

National summary of the Outpatients department 2011 survey

This national summary provides key findings from the fourth national survey of adult outpatient services. It details the key aspects of care and highlights statistically significant differences between the 2009 and 2011 survey results. A statistically significant difference means that the change in the results is very unlikely to have occurred by chance. The results are primarily intended for use by NHS trusts to help them improve their performance. The CQC has included data in its Quality and Risk Profiles to assess compliance with the essential standards set by the government, and has published data for all NHS trusts on its website.

A set of tables showing the full year on year results for England, for each question is also available on the CQC website, along with the results for each NHS trust: www.cqc.org.uk/outpatientsurvey2011

Summary

Since 2009 there has been an increase in the proportion of patients who had visited the outpatients department before for the same condition (58% rising to 69% in 2011). Some of the differences between the two survey years may, in part, be due to a decrease in 2011 in the proportions of patients attending the outpatients department for the first time. In addition, there is a higher proportion of people with long term conditions or illnesses within the group returning for repeat appointments. For these reasons we present results separately for two groups (first appointments and repeat appointments), where it seems likely that the change in respondent profile may account for some of the differences between results.

Generally, there have been some improvements since the 2009 survey, such as being seen on time or early for an appointment, in the cleanliness of the outpatient department and toilets, the ratings of overall care received at the outpatient department, and in being treated with respect and dignity.

There have also been improvements shown in some of the results of the questions asked about doctors. These include doctors giving patients' explanations for any action or treatment; patients getting answers from doctors to important questions that they wanted to ask and patients feeling that doctors knew enough about their medical history.

There has been an increase in the proportion of respondents reporting that they 'definitely' got answers that they could understand from other professionals when asking important questions, and there has been an increase in those who felt they 'definitely' had confidence and trust in other professionals.

Improvements have been shown in how respondents felt they were involved in decisions about their care and treatment and in the amount of information given to them about their condition and treatment. More respondents

'definitely' knew what would happen during their appointment, though this could be related to there being more respondents attending for repeat appointments.

A considerable improvement was also shown in the proportion of respondents receiving copies of letters sent between the hospital and their family doctor.

Also encouraging was the finding that most outpatients waited less than 3 months for their first appointment (93%).

However, a number of findings have indicated a decline in performance. More respondents reported that their appointment was changed to a later date by the hospital, more so for repeat attendees. Fewer respondents waiting longer than 15 minutes were told how long they would have to wait and more respondents felt that the results of their tests were not explained in a way that they could understand (more so for repeat attendees). There was also a decrease in the proportion who felt that staff 'definitely' explained what would happen during their treatment, and 'definitely' explained the risks and benefits before their treatment, and fewer felt that staff 'completely' told them about side effects of medication. Overall more respondents reported that they did not have confidence and trust in their doctor.

Poor results were also shown in several other areas: only a third of first attendees were given a choice about appointment date and time and 7% of all respondents reported that 'very few or none' of the staff introduced themselves. Of those with long term conditions or illnesses, 16% were not asked what was important to them in managing their condition and illness, and 17% felt their appointment had not helped them to better manage their condition or illness.

There has been no improvement since 2009 in the proportion of respondents who:

- Were 'never' told the results of their tests.
- Reported that doctors or other staff 'definitely' talked in front of them as if they weren't there.
- Did not receive 'any information' about their condition or treatment.
- Experienced one member of staff saying one thing and another saying something quite different.
- Did not receive an explanation of the purpose of new medications.
- Were 'completely' told about danger signals regarding their illness or treatment to watch for after going home.
- Felt that the main reason they went to the outpatients department was dealt with 'completely' to their satisfaction.

Results of the survey

Before the appointment

Forty nine percent of those who attended the outpatients department for the first time waited one month or less for an appointment. Overall, 93% of

patients having first appointments waited no more than three months. Most of the remainder waited between three and twelve months; less than 1% waited for more than twelve months. While waiting for an appointment 31% reported that their symptoms or condition got worse, either 'definitely' or 'to some extent'.

The 'choose and book'¹ policy states that a choice of appointment should be given for all first outpatients appointments. Of the respondents attending for their first appointment, 33% said they had a choice of appointment date and time. Over half (52%) did not have a choice but felt that they did not need or want one, and 15% would have liked a choice but did not get one.

Since 2009 the proportion of all respondents (first and repeat appointments) reporting that their appointment was changed to a later date by the hospital has increased. In 2009, 21% of outpatient attendees had their appointment changed, this compares with 23% in 2011. This increase could be explained in part by the rise in the proportion of respondents visiting the outpatients department for repeat appointments. When broken down by first and repeat appointments, 20% of those visiting for a repeat appointment had their appointment changed to a later date once, compared with 12% of those visiting for a first appointment. A further 6% of respondents visiting for repeat appointments had their date changed 2 or 3 times, compared with 2% of those visiting for first appointments.

When asked whether they knew what would happen during their appointment, 45% of outpatients reported that they 'definitely' knew. This has increased since 2009 when it was 38%. Again, the increase may be explained, at least in part, by the higher proportion of respondents in 2011 who had visited the outpatients department before. Of those who had visited before, 48% said they 'definitely' knew what would happen during their appointment, compared with 29% of respondents attending for their first appointment.

Waiting in the Hospital

There has been an increase in the proportion of outpatients who were seen on time or early for their appointment (24% compared with 19% in 2009). In 2011, when broken down by first and repeat appointments who responded to the survey; a higher proportion of those visiting for a first appointment were seen on time or early (23%) compared with 18% attending for repeat appointments.

The proportion of those waiting more than fifteen minutes has decreased overall (38% compared with 45% in 2009). A higher proportion of the repeat attendees to the outpatient department had to wait for more than fifteen minutes (47%), while only 40% of first time attendees had to wait for this length of time.

¹ <http://www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/>

Of those who had to wait more than 15 minutes, a lower proportion of all respondents were told how long they would have to wait (39%) compared with the 2009 survey (40%).

Hospital Environment and Facilities

There has been an increase in the proportion of outpatients who felt that the outpatients department that they visited was 'very clean' (61% in 2009 and 65% in 2011). There has been a corresponding decrease in all other responses to the question, with 1% reporting that the department was 'not very clean', and less than one percent reporting it to be 'not at all clean' in 2011. This improvement was also shown in relation to the cleanliness of the toilets in the outpatients departments. The proportion reporting that the toilets were 'very clean' has increased from 57% in 2009, to 60% in 2011. In 2011, 5% thought that the toilets were 'not very clean' or 'not at all clean', compared with 6% in 2009.

Tests and Treatment

Fewer outpatients had any tests, such as x-rays, scans or blood tests, done when they last visited the outpatients department, (50% compared with 61% in 2009). Again, this could be a reflection of there being fewer respondents who responded to the survey attending for the first time, as 60% of first time attendees had tests or treatment compared with 58% of repeat attendees.

Of those who did have tests in 2011, 7% felt that the member of staff did not explain why they needed the tests in a way that they could understand. A further 18% were not told how they would find out the results of their tests.

The proportion of all outpatients who felt that the results of their tests were not explained in a way that they could understand has increased from 9% in 2009 to 11% in 2011. A higher proportion of respondents who were first time attendees than repeat attendees to the outpatients department felt that a member of staff explained their results in a way that they could 'definitely' understand (64% and 60% respectively).

The proportion of those who were never told the results of their tests has not changed since 2009 and remains at 5%.

More outpatients than in 2009 received treatment for their condition during their appointment (32% in 2009 and 33% in 2011).

Of those receiving treatment the proportion who felt that a member of staff had 'definitely' explained what would happen has decreased since 2009 (80% to 77%). There has been a corresponding increase in the proportion who did not receive an explanation (3% in 2009 to 4% in 2011).

There has also been a decrease in the proportion of outpatients feeling that a member of staff 'definitely' explained any risks and/or benefits before their treatment, from 72% in 2009 to 69% in 2011. Sixty eight percent of repeat attendees who took part in the 2011 survey felt that a member of staff

'definitely' explained the risks and benefits of their treatment, compared with 70% of first time attendees.

Seeing a doctor

Eighty percent of respondents saw a doctor at some point during their appointment, unchanged since 2009. In 2011, 84% felt that the doctor knew enough about their medical history, an increase from 82% in 2009. This could be due to the increase in the proportion of repeat attendees to the outpatients department in 2011. Eighty four percent of repeat attendees felt that the doctor knew enough about their medical history, compared with only 78% of first time attendees. Only four percent of repeat attendees felt that the doctor knew little or nothing about their medical history, compared with 8% of first time attendees.

There has been an increase in the proportion of outpatients feeling that the doctor that they saw during their appointment 'completely' explained the reasons for action or treatment in a way that they could understand, from 77% in 2009 to 78% in 2011. However, there has been a corresponding decline in the proportion feeling that the doctor explained to 'some extent' (21% in 2009 to 19% in 2011). In addition, two percent of respondents in both years reported that the doctor did not listen to what they had to say.

Respondents were asked if they received answers that they could understand when they had important questions to ask the doctor. Seventy-three percent felt that they 'definitely' did an increase from 71% in 2009. The proportion who said 'no' that they did not have confidence and trust in the doctor has increased since 2009 from 2% to 3%.

Seeing another professional

Sixty percent of respondents saw another member of staff other than a doctor (compared with 59% in 2009). The most common staff groups seen were nurses and radiographers. The proportions seeing these groups have changed across the survey years, which may be a reflection of there being fewer respondents who visited the outpatients department for first time appointments.

The proportion who felt that they 'definitely' got answers to any important questions that they had from these members of staff has increased from 73% in 2009 to 75% in 2011. There has also been an improvement in the proportion that 'definitely' had confidence and trust in the staff they saw; increasing from 81% in 2009 to 83% in 2011.

Overall about the appointment

Respondents were asked whether the staff treating and examining them introduced themselves. Of those who were attending the outpatient department for the first time, or who usually see different members of staff, 70% said that 'all' staff introduced themselves. Seven percent reported that 'very few or none' of the staff introduced themselves.

Four percent of all respondents reported that doctors or other staff talked in front of them as if they weren't there. A further 8% reported that this happened 'to some extent'. Both are unchanged from 2009.

When asked how much information was given to them about their condition and treatment, 83% of all respondents thought that they were given the 'right amount', an increase from 82% in 2009. Six percent did not receive any information unchanged from 2009. Six percent of respondents who were repeat attendees did not receive any information, compared with 8% of respondents who were first time attendees.

The majority of respondents felt they had enough privacy when discussing their condition or treatment: 87% 'definitely', and 12% 'to some extent' (87% and 11% in 2009). Four percent of all respondents experienced one member of staff saying one thing and another saying something quite different, with a further 8% reporting this happened 'to some extent' (unchanged on 2009).

Seventy two percent of respondents felt that they were 'definitely' involved in decisions about their care and treatment as much as they wanted to be. This is an increase of two percentage points from 2009. A corresponding decrease was shown in those reporting that this happened 'to some extent' (22%, compared with 24% in 2009).

Respondents were asked whether their appointment was about a long term condition or illness that they needed ongoing care and treatment for, and 71% said 'yes'. A higher proportion of repeat attendees to the outpatient departments reported that their appointment was about a long term condition or illness (80%), compared with 51% of first time attendees.

When looking at all those whose appointment was about a long term condition or illness, just over half (52%) reported that the doctors/staff had 'definitely' asked them what was important in managing their condition and illness, 32% said yes 'to some extent' and 16% said 'no but I would have liked this'.

Forty five percent of those who were visiting the outpatients department for a long term condition or illness felt that their appointment had 'definitely' helped them to better manage their condition or illness, and 17% said it had not.

Medications

Twenty four percent of respondents left the outpatients department with new medications prescribed (down from 28% in 2009). Five percent of those prescribed medication reported not having received an explanation (an increase from 4% in 2009). No change was shown in the proportion of respondents who received an explanation on the purpose of their new medication, with 82% receiving a complete explanation, and 4% receiving no explanation at all.

There has been a decrease between 2009 and 2011 in the proportion of outpatients who felt that staff 'completely' told them about medication side effects to watch for (45% to 43%). This decrease may be due to the increased

proportion of respondents who were repeat attendees to the outpatient departments in 2011, as a lower proportion of repeat attendees than first appointment attendees felt that staff 'completely' told them about medication side effects to watch out for (41% vs. 46%).

Seventeen percent of all respondents reported that changes were made to the medication that they had been taking before the appointment, and of these, 78% felt that a member of staff 'completely' explained why the changes were made. However, a further 6% reported that the reasons for the change were not explained. A higher proportion of repeat attendees reported that changes were made to their medication, than first time attendees (18% compared with 13%)

Information

There has been a considerable increase in the proportion of outpatients reporting that they received copies of all letters sent between hospital and their family doctors (GP), this has increased from 35% in 2009 to 46% in 2011. Correspondingly, the proportion of those reporting that they did not receive copies of any letters has decreased from 55% in 2009 to 44% in 2011.

Respondents were asked whether a member of staff told them about the danger signals regarding their illness or treatment to look for after going home. This has not changed since 2009, with 46% reporting that they were explained 'completely' and 33% who were not told.

Overall Impression

Nearly three quarters (74%) of respondents felt that the main reason they went to the outpatients department was dealt with 'completely' to their satisfaction. Four percent reported that the reason for their visit had not been dealt with to their satisfaction. This is unchanged since 2009.

Overall 89% of outpatients felt they were treated with respect and dignity; this is an increase of two percentage points since 2009. One percent reported that they were not treated with respect and dignity, unchanged since 2009.

Forty four percent of outpatients rated the care that they received at the outpatient department as 'excellent'. This figure has risen from 40% in 2009. However, the proportion reporting that the care was 'poor' or 'very poor' has remained unchanged between 2009 and 2011 at around 1%.