



Healthwatch Observations of Southlands Hospital Eye Clinic

July 2017

The following account is the personal observation of a Healthwatch West Sussex Authorised Representative who visited the new Eye Clinic at Southlands Hospital last week. These observations have been shared with the Trust responsible for the hospital and their responses are included at the end of this report. We are pleased that some prompt actions have already been taken resulting in immediate improvements.

Observations

“The clinic is very bright, modern and pleasant, with probably enough chairs in the main waiting room, but there are also additional waiting rooms nearer to the treatment rooms, so it was difficult to know how many people were in the clinic.

It appeared relatively quiet but it should be noted that the clinic had only been open for a couple of days.

There are only two (both mixed gender) toilets in the reception area. Both are suitable for disabled access. Presumably there are more toilet facilities nearer to the other waiting areas and the treatment rooms?

There is a very small counter for refreshments provided by Friends of Southlands Hospital with a couple of tables nearby. There is a much larger cafe in the main building by the Outpatients entrance, also provided by The Friends.

Observation suggest patients may experience some difficulties accessing or locating the clinic, as there is no internal access between the main building and the Eye Clinic. There are makeshift signs pasted to doors and walls saying Eye Clinic with a directional arrow for people arriving at the usual Outpatients entrance. Patients and visitors have to walk down a long corridor, out the Main (north) entrance and around the corner to the new clinic, which would not be satisfactory in wintery conditions. However, there are future plans to build a covered walkway which would address this problem.

There is a [brochure](#) available in the clinic, which gives a full spread diagram of the entire clinic. The brochure says that it is available in other accessible formats such as large print, braille or a language other than English. When I asked for a large print copy, the staff were uncertain if they had one, but phoned the Communication Office to ask. Apparently, if a large print copy was needed, they would enlarge it on a photocopier, and they would prepare other formats on request.



Given that this is an eye clinic, we would assume there is an increased likelihood of patients needing information in large print and we would therefore suggest there are copies of large print versions of the brochure available for immediate use.

The times of the next buses are shown on a television screen at the Outpatients' entrance but not in the clinic. Hopefully the clinic will have a similar screen at some stage but meantime, **our recommendation is that the eye clinic has a very large print copy of the bus [timetable](#), which is on their website, visible at the reception desk or on a notice board at the entrance to the clinic.**

Again, there is a telephone at the Outpatients entrance for calling taxis but not in the new Eye Clinic, but maybe there are plans to install one. **Meantime, we would recommend a notice, telling patients there is a taxi phone at the Outpatients entrance, be displayed in an appropriate position.**

All the bus stops nearby have shelters and seats. There is no nearby pedestrian crossing, only small traffic islands in the middle of the road allowing people to cross one lane of traffic before attempting the next one.

The Trust is developing more parking spaces to be completed by early December. However, unlike at Worthing Hospital, you have to pay in advance, when not knowing how long you will be there. There is a parking meter at the entrance to the Eye Clinic, but it was not working and there was a sign saying free parking. However, there was also a meter at the Main entrance which was working.

The parking signs in the car park are very confusing, since they say you can pay by credit card or online, but it seems that this is only available to pay any penalty fines incurred. **We would recommend that the Trust look at the parking information signs, to identify and action ways of making them easier to understand as possible.**

With Southlands Hospital, we understand, only being for day patients and treatments without general anaesthetic, one patient I spoke to was concerned as to whether Worthing Hospital retained any expertise in eye care for emergency problems. For example, would patients arriving at Worthing A&E with, say, a detached retina which needs to be treated immediately, have to be transferred by ambulance or taxi to Southlands or to Brighton (which is nearer than St Richards Chichester).”

What Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (which is responsible for Southlands Hospital) told us:

There are additional patient toilets located in the Day Surgery Suite.

Signage is being updated in line with the additional car parking and signs have been erected to explain the phasing of the carpark and temporary signs are now in place to assist patients locating the Eye Unit.

The Patient Experience Manager has contacted the Estates Department to see whether it is possible to have a screen put up to inform people of the bus times. Also to see whether a taxi line can be installed. Currently, staff are calling taxis for those patients that require one, rather than sending them to the main department and will be happy to continue to do so.

The parking meters have been installed and are now working. There was a delay in the parking company installing them.

The brochure is already in a larger font, than the majority of publications from the Trust. This was agreed with the Patient Reference Group. However, we will ensure that we print some larger font copies for patients who request one, when attending the unit.

Southlands Hospital currently only treats patients who require surgery under local anaesthetic. Many emergency procedures are carried out under local anaesthetic. Where patients require a general anaesthetic, this will be scheduled at St Richards Hospital (Chichester) and our Surgeons operate across site so all necessary skills will be utilised and maintained within the service. When patients present at Worthing Hospital A&E they will be assessed there and an Ophthalmologist will be called for expert opinion when required. They will then make a decision on the appropriate treatment plan and where surgery is best carried out according to the patient's individual needs.

Healthwatch summary:

We would like to thank and commend Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust for their prompt response and proactive follow-up to the recommendations made in this document.

The improvement to the travel information to Southlands Hospital was done on the same day we made the recommendation. The Trust's website page gives very clear [directions](#), including a comprehensive bus timetable.

Natasha Vickers, an Intern from Chichester University working collaboratively with Healthwatch West Sussex and 4Sight is working throughout the summer months and speaking to patients in the new unit. This work will be shared with the Trust and provide an understanding, from a lived experience point-of-view, what is working well and if there are any areas of improvement.