



## Improving waiting lists equitably - supporting patients to 'wait well'

While tackling waiting lists remains a priority for NHS trusts, how can providers support people to 'wait well'? How can they proactively consider equity as they do this?

Chris McCann, Director of Communications, Campaigns and Insights at Healthwatch shares actionable insights for board members to ensure the patient perspective is central to your thinking, drawn from our [Provider collaboratives: Improving equitably](#) programme.

*'It's not just about the length of the wait but the quality of the wait and how an individual experiences it – and the way to understand this is through communication.'*

*Chris McCann*

### Key considerations for boards

- **Clear, regular and timely communication** with patients is crucial in every step of their experience of waiting for, accessing and receiving treatment to ensure that they understand what is happening, why, and when they can expect updates.
- Emphasising a culture of **listening to patients' experiences of waiting** and recognising their situation can help them feel supported. Often, by the time a patient has been placed on a waiting list for treatment, they have already been through GP referrals and the diagnostic process and have already experienced periods of uncertainty and waiting.
- Ensuring that there is enough **administrative capacity** for points of contact to be assigned to patients, as well as making sure that the staff in those roles receive the correct training in how to relate to and relay information to patients can help patients feel supported and understood whilst they wait for care.
- It is important to understand that the **quality** of a patient's experience of waiting for care is almost as important as how long they need to wait. Patients often understand the realities of waiting times

for elective care and are aware that there may be substantial delays, but it is a sense of uncertainty and lack of communication that can cause more stress.

- Putting in place **interim support measures** such as physiotherapy, pain relief and mental health support and giving clear information on how to access these measures could help patients manage their own health whilst waiting for treatment, and prevent them from getting worse.
- **Considering inequalities when addressing waiting lists is crucial.** People from ethnic minority backgrounds, women, patients with disabilities and those from lower income households are the most likely groups to have experienced long waits, delays and cancellations, and have a poorer experience while waiting.
- Putting in place systems which **assess and consider waiting lists from an inequalities** perspective, with a focus on prioritising urgent treatment for those from groups who routinely experience unequal delays can help tackle these inequities.
- Ensuring **accessible forms of information** are available for those who might need them such as easy read materials, or materials in alternative language, can prevent barriers to communication. The **Accessible Information Standard** sets out a specific and consistent approach to identifying and meeting the information and communication support needs of patients.
- Similarly, when it comes to missed appointments, taking steps to gain a **deeper understanding** around not just what patients are doing but why they're doing it, will be crucial to understanding how to tackle waiting lists equitably.

If you would like to discuss any of these considerations further, you can contact Healthwatch England or your local Healthwatch at [enquiries@healthwatch.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatch.co.uk).