This report summarises the key findings from the survey of outpatients. All NHS acute trusts who run outpatient clinics for adults took part in the survey and we received completed surveys from over 90,000 recent patients.

The results of the survey and the patients experience relating to your local NHS hospital trust are available in detailed reports and can be found on the CHI website www.chi.gov.uk/eng/surveys/nps2003/outpatients.shtml

The patient's journey through the outpatient department

Outpatient departments provide access to a wide range of clinics including cardiology, dermatology, diabetes, obstetrics and gynaecology where a patient will see a consultant or another health care professional.

Patients arriving at an outpatient department have usually been referred by their GP or maybe from their emergency department. From the survey 37% of patients were having their first visit while 63% were attending for a follow up appointment.

The waiting time for an appointment varies from less than one month to more than 18 months.

Most patients (61%) had some tests during their appointment, to help find out more about their condition. Not many patients had any treatment for their condition during their appointment (29%), and 29% had new medications prescribed for them before leaving the outpatient department.

Before the appointment

The results of the survey showed that 98% of patients had an appointment to attend the outpatient department and 73% went to the outpatient department within three months of being told they needed an appointment.

- 37% of patients were seen within one month
- 36% waited between one and three months for an appointment
- 13% waited between three and five months
- 10% waited between five and 12 months

"Staff were friendly, discreet and sympathetic. Reception staff took time to notify me of a cancellation so I could be seen sooner. Excellent service."

"I am very upset because I can't get an appointment. I have waited over six months."

Some patients waited even longer for their appointment – 1% waited between 12 and 18 months and 1% waited more than 18 months (2% of patients went to the outpatient department without an appointment).

Twenty three percent of patients had their appointment changed by the hospital. In 18% of cases the appointment was changed only once, however, 4% of all patients had their appointment changed at least twice by the hospital.

"I think the procedure for making appointments needs to be looked at carefully and patients should be kept better informed of changes. The disruption caused to myself and my family by the mix up with the appointment was very great. My husband and daughter arranged time off work to care for me, only to do the whole thing again the following week. I also feel that the aftercare should be improved."





Although patients received their appointments some said that they were not very well informed before the appointment particularly with regards to the reason for the appointment and who to contact if their symptoms got worse.

Waiting in the outpatient department

Patients can experience problems with extended waits once they arrive for their outpatient appointment.

- 19% were seen at their stated appointment time or earlier
- 10% of patients were seen within five minutes of their stated appointment time
- 25% waited between six and 15 minutes for their appointment to start
- 22% waited between 16 and 30 minutes
- 14% waited between 31 and 60 minutes
- 8% waited between one and two hours beyond their stated appointment time
- 2% reported waiting for more than two hours to be seen

“If you are told a time you are going to be seen you need to stick to it or as soon as possible.”

“...it seemed everybody had the same appointment time and therefore I wasn't seen for two hours.”

“I don't see the point of appointment times if they are not adhered to. Choice of appointment times would be much better. Opening midday and evenings would help as well.”

Only one quarter of patients (25%) were told why they had to wait for their appointment to start, beyond the stated appointment time. One third of patients (32%) were not told why they had to wait, but would have liked an explanation while other patients (43%) were not given a reason for having to wait, but said they didn't mind.

Cleanliness is an important issue for patients. Sixty percent of patients reported the outpatient department they attended to be very clean, 37% said it was fairly clean and 2% of patients felt the department was not very clean.

“It was clean and bright with plenty of seating.”

“My outpatient department was next to surgical wards but the area was very unclean and very poor in decoration and lifts were not clean.”

“Hospital corridors are cleaned only in the centre, not down the sides, it's not hygienic.”

The appointment

Most patients (84%) saw a doctor during their outpatient appointment and over half (54%) saw another health care professional, for either all or part of their appointment. In most cases (61%), this other member of staff was a nurse. A further 18% of patients saw a radiographer, 6% of patients saw a physiotherapist, 1% saw a dietician and 1% saw a pharmacist.

When asked about their appointment, 83% of patients definitely had confidence and trust in the person treating them. A further 16% said they had confidence and trust to some extent, but 2% of patients did not have confidence and trust in either the doctor or the other health care professional they saw.

Most patients who saw a doctor spent 20 minutes or less with the doctor (88%) and 12% spent more than 20 minutes. As a result:

- 74% of patients felt they definitely had enough time to discuss their health or medical problem with the doctor
- 22% of patients would have liked more time to some extent
- 3% of patients felt they did not have enough time to discuss their condition with the doctor

"The staff were very helpful and friendly, they gave me a sense of security and confidence."

"I found the consultant and his staff (including nurse) very confident and reassuring."

"I was given a lot of time by a doctor who was very busy."

"I felt rushed and didn't have time to ask questions as consultant was running very late."

Most patients (82%) reported that the doctor was aware of their medical history. However, 13% of patients said that the doctor knew something, but not enough and 5% of patients thought that the doctor knew little or nothing about their medical history.

"The doctor I was sent to by my GP is very clear and helpful, but when I don't see him I have to go through everything all over again and I am asked questions which made me anxious and worried."



Good communication between doctors or other health care professionals and patients is a very important aspect of patient care. The survey highlighted some areas where communication could be improved:

- 79% felt that the doctor had definitely listened to all they had to say. But 19% of patients felt that the doctor had only listened to some extent and 2% felt the doctor had not listened to what they had to say
- 69% of patients who had important questions to ask the doctor felt they had definitely been given answers that they could understand. But 26% only understood the answers they were given to some extent and 3% of patients were not given answers, which they could understand. A further 2% of patients did not have an opportunity to ask the doctor any questions
- 9% of patients thought that the doctor was deliberately not telling them certain things they wanted to know, either definitely (2%) or to some extent (7%)

"If the doctor had read my notes from my GP he would have realised he was wasting both our time as I required tests that needed to be carried out in the morning, not afternoon."



- 9% of patients felt that doctors and/or other staff had talked in front of them, as if they weren't there to some extent and 3% reported that this had definitely happened (88% of patients did not report this problem)

“The doctor hasn't told me things I need to know about my condition. When I ask questions, the answers are always brief and abrupt.”

- 7% of patients reported that different members of staff had given them conflicting information to some extent and 4% reported that this had definitely happened to them (90% of patients did not report this problem)

Two percent of patients needed help with understanding English. Among this group:

- 26% received help from hospital staff in the outpatient department
- 48% of patients had help with interpretation from a relative or friend
- 27% of patients who needed help with understanding English did not get any

“My first visit was with the consultant, 2nd was with a colleague who I felt wasn't completely honest. I feel more would have been done if I were a younger person.”

Providing patients with basic information can help to alleviate any anxieties and fears. It also helps to equip them to make informed choices about their care and treatment. The survey highlighted some gaps in the information provided to patients:

- 81% felt they were given the right amount of information about their condition or treatment while in the outpatient department. But 12% of patients felt they were not given enough information and a further 7% said they were not given any information at all about their condition or treatment
- amongst patients who needed treatment, over three quarters (76%) said the doctor had explained the reasons for any treatment or action completely. But 22% of patients felt that the doctor had given an explanation they could understand to some extent and 3% of patients said the doctor had not explained the reasons for their treatment in a way they could understand. (These figures exclude the 3% of patients who said they did not need an explanation of their treatment)
- 70% felt they were involved as much as they wanted to be in decisions about their care and treatment. But 24% of patients only felt involved to some extent and 6% reported that they were not involved as much as they wanted to be in these decisions

Tests and treatment

Sixty one percent of patients had some tests including blood tests, x-rays or scans during their outpatient appointment, to help find out more about their condition.

Whenever tests or treatment are needed, providing information to patients is an important aspect of their care.

“There was awareness by staff of my anxiety about the possible results of tests. I recently visited the ophthalmology department for an assessment and would like to commend the nursing manager for her care and attention. She explained the test etc. that I was about to have and put me completely at ease.”

The survey found that some patients did not know why their tests were carried out, or were not told anything about the results. Of those patients who had tests:

- 72% felt that a member of staff had explained fully why the tests were needed, but 18% of patients understood the explanation given to some extent and 9% said that staff had not explained why the tests were needed in a way they could understand
- 79% were told by staff how they would find out the results of their tests, but over one fifth (21%) of patients were not given this information
- 52% said that a member of staff had 'definitely' explained their test results in a way they could understand. Almost one fifth (19%) said they had understood the explanation of their test results 'to some extent', but 9% had not understood the explanation given
- 21% were not given the results during their appointment – 16% were told that they would be given the results at a later date and 5% were never told the results of their tests

Twenty nine percent of patients had some treatment during their outpatient appointment. Ninety six percent of patients wanted an explanation of what would happen before the treatment began:

- 77% said that a member of staff had definitely explained what would happen before the treatment began
- 18% felt they had been told what would happen to some extent
- 6% said that staff did not explain what would happen during their treatment (these figures exclude the 4% of patients who did not want an explanation of their treatment)

“I recently had an operation, the hospital failed to inform me of the significant changes I would experience. The operation involved lifestyle changes.”



Ninety one percent of patients who had treatment during their appointment wanted a clear explanation of any risks and/or benefits of the treatment before it began. Of these:

- 67% said that a member of staff had definitely explained any risks and/or benefits in a way they could understand
- 21% said the risks and/or benefits had been explained to some extent
- 12% said that staff had not explained any risks and/or benefits in a way they could understand (these figures exclude the 9% of patients who did not want an explanation of risks/benefits)



Leaving the outpatient department

Most patients (71%) were not prescribed any new medications for example, medicines, tablets or ointments before leaving the outpatient department. However, when medication is prescribed, it is crucial that patients are well informed about why it is needed, how to take it correctly and any possible side effects. The survey found there is room for improvement in providing this information to patients. Of those patients (29%) who were prescribed new medications:

- 82% said that a member of staff had completely explained the purpose of the new medications they were given to take at home. But 13% said this had only been explained to some extent and 5% said the purpose of the medications was not explained in a way they could understand. (These figures exclude those patients 7% who said they did not need an explanation of the purpose of the new medications they were prescribed)
- 86% said that a member of staff had completely explained how to take the new medications they were prescribed. But 9% felt they had only been told how to take their new medications to some extent and 5% were not told how to take them. (These figures exclude those patients (8%) who said they did not need an explanation of how to take the new medications they were prescribed)

- 42% said that a member of staff had explained any medication side effects completely. Nineteen per cent said they were told about any side effects to some extent and 39% said they had not been told about any medication side effects in a way they could understand. (These figures exclude those patients (18%) who did not need an explanation of any side effects of the new medications they were prescribed)

Patients also need information to help them manage their condition after they go home, such as how to recognise danger signals, when to seek help and who to contact if they become worried about their condition or treatment:

"I was given printed information regarding how to care for wounds to take home and the nurse talked me through everything as well. Both nurse and doctor were friendly and professional."

- 35% of patients were told about any danger signals regarding their illness or treatment to watch for after they went home

"I had one bad doctor, he never spoke to me and was not nice, he sent me home and never told me what to do."

- 53% said that hospital staff had told them who to contact after they got home if they were worried about their condition or treatment

Overall

Fifty nine percent of patients thought that the outpatient department was very well organised. A further 38% said it was fairly organised and 2% said it was not at all organised.

Overall, most patients (99%) felt they were treated with respect and dignity whilst in the outpatient department, either all (87%) or some of the time (12%). Only 1% of patients said they did not feel as though they were treated with respect and dignity.

"I was extremely impressed with the organization, efficiency and the genuine caring of everyone who dealt with me in the outpatient department."

Almost four fifths of patients (78%) rated the care they had received in the outpatient department as either excellent (37%) or very good (41%). A further 16% of patients rated their care as good, but 5% rated it as fair and 1% rated it 'poor'. Fewer than 0.5% of patients rated their care as very poor.

About CHI

What is the Commission for Health Improvement?

The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) was established to improve the quality of patient care in the NHS. It does this by reviewing the care provided by the NHS in England and Wales (Scotland has its own regulatory body, Quality Improvement Scotland, formerly known as the Clinical Standards Board). CHI aims to address unacceptable variations in NHS patient care by identifying both notable practice, and areas where care could be improved. CHI has six operating principles that underpin all of its work:

- the patient's experience is at the heart of CHI's work
- CHI will be independent, rigorous and fair
- CHI's approach is developmental and will support the NHS to continuously improve
- CHI's work will be based on the best available evidence and focus on improvement
- CHI will be open and accessible
- CHI will apply the same standards of continuous improvement to itself that it expects of others

How was the survey undertaken?

Each trust identified a list of patients who had attended an outpatient appointment (excluding maternity or psychiatric clinics) during either November 2002 or January 2003. Staff at the hospital selected 850 patients from the list, at random. The sampled patients were sent a postal questionnaire and a covering letter and up to two reminders.

How was the survey developed?

The questionnaire and survey methods were developed for CHI by the NHS Survey Advice Centre at the Picker Institute

Europe. They carried out interviews and focus groups with patients to find out identify the issues which patients considered to be most important (a full report of the development and pilot work for the outpatients survey is available on the www.nhssurveys.org website).

Who took part in the survey?

For the national survey, in total over 143,000 patients were sampled. Completed questionnaires were received back from 90,552 – a response rate of 63%, after allowing for some patients who proved to be ineligible. Response rates varied among trusts, from 34% to 76%.

Nationally, of all those patients who returned completed questionnaires:

- 42% were men; 58% were women; 11% were aged 16-35; 18% were aged 36-50; 29% were aged 51-65; 33% were aged 66-80; 9% were aged 81 or over
- 95% of respondents were White; 2% were Asian or Asian British; 2% were Black or Black British and 1% were either of mixed race or from Chinese or other ethnic groups
- 17% of respondents rated their health during the past 4 weeks as 'excellent'; 33% rated it 'very good'; 29% rated it 'good', 15% rated it 'fair', 5% rated it 'poor' and 1% rated it 'very poor'. Comparing these figures with the results from the **accident & emergency department survey (2003)** shows that the self reported health status of outpatients was better than patients recently attending A&E departments. Thus, 79% of outpatients rated their health during the past four weeks as 'good' or better, compared with 61% of respondents in the emergency department survey



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