

healthwatch news

Oxfordshire

Stay calm and keep the front line services

by Eddie Duller OBE,
Chairman of Healthwatch Oxfordshire



The warning bells are sounding. We are getting the same message nationally and

locally: the cuts to health and social care are coming.

But those who dish out the funds that pay for and provide the services should bear in mind that cuts in budgets need not necessarily mean cuts in front line services. Savings can be made by doing things differently and by working smarter.

Monitor, the health service financial watchdog, has told all hospitals in Oxfordshire and the rest of the country that the present level of spending is unsustainable.

Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, which pays for most hospital care in the county, and the hospital trusts should spell out in clear language how they see the way ahead.

Oxfordshire County Council which provides most of the care in the community should also do likewise.

The authorities should be looking to make those savings where it hurts least - not hospital or social care, but by more creative investment in the way money is allocated, both inside and outside their organisations. The public needs re-assurance in these tough times.

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Hospital discharges: changes needed



Healthwatch Oxfordshire is recommending sweeping changes after a survey showed that many patients were dissatisfied with the way in which hospital discharge procedures were carried out.

Doctors and pharmacists also voiced their criticisms, quoting poor communication over care plans and medicines when patients left hospitals for the next stage of their care.

The survey involved 212 patients in acute and community hospitals, 14 care providers, 33 GPs and 44 pharmacists, and the message was abundantly clear: hospital authorities need to radically overhaul their discharge policies.

Our volunteers, who collected the views of patients, found that more than 70 percent of them were not given their estimated date of discharge within 36 hours of admission and many of them were dissatisfied with the way they were treated in hospital discharge lounges.

The 13 recommendations for improvement included:

Taking immediate action to increase the number of patients receiving their estimated discharge date within 36 hours of admission;

Patients being given a named discharge co-ordinator when their date is fixed;

Training discharge co-ordinators to communicate better with patients, carers and families;

Reviewing the pharmacy arrangements so that patients receive two weeks' worth of medications they need 24 hours before they are discharged, with clear information emailed to the patients' pharmacists;

Hospital doctors taking responsibility for chasing test results and emailing them to patients' GPs.

The survey was carried out because patients contacted Healthwatch Oxfordshire with their concerns and also because doctors had raised the question of the quality of the discharge process. Oxfordshire is one of the worst performers in the country for delayed transfers of care.

The full report entitled Improving discharges from hospital in Oxfordshire, is on our webpages which can be found at www.healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk

Giving a voice to voluntary organisations

More than 40 voluntary organisations attended a Healthwatch Oxfordshire conference where they voiced their concerns.

In a session on children and young people, some groups raised difficulties in accessing schools and GPs and in moving from children's to adults' services. The officials were also told about communication problems with the authorities, and a need to identify carers and to offer support at an early stage. Smaller groups also pointed to difficulties in competing for contracts.

Officials agreed to improve the online carers' assessment. A full report of the conference will appear on our web pages soon

Officials to present action plan

A Hearsay! 'summit' will be held in January, at which county council officials will present an action plan to address matters raised by more than 50 people using adult care services at previous events this year.

The main subjects included were the need for a joined-up health and care system and better communication, the need for a personalised, holistic approach to care with an emphasis on maintaining a person's quality of life, and plugging the care gap between young and working age people.

What you say to Jen about your worries

Jen Marks, who is Healthwatch Oxfordshire's eyes and ears in the community, has been to more than 12 events over the past two months and will be out and about at further events in the county in the near future.

She says: "People welcome us at all types of public events and are very open about their concerns, which are widespread. Their views are vital to us and we make sure the matters that worry them most are passed on to health and social care policy makers so that their decisions make sense to people who use them."

Major concerns from members of the public on Jen's outings over the summer period included:

- Waiting times and lack of continuity of care from the mental health care sector
- Lack of support for young people with physical or learning difficulties as they progress to adult services
- Long waits for results of scans from hospital staff, who are difficult to contact
- Poor and late communications from hospitals over appointments
- Long waiting times to see a GP
- 10 minute consultations by GPs are too short
- GPs unwilling to refer patients to hospitals
- A&E waiting times too long



Jen Marks

- Inaction by the PALS, which is supposed to deal with patients' complaints
- Lack of support after being discharged from hospital

Positive comments included praise for surgeries at Abingdon and excellent and lifesaving care by the complex needs service, although some people complained about the waiting time for the latter service.

Jen is out and about at the Carterton health and wellbeing event on 24 September and Banbury canal day on 4 October. Details of future events at which Jen will attend will be on our website and you can contact her at jen.marks@healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk

Dignity in care report out soon

The Healthwatch Oxfordshire Dignity in Care survey is due to be published early in November.

Our volunteers have been carrying out surveys in hospitals and care homes across the county to see whether people think they are receiving care in line with national dignity standards.

The report will be launched at a high-profile conference and awards

ceremony on 4 November. The event is being organised with Age UK Oxfordshire and awards will be presented for leadership, a care setting or service, care or support staff, innovation in dignity in care, an unpaid carer or a volunteer worker and Josie's Award for an individual who in some way is making an exceptional difference to dignity in care.

Alice pleads for better mental health care

A 72-year-old Oxfordshire woman who has been receiving mental healthcare for more than 30 years has launched a plea for a new service after spending a year researching how mental health service user-run groups are running in different parts of the country.

Alice Hicks, who is a widow with two children, is being backed by Healthwatch Oxfordshire, which recently published her report.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Alice was using mental health services regularly after being given a diagnosis of manic depression. In the mid 1990s she became aware of the user movement and became an activist and campaigner.

She joined a group called Oxford Survivors and founded a training group Moonlight, and this sparked her desire to want to challenge the myths and fear that surrounded what she described as “madness”.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire CEO Rachel Coney said: “With the support of Healthwatch Oxfordshire and local mental health charity Restore, she has produced a report which



• Alice Hicks

concludes that Oxfordshire is failing in its responsibility to involve those using the mental health service effectively in decisions about local services.”

Alice explains: “I care deeply for my fellows, the people who live and survive like me. I am passionately committed to promoting a better understanding of madness and

want to do something that can make a difference for the better in our lives.”

Alice’s report shows that there is no joined-up policy around the involvement of people who are receiving mental health treatment and support in Oxfordshire. There are small pockets of activity where involvement takes place informally, but there is no ‘hub’ that the authorities who pay for the service or provide it can go to in order to get a collective voice from those who have first-hand experience of mental health services in the county.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire is backing her plea for the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust and large mental health charities in Oxfordshire to address this gap by supporting the creation of a new organisation that would be managed and staffed by those who have had their own experience of mental health services.

Alice’s full report can be found on our website at www.healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk

Clanfield leads the way in dementia support

The West Oxfordshire village of Clanfield is highlighted as the county’s leading example of a community caring for those with dementia in a report commissioned by Healthwatch Oxfordshire.

The report by the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council drew attention to a group that was set up a year ago and now meets regularly in the local pub to plan support for those in the village with dementia.

It also made four far reaching

recommendations that called for

- Someone in each GP practice to take the lead in building relationships between the practice and dementia support groups.
- A formal referral system between GP practices and community groups to be developed.
- An informed discussion to take place straight away on a new way of helping to look after people with dementia in their own communities, involving

doctors and voluntary groups as well as the health service and the county council.

- Oxfordshire health and social care commissioners to commission community development work and provide funding to provide support to develop dementia support groups, and to help them access training, cover incidental costs and recruit new members.

The full report is available on our website at www.healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk

Shock over Chipping Norton hospital care

Future services at Chipping Norton's community hospital are still in the melting pot after a shock announcement of a proposed change to nursing arrangements from March next year to cut costs.

At present, the intermediate care beds at the hospital are staffed by NHS nurses but Oxfordshire County Council announced its intention to replace them with nurses from the Orders of St John Care Trust.

The county council caused further concern by stressing that people in Chipping Norton should accept the proposal or have no intermediate care beds in the town at all.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire Chairman, Eddie Duller, said: "At this point we intervened and took part in a round-table meeting between senior officers of the local authorities, the Chipping Norton Action group, local politicians and Witney MP David Cameron."

The meeting came to a conclusion that the authorities



should halt the consultation while other options were being considered.

Instead, the county council issued a further statement to say the consultation over the original proposal will go on, and added an option of looking at "alternative ways" of providing intermediate care in the north of the county. It said it planned to start the consultation at the end of September.

Eddie Duller said: "We have not changed our view that before proceeding, the council should publish the figures relating to Chipping Norton and any other proposals that affect community hospitals in a county-wide context, in case savings can be made elsewhere."

Concern over Witney ward closure

A ward of 30 beds at Witney Community Hospital will shut for seven months and deploy staff elsewhere in the county.

The announcement was made by Oxford NHS Foundation Trust, which said the move would enable it to safely open 24 beds

at other hospitals.

Oxford Healthwatch chairman Eddie Duller said: "The Trust should make a statement spelling out the staffing levels and financial situation across its eight hospitals so that the public have a clearer picture."

Campaigners call for legal action

Campaigners say they are prepared to take legal action to save 18 beds at the new Townlands Hospital in Henley.

Townlands Steering Group could seek a judicial review of the new £16m 'health campus' if the Oxfordshire Clinical

Commissioning Group goes ahead with the planned model, which includes a rapid access care unit and five to eight beds.

The commissioners endorsed the plan but have asked for further talks with stakeholders before making a final decision.



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Healthwatch Oxfordshire is to hold its Board meetings in public. Members of the public will have an opportunity to submit written questions five working days in advance, and ask questions at the meeting itself. The dates and venues for its forthcoming meetings are:

22nd September 2015, 7pm - 9pm,
Banbury Town Hall.

24th November 2015, 2pm - 4pm,
Henley-on-Thames Town Hall, Council Chamber, (NB space is limited so please arrive early).

26th January 2016, 4pm - 6pm, Long Furlong Community Centre, Abingdon.

22nd March 2016, 7pm - 9pm, West Oxfordshire District Council Office, Wood Green, Witney.



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