



Enter & View

Blakelands Hospital January 2024

healthwatch
Milton Keynes

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2 Introduction

2.1 Details of visit

Service provider	Ramsey Health care
Date and time	January 23 rd , 2024 – 9.30am to 3.30pm
Authorised representative	Helen Browse and Attiya Ahmed Mohamed
Patient Experience Review	Blakelands Hospital, MK14 5HR

2.2 Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Milton Keynes would like to thank the Blakelands Hospital and all its staff, service users and their families for their contribution to this Enter and View visit, notably for their helpfulness, hospitality, and courtesy.

2.3 Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings observed on the specific date set out above. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all service users and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

3 What is Enter and View?

Part of the local Healthwatch programme is to carry out Enter and View visits. Local Healthwatch representatives carry out these visits to health and social care services to find out how they are being run and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement. The Health and Social Care Act allows local Healthwatch authorised representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families, and carers on premises such as hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists, and pharmacies. Enter and View visits can happen if people tell us there is a problem with a service but, equally, they can occur when services have a good reputation – so we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first-hand.

Healthwatch Enter and Views are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues. However, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit, they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch safeguarding policies. If at any time an authorised representative observes anything that they feel uncomfortable about they need to inform their lead who will inform the service manager, ending the visit.

In addition, if any member of staff wishes to raise a safeguarding issue about their employer, they will be directed to the CQC where they are protected by legislation if they raise a concern.

3.1 Purpose of visit

We were invited to return to Blakelands Hospital by the Head of Clinical Services following a previous visit in 2019, the benefit of an independent review is appreciated by the hospital.

The purpose of this Enter and View programme was to engage with patients, their relatives, or carers, to explore their overall patient experience at Blakelands Hospital.

We used question prompts to encourage discussion about the referral process, booking of appointments and checking in and general cleanliness and quality of consultant care. (Appendix A)

3.2 Strategic drivers

We undertake Enter and View functions for patient experiences in settings where publicly funded Health or Social Care services are provided.

Visiting this setting meets our criteria for Enter and View:

- Understanding the needs of patients in a Healthcare setting
- Empowering the community to evaluate and change services offered.
- Using evidence to help providers better understand the needs of the community.
- Impartial feedback at point of delivery.

3.3 Methodology

The visit was prearranged, following an invitation from Blakelands Hospital to Healthwatch Milton Keynes to undertake a second Enter and View visit, the previous visit being in December 2019. We agreed, in discussion with the Blakelands team, on the purpose, the timing and how the day would run.

Posters were displayed in both the main reception area and the patient recovery area informing of our visit, an explanation of the purpose of the visit was also provided.

On arrival Authorised Representatives (ARs) were given a tour of the facilities and introduced to all staff on duty – there have been many changes since the previous visit.

The ARs were subsequently afforded access to all parts of the Hospital for the duration of the visit.

The ARs used a semi-structured conversation approach in the main waiting area, with access to a private meeting room should any patient request privacy – and in the recovery area of the hospital whilst some patients had to wait before being able to leave after minor procedures.

The checklist of conversation topics was based on the pre-agreed themes for the visits. Additionally, the AR spent time observing routine activity and the interaction of staff and patients. The AR recorded the conversations and observations via hand-written notes.

Patients were approached and asked if they would be willing to discuss their experiences. It was made clear to patients that they could withdraw from the conversation at any time.

A total of 23 patients and one family member took part in these conversations. The majority of patients spoken to were NHS referrals, the age range of patients on the day we visited was between 45 and 92 years of age and patients we spoke to were predominantly female.

At the end of the visit, the Manager was verbally briefed on the overall outcome.

4 Summary of findings

4.1 Overview

Blakelands Hospital is a purpose-built day care unit, designed to provide outpatient facilities for the assessment and treatment of patients. Treatments at the centre include Cataract surgery, Inguinal, umbilical, or femoral hernia repairs, Knee Arthroscopy, Hand Surgery, anal procedures, haemorrhoids banding and injection. Lumps and bumps and minor skin procedures as well as upper and lower limb outpatient appointments (hip, knee, and shoulder replacement).

The treatment centre has an x-ray department, outpatient consultation rooms, pre assessment facilities, two operating theatres and a four bedded recovery bay.

Whilst Blakelands treat privately insured and self-funding patients, a high proportion of their patients (90.23%)¹ are referred from the NHS.

Blakelands Hospital is situated in a quiet residential area, the grounds are pleasant and well-maintained, ample free car parking spaces are situated directly outside the main entrance which is on level ground, no steps or long walk to access the building with automatic doors for direct access to the main reception.

4.2 Appointments and Arrival

When we asked why patients had come to this Hospital and whether they had been given a choice, people told us they had been happy to come to Blakelands rather than go to the main hospital. The reasons given for this were that it has easier access, shorter waiting times for appointments and follow-ups, and the atmosphere is more relaxed and friendly, and overall gave patients a better experience.

Eye Appointments, for example, were made by a direct referral to Blakelands from Opticians via GP. Patients told us that the appointments had been made for them with only a few weeks wait for their first appointment which they were very happy about.

Patients felt that the system for booking appointments was efficient and it was not difficult or complicated to change an appointment date to a more convenient one if necessary. People also told us that the staff were friendly and helpful. Follow-up appointments and physio appointments were booked with ease, appointments ran to time, and any anticipated delays were relayed to patients as they checked in which ensured patients were content in the waiting room. This experience was related to us by both NHS and private patients.

¹ <https://www.ramsayhealth.co.uk/siteassets/hospitals/blakelands-hospital/about/blakelands-hospital-quality-account--2023-compressed.pdf>

The carpark is close to the building entrance, has free parking and straightforward access to the building which was noted by those who drove as being greatly valued. However, a few patients told us they thought the car parking spaces could be wider, or there could be more disabled parking available to better reflect the needs of those who are using the car park.

Booking in at reception, patients told us how much they appreciated the kindness and warmth of the staff:

"I'd give the receptionist a Gold Star if I could, She's great" .

"I don't like hospitals but would come back here if I ever needed any other treatments, felt so at ease, staff are really great."

Even though the waiting area was full and very busy during the day, the layout and the efficient patient management mean it does not feel noisy or overcrowded at any time. Appointments largely ran on time, with any slight delays being relayed promptly to those in the waiting room. There is also a patient notice in the waiting area inviting people to let reception know if they have been waiting more than 20 minutes over their scheduled appointment time. This means that people don't get anxious about delays or feel that they need to approach the reception desk multiple times to ask for updates about when they will be seen.

The provision of tea and coffee for patients and those who drove them was unexpected but very welcome.

All patients were called though to their appointments by a nurse for their surgery, or by the consultant they were seeing, rather than by a bleep or screen message. People told us that this personal contact throughout their visit made an impact on how they felt during their time at Blakelands:

"Staff treat you like an individual at all the times, you feel like they listen to you."

4.3 Staff interaction and quality of care

Staff attitudes and behaviour made up the largest part of our conversations with people; patients wanted to tell us what a difference receiving such good customer service made to their experience. The general theme was that because staff were kind and caring, patients felt listened to which helped to relax them and made their experience much better than what they have come to expect to in health settings.

We only heard one negative comment about staff all day:

“I was with the consultant for less than five minutes, live with it, nothing else I can do, just wrote his notes without looking at me and that was it, consultation over – no follow-up, discharged.”

While this comment was the exception to everything else, we observed and heard on the day, it is always useful to reflect the less positive experiences that people choose to share with Healthwatch. Communication is one of the biggest concerns that people bring to us and can sometimes be a sign of staff beginning to struggle with workload. It could also highlight a need for training and support to staff who might need to build confidence in how to have difficult conversations with patients.

Our ARs observations during the day were of attentive, caring staff with positive interactions between patients and staff of all levels. This provided patients with a positive experience, many commenting on how good staff were and how pleased they were to be at Blakelands rather than the ‘big’ hospital where you are just a number but here:

“they ‘know your name, have time to smile at you and listen to your questions.”

There was a very calm and relaxed atmosphere in the whole hospital, the ARs were given access to all areas and staff were happy to accommodate the ARs in all areas. To preserve patient privacy and dignity, as well as patient safety, we did not view theatres, or treatment rooms while they were in use,

4.4 Environment

The ARs first impression was of a welcoming, clean modern space with no overwhelming 'hospital' odour which can be helpful for patients who may be nervous.

There is step free access from the car park and an automatic door which leads directly to the main reception where helpful staff greet people with a smile. There is hand sanitiser on the reception desk, entrance wall and at the entrance to clinical areas, encouraging its use whilst in the hospital. The new coffee station is to the left of the reception desk and is well stocked with a selection of beverages and water.

The waiting area is set out with seating at the entrance doorway and seating arranged in three sections to give division and good use of the space, there are well signed toilets at the far side of the waiting area. Next to the reception area there is a small room with a chair a sofa should a private space be required.

Patients were impressed with the calm and cleanliness of Blakelands and gave some positive feedback:

"Really relaxed and comfortable, nice and clean"

"Facilities are good, clean friendly and efficient".

*"So much cleaner and nicer than B*****y"*

"Lovely and clean, feels relaxed – no stress".

"Changing rooms and restrooms very clean".

Overall patients told us they were very happy to be at Blakelands when comparing it to a main hospital. The quiet calm atmosphere, appointments running mostly to time, the speed of appointment booking and the ease of access to the building were all mentioned as being highly valued by patients and their carers and family.

4.5 Additional findings

Continuity of care

Patients who have procedures in other sites with their follow-up appointments at Blakelands and are then sent for physio at yet another site, felt that some continuity of location and better details on what services are on offer geographically. Blakelands would have been preferred for physio if possible. As one patient told us:

"It feels as though I have had a tour of the three counties"

Online Form

Eye surgery patients told us that the print is fairly small on the forms they needed to fill in. They said it was really a minor thing but that it would make life so much easier if it were a little larger.

Appointment duration

Patients feel well looked after and cared for during their stay but feel a little more information on anticipated length of stay could be included in the information pack sent out. Many of the patients spoken said that their stay was much longer than anticipated, and they were concerned about the wait time for the people who were picking them up.

Dementia Friendly signage

Milton Keynes is becoming a Dementia Friendly City and part of this is ensuring all of our public facing areas are Dementia friendly. Your patient demographic suggests that it is likely that some patients, or their partners, could be affected by Dementia. The signage for the toilets and the hot and cold water for hand washing within them could be made more accessible.

5 Recommendations

Following our visit, no significant issues were identified in relation to the care provided to patients at Blakelands Hospital.

We recommend that, that in order to enhance the excellent service currently offered to patients that you may consider the following:

- If possible, increase the font size on the Online booking form as a high number of patients book for Cataract surgery.
- Consider increasing the number of disabled parking bays in the car park.
- Becoming Dementia friendly in your signage would add to the high-quality service already provided, and could be standardised across Ramsay Healthcare



As an example: a simple Toilet sign and the addition of a Hot and Cold sign highlighting the water temperature on each tap or direction of the mixer tap is all that is required.

6 Blakelands Hospital response

On behalf of the Senior Leadership Team and Blakelands staff I would like to thank Healthwatch MK in supporting our quest to care and service improvement. In 2019, I am pleased to report the recommendations made from the visit were actioned and implemented.

Blakelands hospital has supported the local community during the Covid period, continuing to provide access to healthcare services despite the constraints at that time. With the lapse of time therefore, we decided another visit and independent review was overdue, we are delighted to open our doors to Healthwatch staff to 'enter and view'.

We are extremely pleased that the majority of patients considered their experiences within the hospital met their needs and demonstrated a patient centred approach in care delivery. This face-to-face feedback and the recommendations made enables the senior team and staff to review those areas identified and implement changes as suggested.

We are very proud of the Blakelands multidisciplinary team that deliver care on a daily basis whilst providing a safe and supportive environment to both NHS and private patients. We will endeavour to support the local healthcare community in everything we do and ensure we consider improvements continuously to enable outstanding care provision now and in the future.

*Gina Taylor
Head of Clinical Services
Blakelands Hospital*

Appendix A

Prompts for semi-structured interviews with service users

Why have you come to Blakelands today? (planned surgery / pre-assessment / follow-up / physiotherapy)

Did you have a choice whether to come to Blakelands or to go elsewhere? Why choose Blakelands?

How did you find the booking in process at Reception? Did you feel welcome? Did you feel your privacy was respected?

How did you find the communications with Blakelands? Have you been able to contact them by phone?

(follow-ups only) **How was your consultation?** Who did you see? Did you receive good care?

(follow-ups only) **Discharge** – Did you receive aftercare information? Were there any delays?

If there was one thing you could change about this service, what would it be?

Comments on environment – comfort / cleanliness etc



Committed to quality

We are committed to the quality of our information. Every three years we perform an in depth audit so that we can be certain of this.

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Milton Keynes

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