

Healthwatch Worcestershire's response to the Quality Account of the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust for the financial year 2021/22

Healthwatch Worcestershire has a statutory role as the champion for those who use publicly funded health and care services in the county and therefore, we welcome the opportunity to comment on the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust Quality Account for 2021/22.

This has been another extraordinary and difficult year for providers of NHS services and Healthwatch Worcestershire appreciates and acknowledges the effort and commitment of the staff at the Trust who have been working hard to do their best for patients under difficult circumstances.

As is our normal practice we have used Healthwatch England guidance to form our response as follows:

1. Do the priorities of the provider reflect the priorities of the local population?

Healthwatch Worcestershire believes that the overriding priority of patients, their carers and the public regarding Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust is that the Trust should provide safe, quality, and accessible services at its hospital sites in the county.

In April 2021 the CQC formally confirmed that all conditions had been removed from both of the emergency care departments.

We are pleased to see that the Trust has continued with the implementation of the Quality Improvement Strategy and its 3 Priorities that were co-produced with stakeholders including patients and the public in 2018: Care that is safe: Care that is clinically effective, and Care that is a positive experience for Patients and Carers.

We recognise that during 2021/22, the Trust has been required to continue its clinical focus on the COVID-19 pandemic response, and the restoration of services and that this may have impacted on the delivery of some of the improvement priorities identified for 2021/22

However, there has been measurable progress across many of the improvement priorities identified last year and we appreciate the value of carrying forward to 2022/23 those priorities where targets were not met and/or further improvement is likely to continue into 2022/23.

Improvement Priorities 2022/23:

Healthwatch Worcestershire recognises that the identified improvement priorities for 2022/23 are likely to improve patient experience, safety and outcomes. We welcome the inclusion of clear numerical targets for the majority of priorities against which progress can be measured and evaluated. We would make the following comments:

Care that is Safe:

We have welcomed the Trust's transparency in delivering the 'Digital Care Record' project. We are optimistic that its implementation has the potential to both significantly improve patient safety and the quality of care patients experience within the Trust. Its integration with Herefordshire and Worcestershire's shared digital care record will also contribute to improvements in care as patients journey through health and social care services in the county and beyond.

Healthwatch Worcestershire are pleased to note that the target to eliminate MRSA infections in 2021/22 was met and welcome the continued focus on infection protection and control to reduce C. Difficile infections and strengthening antimicrobial stewardship.

We note the implementation of the Patient Safety Incident Response Framework and recognise the importance of including patients in the governance processes.

We note the focus on patients' nutrition and hydration needs and welcome the clearly measurable targets for improvement.

Safe and timely discharge from hospital and transfers between services: we are not entirely sure what a Discharge Production Board is or its role in improving patient's experience of the discharge process but we welcome the focus on this as in our survey & Hospital Discharge Report we found that it was an area that patients and carers often found challenging. A more detailed explanation of how the objectives are going to be achieved would have been of benefit in understanding this priority.

Timely identification and Treatment of Sepsis: we are note that this is a priority brought forward from 2021/22 where the targets set were only partially met and welcome its inclusion in the 2022/23 priorities as an important area for patient safety.

Care that is Clinically Effective:

We note the commitment to continuing to learn from deaths and monitor and seek to reduce mortality rates for patients whilst under the care of the Trust. We note that this has been brought forward as a priority from 2021/22 even though the target that was set was met last year. We welcome the continuing focus on learning from deaths.

We recognise that the Trust's involvement in a regular programme of clinical audits and subsequent quality improvement projects is likely to result in better outcomes for patients and welcome the Trust's commitment to this, together with developing a new Research and Development Strategy and a focus on improving staff training.

One of the clear concerns for patients and the public in Worcestershire is the backlog of care and the waiting times for treatment. We welcome the priority around patients receiving timely treatment and care through improved waiting times, seven day services and a focus on reducing backlog: eliminating 104 week waits for elective treatment and restoring diagnostic and treatment activity to pre covid levels and hope that it can be achieved.

Care that is a Positive Experience for Patients and Carers:

We welcome the priority around patients accessing services with a clear focus around health inequalities including accessible information, strengthening the learning disabilities pathway and developing diagnostic capabilities via a community diagnostic hub. We hope that patients and carers have been involved in the planning and development of the Community Diagnostic hub.

We note that patients and their carers will be provided with a variety of methods for providing feedback on their experiences of services, to ensure learning and improvements can be prioritised. We support the continued emphasis on patient feedback as it is of such importance in continuous improvement.

2. Are there any important issues missed?

One of the areas of concern raised with Healthwatch Worcestershire and most frequently reported upon in the local media is the pressure on the Accident and Emergency Department, the waiting times and especially Ambulance Handover Times. Whilst we are aware that this is a whole system issue it might have been useful to address some of these concerns within the Quality Account.

We note that the Trust is making good progress on the continued implementation of the actions in their Maternity Improvement Plan which sets out how the Trust will continue to work on national and local improvement plans to continually improve the service offered to women and families in Worcestershire, whilst this has not been detailed in the 2022/23 improvement priorities.

For some time Healthwatch Worcestershire has been concerned about the quality of stroke service provided by the Trust. We have therefore welcomed the Trust's commitment to improve it, both by its implementation of an innovative workforce plan and its commitment to patient safety as evidenced by its response to Healthwatch Worcestershire's request through the Stroke Programme Board to report on harm reviews for those stroke patients for whom NHSE's targets in relation to effective stroke care are missed.

3. Has the provider demonstrated that they have involved patients and the public in the production of the Quality Account?

The Trust conducted their second 'Big Quality Conversation' online survey and used the results to help inform their Improvement Priorities for 2021/22. Whilst acknowledging the difficulties of face to face engagement during the last two years we would hope that going forward this will be extended beyond digital engagement to promote inclusivity.

The QA also state that the 2022/23 priorities have been formulated through ongoing engagement and action focussed refinement with staff; patients; family feedback; system partners; patient public forum; youth forum, and students via engagement sessions.

Healthwatch Worcestershire recognises that the Trust has increased its engagement with, and the reporting of, its engagement with patients, their carers and the public who live with health inequalities, are members of Ethnic Minority communities, the LGBT+ community and live with disabilities by means such as Carers' cafes and engaging with the D/Deaf community.

4. Is the Quality Account clearly presented for patients and the public?

Healthwatch Worcestershire acknowledges that there is a challenge in producing a Quality Account which is clearly presented and meaningful for patients and the public, taking into account the technical information required by NHS England. Given those restrictions the introduction does clearly set out the purpose and structure of the QA and the infographics pages are an easily accessible picture of the work of the hospital.

We recommend that the Trust should produce a summary of the Quality Account in an accessible format selecting important information for the public, complemented by an Easy Read version.

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