



Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust – Waiting Well Report

October 2025

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Rotherham

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About Healthwatch Rotherham

Healthwatch Rotherham is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Rotherham. We are here to make sure that those running services put people at the heart of care.

Our sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf. We focus on ensuring that peoples' worries and concerns about current services are addressed and work to get services right for the future.

What is a Waiting Well?

A "waiting well" at Rotherham Hospital is a program/service designed to support patients who are on a waiting list for planned surgery or treatment.

It provides information and resources to help patients stay healthy while they wait, which can help manage symptoms, prepare for procedures, and improve recovery time.

How it works

Access to information:
Patients can find resources like exercise tips, healthy recipes, and advice on managing health conditions while they wait for their procedure.

Health and wellbeing support:
The service aims to improve a patient's overall health, which can lead to better outcomes after surgery.

Patient communication:
The hospital may use digital updates and advice to keep patients informed and to reduce anxiety during the waiting period.

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Engagement Feedback

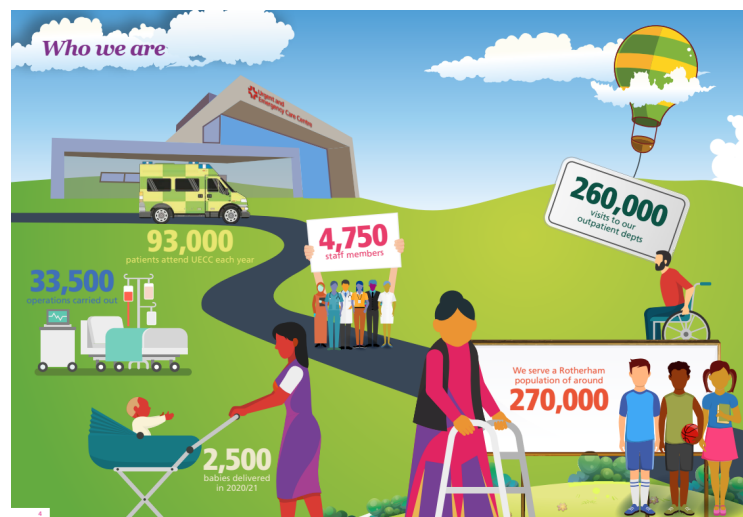
During several public engagement sessions conducted by Healthwatch Rotherham, concerns were raised about hospital referral waiting times. A number of individuals reported experiencing delays of several weeks for their referrals, with some expressing that they felt abandoned by the NHS during this period of uncertainty.

In response to these concerns, Healthwatch Rotherham launched a web-based SmartSurvey to gather data on patients' experiences of "waiting well" and to explore whether this approach had been recommended or supported by their healthcare professionals.

Our findings

Rotherham hospital [2022-2027 Strategy](#) shows that 260,000 patients visit their outpatients departments per year.

Healthwatch Rotherham's findings show that **89.3%** of people are currently waiting to receive treatment at Rotherham Hospital, this percentage equates to **232,180 patients per year**.



Outpatient Referral Waiting Times – Patient Feedback

As part of ongoing engagement with local residents, Healthwatch Rotherham gathered survey data highlighting significant delays in outpatient referrals within Rotherham hospitals. Feedback from members of the public indicates a wide variation in waiting times, with many reporting extended delays and a lack of clear communication regarding expected timeframes.

The reported waiting times from individuals include:



Several respondents noted **no time scales were given** at all, leaving them uncertain about when they might expect an appointment. Others reported simply being told "yes" when asked if they were still on the waiting list, but without any further detail.

A recurring theme in the feedback was the lack of communication or clarity from NHS services, with some patients stating they felt "left in the dark" or "forgotten" while waiting for their referrals to be fulfilled.

64%

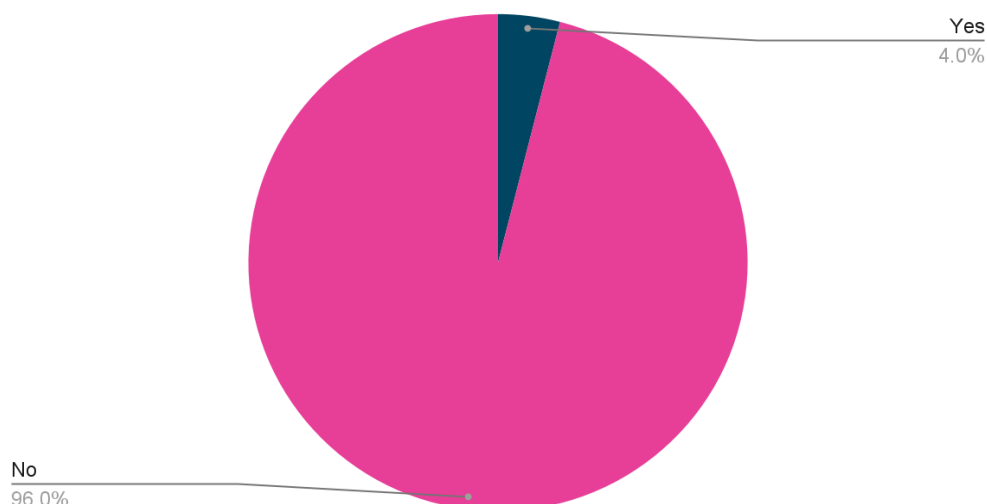
**Use of Digital Platforms
for Health Information:**

A majority of respondents reported using digital platforms to access healthcare-related information.

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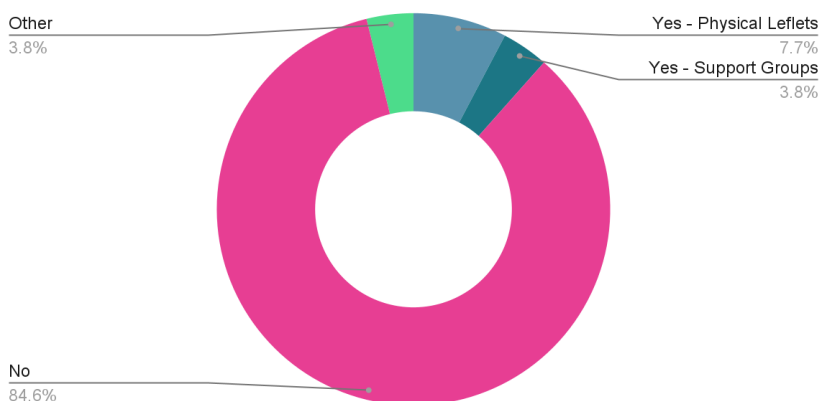
Our findings align closely with insights gathered during previous engagement sessions, revealing a significant lack of awareness regarding Rotherham's *Waiting Well* programme. Specifically, **96%** of respondents indicated they were not aware of the initiative. This highlights a substantial gap in communication and outreach, suggesting the need for improved strategies to raise public awareness and ensure that patients waiting for treatment are informed about available support resources.

Are you aware of the Waiting Well service? (this is a service providing information to patients who are waiting for treatment to help them look after their health whilst they wait)



When asked whether they had received any information on how to look after themselves while waiting for treatment, the vast majority of respondents (**over 20**) reported that they had not been given any such guidance. Only a small number of participants indicated they had been provided with physical resources or signposted to relevant support services. A

Have you been given any information about looking after yourself whilst waiting for treatment?



few respondents selected 'Other' and provided individual comments. These findings highlight a significant gap in pre-treatment patient support and suggest an opportunity to enhance communication and resource provision for individuals on waiting lists.

Among those who had not received any information about looking after themselves while waiting for treatment, a significant majority expressed that such information would be beneficial. Specifically, most respondents answered 'Yes' when asked if this support would be useful, with a smaller proportion responding 'Maybe', and none indicating it would not be helpful. This clearly demonstrates a demand for accessible and practical guidance during the waiting period, reinforcing the need for healthcare providers to proactively offer relevant resources and signposting to improve patient preparedness and wellbeing.

Patient Feedback on Support Needs While Waiting for Treatment

Feedback from patients highlights a clear desire for more comprehensive support and guidance during the waiting period for treatment. Many expressed a need for practical advice, such as **tips for managing symptoms** (e.g. abdominal discomfort and pain), guidance on **maintaining their health and preventing their condition from worsening**, and information on **when and how to seek help**.

Others requested access to **resources like leaflets, websites, or signposting to support groups**. Several respondents also emphasised the importance of **regular updates and clearer communication** regarding expected waiting times. Collectively, this feedback underlines the need for a more structured and proactive approach to patient support during waiting

For those who answered 'Yes' to Question 3 - has the information helped you manage your health whilst you are waiting?

Yes - 33.33%
No - 0%
Partly - 33.33%
Not looked at it yet - 0%
Unable to find information I was signposted to - 0%
Not Applicable - 33.33%

periods, to help reduce anxiety, manage symptoms, and improve overall patient experience.

Summary.

The Healthwatch Rotherham *Waiting Well Report* highlights serious concerns about how patients are supported while waiting for treatment at Rotherham Hospital. From a wellbeing perspective, the findings reveal that many patients feel **anxious, forgotten, and unsupported**, which can have a direct impact on their physical and emotional health.

National support

Quit smoking

Stopping smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health.

NHS Better Health provide advice, tools, and tips to help you, including a personal quit plan.

NHS Live Well

Get support with pain management, addiction, bone health, dental health and sleep.

Drink Less

Tips from NHS Better Health to help you cut down on alcohol.

Weight loss

If you're overweight, losing weight can have many health benefits.

NHS Better Health can provide weight loss plans, recipe ideas, and lots of useful advice for losing weight.

Get active

It's important to stay as active as you can while you are waiting for treatment.

NHS Better Health has tools, tips and special offers to help keep you moving.

Mental health

As well as looking after your body, it's important to look after your mind.

NHS Better Health offers expert advice, practical tips and support if you're stressed, anxious, low, or struggling to sleep.

Local support

RotherHive

Rotherham Gismo

Rotherham

Waiting for treatment is an unavoidable reality for many patients, but *how* patients are supported during that time profoundly affects their wellbeing, recovery outcomes, and trust in the healthcare system.

Emotional Wellbeing

- Many patients reported feeling **“abandoned,” “in the dark,” or “forgotten.”**
- The absence of communication or updates causes **stress, anxiety, and uncertainty**, leading to a decline in mental health and trust in the NHS.

- Simple reassurance and regular contact could significantly improve emotional stability and reduce distress.

Physical Health Risks

- Most patients (over 90%) reported receiving **no information or guidance** on how to look after themselves while waiting for treatment.
- Without advice on managing symptoms, staying active, or preventing deterioration, patients risk **poorer outcomes and longer recoveries** once treatment begins.
- This lack of support contradicts the purpose of the “Waiting Well” initiative, which aims to help patients remain healthy and prepared.

Loss of Confidence in Care

- The lack of awareness (96% unaware of the “Waiting Well” programme) and inconsistent communication erodes patient confidence.
- Patients often don’t know **who to contact, how long they will wait, or what to do if their condition worsens.**
- This uncertainty leads to frustration and disengagement from healthcare advice.

Better Communication and Transparency

- Patients need **clear and regular updates** on their referral status and expected waiting times.
- Hospitals should implement a **consistent communication protocol**—for example, automated check-ins or a dedicated patient helpline for those on waiting lists.
- Every patient should receive **written confirmation** of where they are in the process and **what to expect next.**

Active Promotion of the “Waiting Well” Programme

- With almost all respondents unaware of it, there must be a **proactive campaign** to raise awareness.
- Waiting Well information should be:

- Shared during GP and outpatient appointments.
- Available on the hospital website and via text/email.
- Provided as printed leaflets or digital toolkits when patients are added to a waiting list.

Practical Health and Self-Management Support

- Patients should receive tailored advice on:
 - Symptom management and pain control.
 - Nutrition, exercise, and mental wellbeing.
 - When and how to seek help if symptoms worsen.
- This could include online resources, telephone support lines, or peer support groups.

Personalised and Compassionate Care

- Staff should be trained to communicate with empathy, recognising that long waiting times can heighten vulnerability and distress.
- A “Patient Wellbeing Check-In” approach could ensure that those waiting longest receive regular contact and reassurance.

Co-Design with Patients

- Patients should be actively involved in shaping the Waiting Well programme.
- Healthwatch Rotherham’s findings show a willingness among patients to engage—this feedback should be harnessed to develop meaningful, accessible resources.

The Waiting Well initiative has strong potential to improve patient experience—but it is currently failing to reach those who need it most.

From a wellbeing perspective, the most urgent priorities are:

- Better communication,
- Active outreach, and
- Practical, compassionate support for patients waiting for care.

By focusing on these areas, Rotherham Hospital can transform “waiting” from a period of anxiety and neglect into one of preparation, empowerment, and wellbeing.

This report has been shared with the relevant department heads, to discuss and make recommendations to the system and how it will be used in the future.

Comments from Rotherham NHS Foundation Trusts:

“The insights you have provided are a vital part of our commitment to continuous improvement, please be assured we are dedicated to ensuring that the voices of service users are heard and acted upon. We would also offer our sincerest apologies for the negative experiences highlighted in the report.” –

Samantha Robinson, Head of Patient Experience and Involvement.

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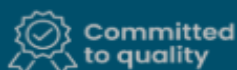
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We are committed to the quality of our information. Every three years we perform an in depth audit so that we can be certain of this.

