

Visit to the Homeless Access Clinic, Brownlow Health

7 April 2022

Introduction

Healthwatch Liverpool was invited by staff from the Homeless Access Clinic (HAC) to visit the clinic and speak with patients to find out what they thought of the service. A small team of staff and volunteers attended. We spoke with 27 people: 26 patients and one support worker accompanying a patient. We shared all the comments we received (anonymised) with HAC staff soon after our visit.

The HAC is a well-established drop-in clinic for people experiencing homelessness, and takes place every Thursday afternoon at Brownlow Health in Pembroke Place. Several services are provided under one roof, including generalist GP/ nurse services, as well as other services including the skin clinic and support for people with addiction issues. The clinic also has a member of staff employed by the Whitechapel Centre who provides support and information on other (non-medical) issues.

Until recently the team included a specialist alcohol nurse, however during our visit we were told that the alcohol nurse had retired. At the time of our visit it wasn't clear if they would be replaced.

What was good

We asked people what they thought worked well, what could be improved, and if they had any suggestions for this – or other – services.

There were far more positive comments compared to negative comments. Most people felt that they received a good service, and several people mentioned that they were treated well at the HAC. Many positive comments were about the **staff, staff attitude** and **treatment**, including:

“Good doctors, nurses and staff (...). Brilliant doctors these, I recommend these to anybody”

“You get your script here, they help you with a lot in this place. They do everything here for you”

“The staff have profound depth of understanding. Staff are professional and going way beyond the call of duty”

“How they help the homeless, they care and they listen”

As it was cold outside on the day of our visit, with a maximum temperature of 9 degrees centigrade and a fresh northerly wind, **being given something to eat** and warm to drink was also much appreciated, and we observed that staff made sure to ask about dietary requirements. **Warmer clothes** were also provided to those who needed them:

“Hospitality, hot drink, food, treated with respect, they know who you are. It’s the only doctors where you come and get a cup of tea and something to eat”

“(staff member) made my day with gloves and an extra jumper”

What could be improved/ done better:

Because of the Covid pandemic there was a limit to the number of people allowed in the waiting area at any one time, and most people had to wait outside until they could be admitted, some for quite a while. We were not surprised that the majority of people we spoke to mentioned **having to wait outside** as something that could be improved. Comments included:

“Standing outside in the cold. The wait when you’re not well”

“Waiting outside; maybe give a time block”

“They need to sort out outside, they say it opens at 12 but they don’t, it’s 12.30. Sort out a warm area”

“More of these kind of services! So that it’s not always rammed on a Thursday”

Other suggestions included:

“shout us in (call in to appointment) in numbers, not our names, sometimes there has been aggro”

Suggestions for improvements at other services:

We didn’t receive many suggestions for improvements to other services. Several people said they had not used other services. Four people mentioned receiving support from the Whitechapel Centre. Two people said that they had been to the Royal Liverpool Hospital recently.

Medication and pharmacies were mentioned by five people. Three had positive experiences, one person said that the medication they received wasn’t suitable, and one person mentioned that they sometimes had received their Methadone prescription too late to be able to get it at the pharmacy that same day.

Two people said they would like to see improvements around mental health:

“Mental health services: people feel not considered, are judged by their mood. They need more patience with people, it pushes people. Also, there’s a stigma around drugs”

“Other services could focus more on mental health”

Conclusion

There were many positives during our visit. We observed caring staff who treated patients with respect, which was borne out by the feedback we received. Treatment and support went beyond clinical issues, with food and a drink being provided, as well as warm clothes for those who needed them.

We understand that there may not be a way to change the outside wait at the moment, as it is related to keeping people as safe as possible in a clinical setting during a pandemic, and the building doesn't easily lend itself to being changed. However, we can also understand that it is difficult for patients, some of whom are quite frail, to have to wait outside for an extended time when it is cold.

Thank you and contact:

We would like to thank everyone who was willing to speak to us for their time and feedback. We would also like to thank the staff at the Homeless Access Clinic for their time and support in organising this visit.

If you have any questions, suggestions or feedback, please contact Healthwatch Liverpool:

Call: 0300 77 77 007 (local landline rates),

Email: enquiries@healthwatchliverpool.co.uk

or visit our website: <https://www.healthwatchliverpool.co.uk/>