

Patient Experience - Access to Ealing Hospital

A two-year review

March 2021

Over the past year, health services across the UK have had to adapt in order to respond to the urgent needs of patients with COVID-19, whilst also maintaining care for non-COVID-19 patients.

This paper examines whether these adaptations have impacted patient ‘Access’ to Ealing Hospital during this time. Despite the restrictions and limitations associated with the pandemic, Healthwatch Ealing’s Patient Experience team have been able to continue with the programme’s feedback collection process through direct telephone contact and online review submissions. Patient’s experiences and opinions from the last two years (January 2019 - December 2020) have been analysed to understand whether accessibility at Ealing Hospital has changed or developed during the year that preceded the COVID-19 pandemic as well as its inception and evolution in 2020.

The patient experiences represented in this review have been drawn from Healthwatch Ealing’s quarterly Patient Experience Reports, conducted during this period. Specific data sets from these reports have been analysed to highlight any emerging or consistent trends relating to Ealing Hospital service access. This includes average star ratings (1 star - 5 stars), which indicate service user’s level of satisfaction toward specific aspects, or ‘domains’, relating to access to Ealing Hospital services as well as more qualitative data sets, which provides insight into the sentiment, themes and sub-themes that have been identified in service user feedback.

The figures throughout this report are based on the following number of patient experience feedback collected for Ealing Hospital during this period:

| Quarter | Q4 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Monthly Period | Jan - Mar 2019 | Apr - Jun 2019 | Jul - Sept 2019 | Oct - Dec 2019 | Jan - Mar 2020 | Apr - Jun 2020 | Jul - Sept 2020 | Oct - Dec 2020 |
| No. of Comments | 281 | 194 | 523 | 327 | 251 | 20 | 225 | 90 |

Table 1. Table to show the monthly period of each quarter and number of reviews collected

From March 2020, the Patient Experience team were unable to attend Ealing Hospital and engage with patients and service users face-to-face, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related government restrictions. It’s clear that this caused a significant reduction in the number of reviews that we were able to obtain for Ealing Hospital between April and June, and October and December 2020 (Table 1). This is likely the reason that the average star rating and positive sentiment for this quarter is lower, compared to other quarters presented in this review (Figure 1). In addition, the number of reviews received from Q1 2020 has, to varying degrees, remained below the average number of reviews usually collected for Ealing Hospital. This may be due to a significant number of appointment and

procedure cancellations as well as individuals with non-COVID related issues opting to avoid any non-urgent, elective visits to hospitals, either as an attempt to alleviate the pressures on Ealing Hospital or out of fear of contracting the virus. The data for these quarters may, therefore, be more representative of each of the individual’s experiences and caution must be exercised when generalising any findings to all Ealing Hospital service users.

Despite the impact on the number of reviews gathered during this time, this paper provides valuable insight into how Ealing residents have been able to access Ealing Hospital services over the last two years.

Star Ratings:

| Rating | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------|----------|------|------|------|-----------|
| | Terrible | Poor | Okay | Good | Excellent |

Table 2. Table to show the star ratings

Key Findings:

Ease of gaining an appointment

Figure 1 represents the average star rating from patients in relation to the ‘Ease of gaining an appointment’ domain of Access to Ealing Hospital. Between Q4 2019 and the end of Q3 2020, the star ratings have remained largely consistent, averaging 3.5 stars. From Q4 of the 2019/20 financial year (Jan-March 2020) to Q1, 2020/21 (April-June 2020), the overall average star rating decreased from 4 to 3, before increasing back to a two-year high of 4.5 stars in Q3 2020/21 (Oct-Dec 2020).

During the first lockdown (Q1 2020), many non-COVID-19 related patients had their appointments cancelled or rescheduled, causing some frustration, particularly amongst those with more severe and/or long-term health conditions. Some of these appointments were rescheduled, while some patients had to change or cancel appointments themselves, possibly due to being fearful of entering hospitals during the pandemic. This may have contributed to the difficulty that patients were experiencing in gaining appointments, however, the significant decrease in the number of patient’s reviews that were gathered during Q1 2020 must also be considered in the evolution of this average star rating.

Although other stakeholder data may be necessary to confirm these findings, it appears that the impact that Ealing Hospital’s adapted way of working had during the start of the pandemic was only temporary. Indeed, the increase in star rating to an average of 4.5 for Q3 (October - December 2020) indicates that the acceleration of the digital-first approach to appointment booking has had a positive long-term effect on this particular aspect of access to Ealing Hospital services.

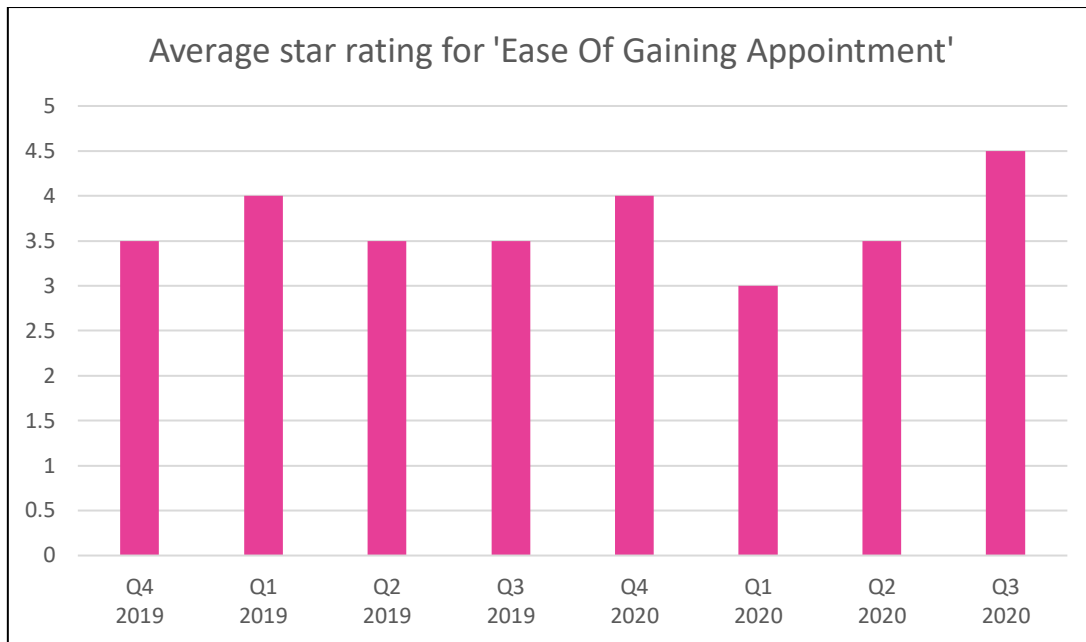


Figure 1. Bar graph to show average star rating by quarter

Generally, how easy it is to get through to someone on the phone

Figure 2 illustrates the star ratings given by patients in relation to ‘How easy it is to get through to someone on the phone’. Similar feedback was given for this domain, with average star ratings fluctuating between 3 and 3.5 throughout Q4 2019 and Q2 2020, before increasing to 5 stars by the end of 2020.

The stability seen throughout the two-year period suggests that, although patients still found it difficult to get through to someone on the phone during the first lockdown, Ealing Hospital has successfully adapted to the pressures of the pandemic and are now operating an administrative telephone system that entirely supports the needs of patients and service users.

One possible contributory factor to this may be that during the pandemic, many patients have also turned to booking appointments online and obtaining results via text message or an online patient portal. This may have contributed to the average star rating’s rise as more patients opted for online booking, reducing the number of individuals calling and thereby making it easier for those that did call to get through to an administrative team at Ealing Hospital.

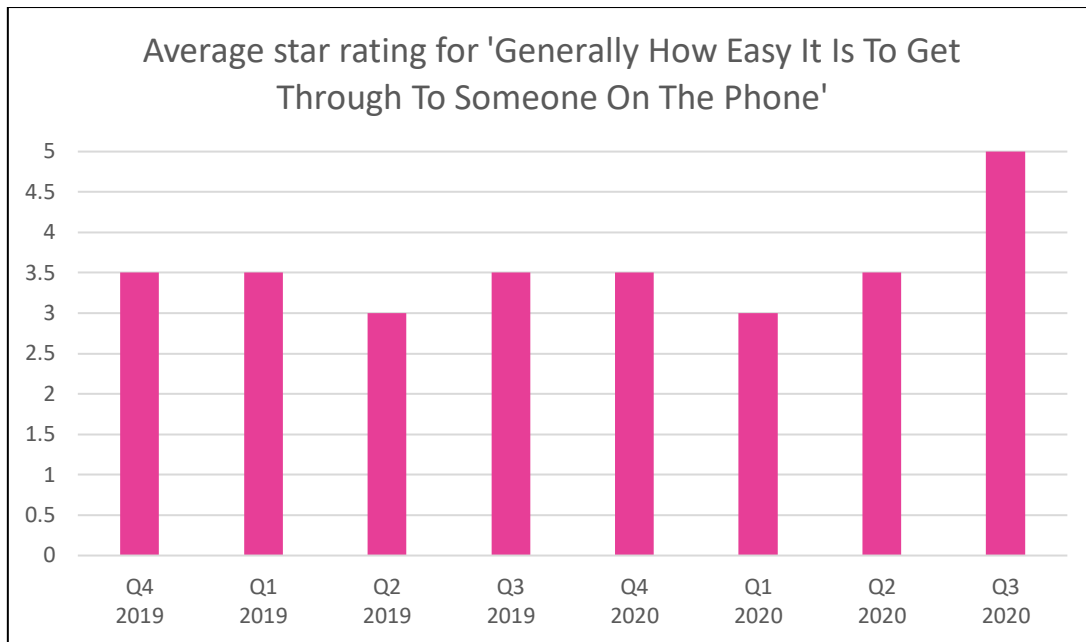


Figure 2. Bar graph to show average star rating by quarter

Waiting Times

The star ratings shown in Figure 3 relate to the 'Waiting time' to book an appointment at Ealing Hospital. This theme was the lowest star rating Healthwatch Ealing received feedback on for Ealing Hospital with the average star rating for this domain consistently falling between 3 and 3.5 stars. The average star rating dropped down to 3 stars on multiple occasions prior to the pandemic, as well as two during official lockdown periods.

As previously mentioned, many patients had hospital appointments cancelled or rescheduled to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. These appointments were often postponed by weeks or months, causing some patients to become frustrated and dissatisfied. However, given that this was also an issue prior to the pandemic, the low average rating may not be directly related to the pressures of the pandemic. Overall, these findings indicate that there is persistent concern around the length of time that patients must wait for their appointment. Once the COVID-19 vaccination has begun to ease pressures on the Hospital and the Trust, this is an area that would be worth exploring to determine how waiting times can be reduced.

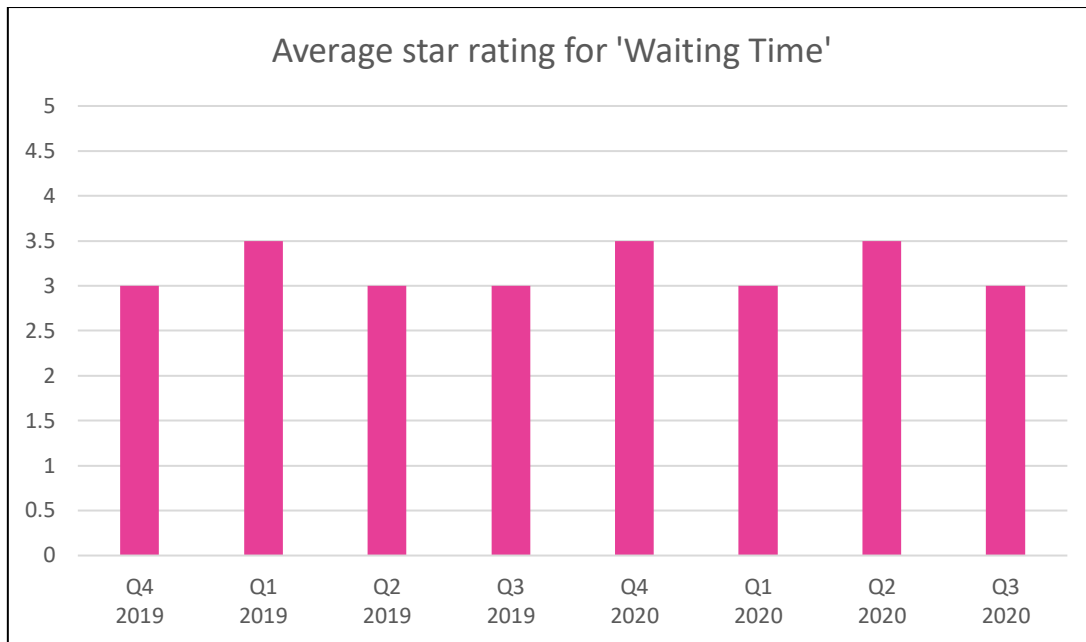


Figure 3. Bar graph to show average star rating by quarter

Sentiment Analysis of Ealing Hospital Reviews:

This section examines the sentiment of patients' feedback regarding Access to Ealing Hospital.

Figures 4 and 5 represent the overall percentage of positive, negative and neutral reviews between January 2019 and December 2020 for Ealing Hospital. The predominant trend in figures 4 and 5 show that positive (64% - 71%), negative (13% - 15%) and neutral (16% - 21%) sentiments remain consistent, prior to the pandemic. However, during the first national lockdown in Q1 2020, positive sentiment decreased (60%) while negative (20%) and neutral sentiments increased (20%).

These findings, once again highlight the initial, but temporary, impact of the pandemic as after the first lockdown, positive sentiment significantly rose (60% - 94%), whilst negative and neutral sentiments rapidly declined (both 20% - 3%). Key words often used in patient feedback for Ealing Hospital included 'Excellent', 'Very Understanding', 'Caring' and 'Helpful'.

Whilst the majority of reviews for Ealing Hospital were positive, the negative reviews must be considered in order to understand where further improvements can be made. Negative sentiment reviews increased during the first part of 2020 as COVID-19 entered the UK and caused drastic changes to many systems and procedures (14% - 20%). Words used by patients to describe the service of Ealing Hospital during Q4 and Q1 were often 'difficult', 'delayed' and 'very hard'. It could be argued that due to services adapting and becoming more efficient in system operations and delivery, these issues have been effectively addressed.

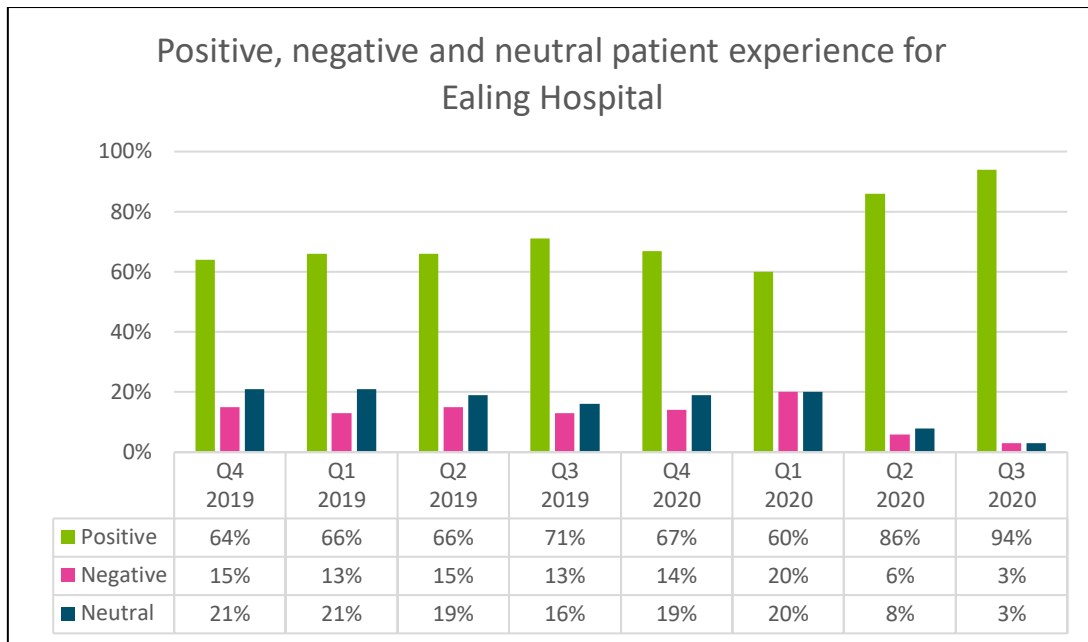


Figure 4. Bar graph to show positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter

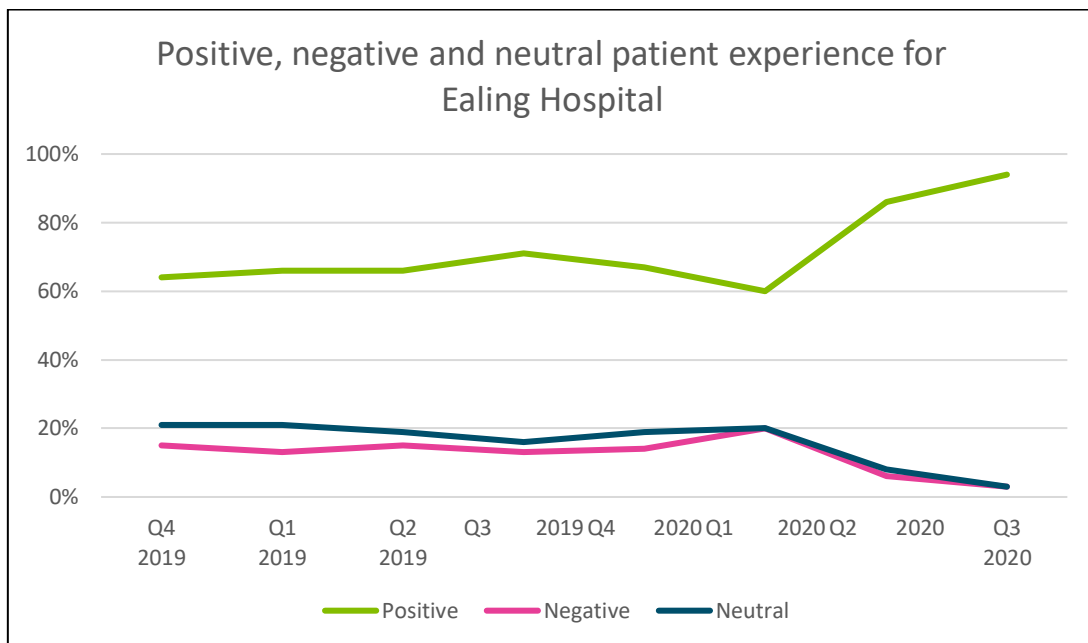


Figure 5. Line graph to show positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter

Main Themes:

The qualitative analysis indicated that the most common themes that relate to Access to Ealing Hospital Services during this time were ‘Administration’ and ‘Access to Services’. Exploring these themes provides further insight into patients’ level of satisfaction with access to the hospital’s services as well as the areas in which it can be further developed.

Access to Services - key findings:

Figures 6 and 7 highlight the change in patient sentiment for the ‘Access to Services’ theme between Q4 2019 (Jan-March) and Q3 2020 (Oct-Dec). During Q2 2019 (July-Sept), sentiments significantly changed, with negative sentiment reviews decreasing from 65% - 30%, and neutral reviews increasing from 1% - 36%. Positive sentiment reviews remained stable during this pre-pandemic period before seeing a significant increase (44%-82%) during Q1, 2020 (April-June). While it must be reiterated that the smaller sample remains a limitation, these findings could indicate that patients were still able to access care during the pandemic and that these individuals may well be more understanding of the pressures that Ealing Hospital staff were under during this time.

Furthermore, the negative correlation between positive and negative reviews relating to access to services, indicates that concerted efforts made by Ealing Hospital to improve access across all hospital departments during the past two years has significantly improved patients’ access to care in relation to non-COVID related health conditions. This is particularly apparent when looking at sentiments during the official lockdown period with consistent positive and negative sentiments suggesting that patients found Ealing Hospital easily and widely accessible despite ongoing lockdown restrictions throughout 2020.

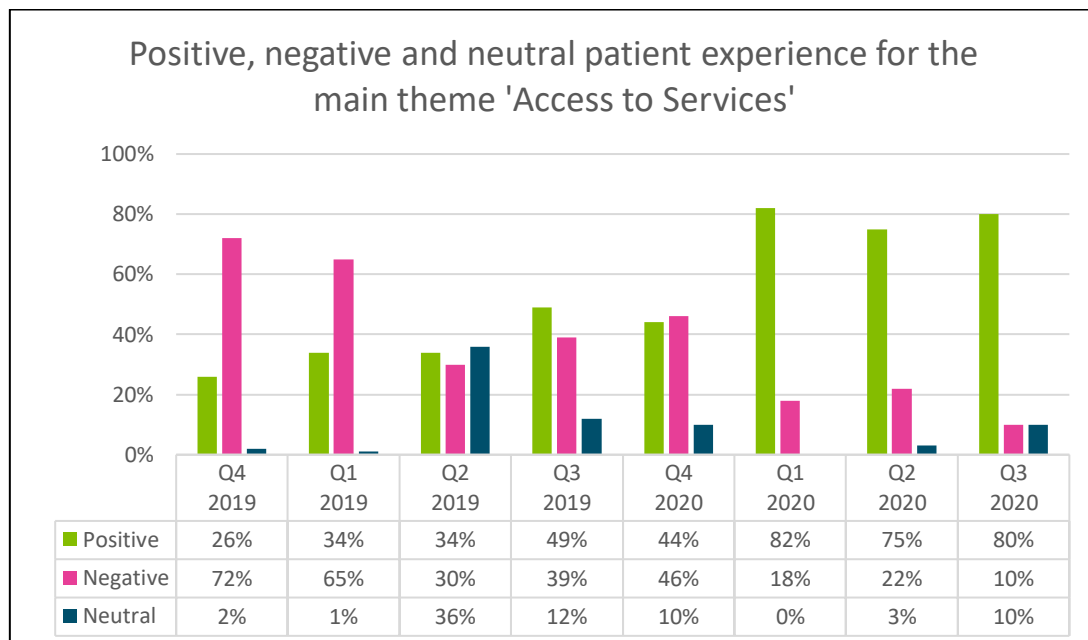


Figure 6. Bar graph to show positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter

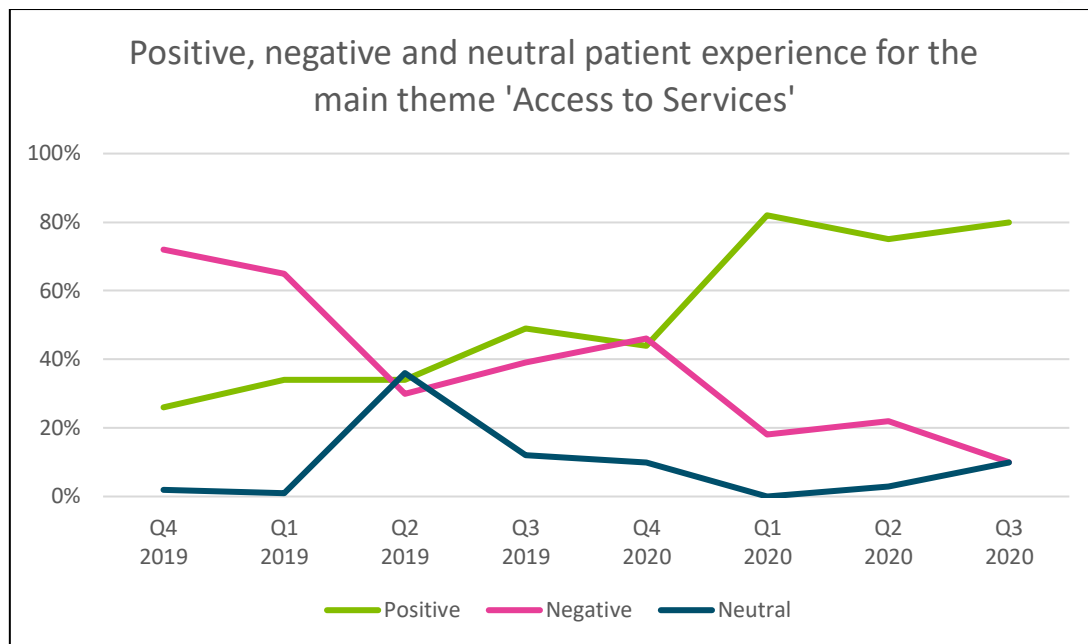


Figure 7. Line graph to show positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter

Sub-themes of 'Access to Services'

Figure 8 illustrates the breakdown of the most cited sub-themes of the theme **Access to Services** for Ealing Hospital. Between January 2019 and December 2020, 1144 reviews were collected for the Access to Services theme. The most prominent sub-themes that were identified included **Suitability of Provider, Information and Advice, Convenience/Distance to travel, and Waiting Times**. Positive sentiment reviews were significantly greater than neutral or negative reviews for the former three sub-themes, reaching 85% for 'Suitability of Provider (Organisation)'.

However, with a total of 780 reviews, negative sentiment accounted for 49% of the reviews that referenced the sub-theme 'Waiting times', with 28% positive and 23% neutral. This sub-theme is explored in more detail in the next section.

In addition to the negative reviews referencing Waiting Times, negative reviews that referenced 'Convenience/ Distance to travel' (26%) and 'Information and Advice' (18%) and accounted for a significant, albeit smaller, percentage of the total reviews for this sub-theme. The sources of these negative reviews may be worth exploring in order to understand whether patients' area of residence and proximity to other appropriate services is being considered when they are being referred to hospital services in Ealing as well as whether patients are receiving the information and advice they require when making decisions about their care and treatment. As the lack of information and advice for patients appears to be a persistent issue throughout healthcare services in Ealing, identifying how this could be improved would be a particularly fruitful area of focus for Ealing Hospital.

This sub-theme sentiment analysis seems to reinforce previously mentioned findings which indicate that, over the course of the last 24 months, Ealing Hospital has been unable to reduce the amount of time an individual must wait for an appointment. Given the circumstances and the evolution of other trends seen within the data, it is possible that

positive sentiment reviews will begin to increase, once the pressures of the pandemic ease.

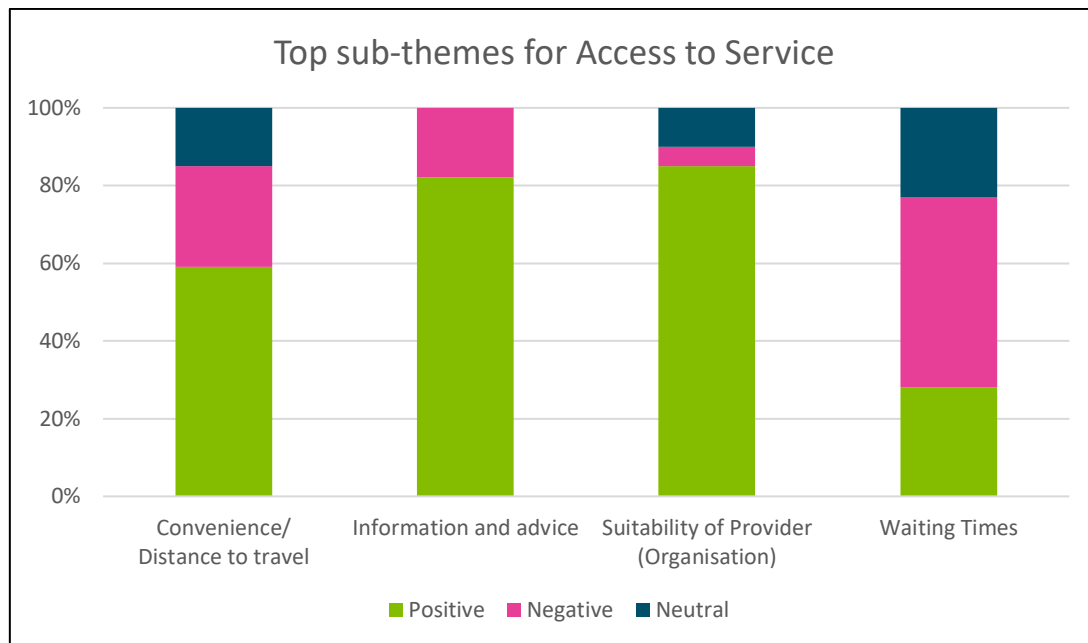


Figure 8. Bar graph to show the top sub-themes for 'Access to services'

Waiting Time (sub-theme of Access to Services) - Key findings:

Figures 9 and 10 display the quarterly percentages of positive, negative and neutral sentiment reviews associated with the sub-theme 'Waiting Time'. During this two-year period negative sentiment reviews consistently outweighed both positive and neutral sentiment reviews. The number of negative sentiment reviews sharply decreased in Q2 2019 (72% - 31%), before gradually increasing to a peak of 67% in Q1, 2020. During this time, neutral sentiment reviews inversely decreased while the number of positive reviews received, remained consistent, before reach a peak of 43% in Q2, 2020.

This insight into the sentiment of waiting time related reviews for Ealing Hospital indicates that this has been a consistent issue for patients, even before the pandemic. What is promising is that over the course of the last two years, negative reviews have seen a decrease from 77% to 50%. This overall decrease may indicate that Ealing Hospital's efforts to reduce waiting times is having a tangible, albeit intermittent, effect and the increase in positive sentiment reviews between Q3 2019 and Q2 2020 seems to support this. Furthermore, it could be argued that the rise of negative sentiments during the first lockdown (Q1 2020) reflects the impact that adapting to a new way of working had on patient's access to services and that the steady decrease since then is an indication that Ealing Hospital's efforts is having a beneficial impact on patients' level of access.

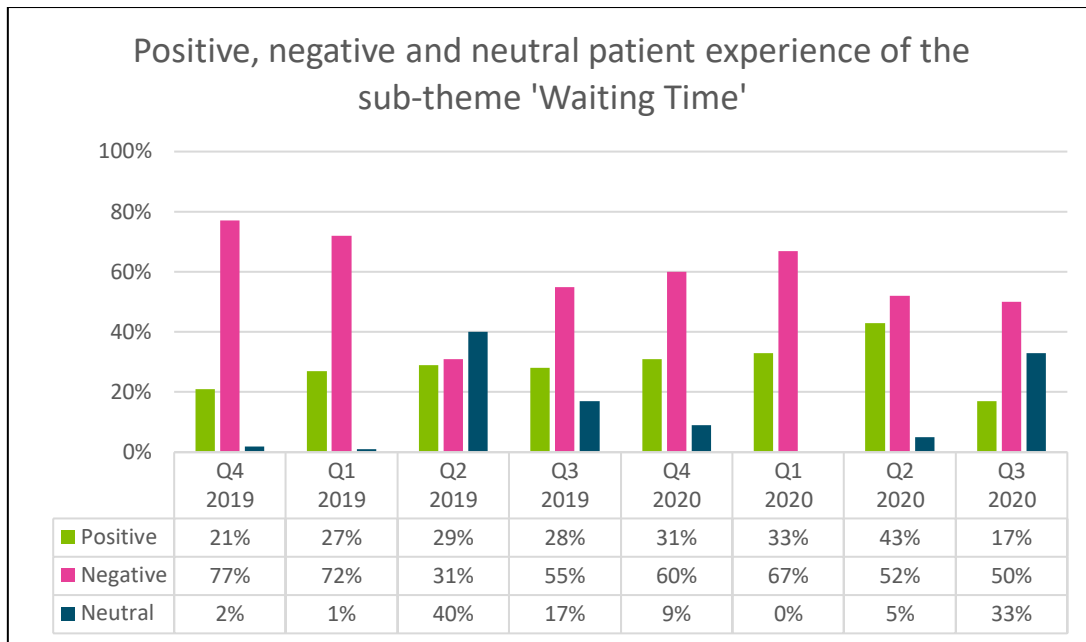


Figure 9. Bar graph to show positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter

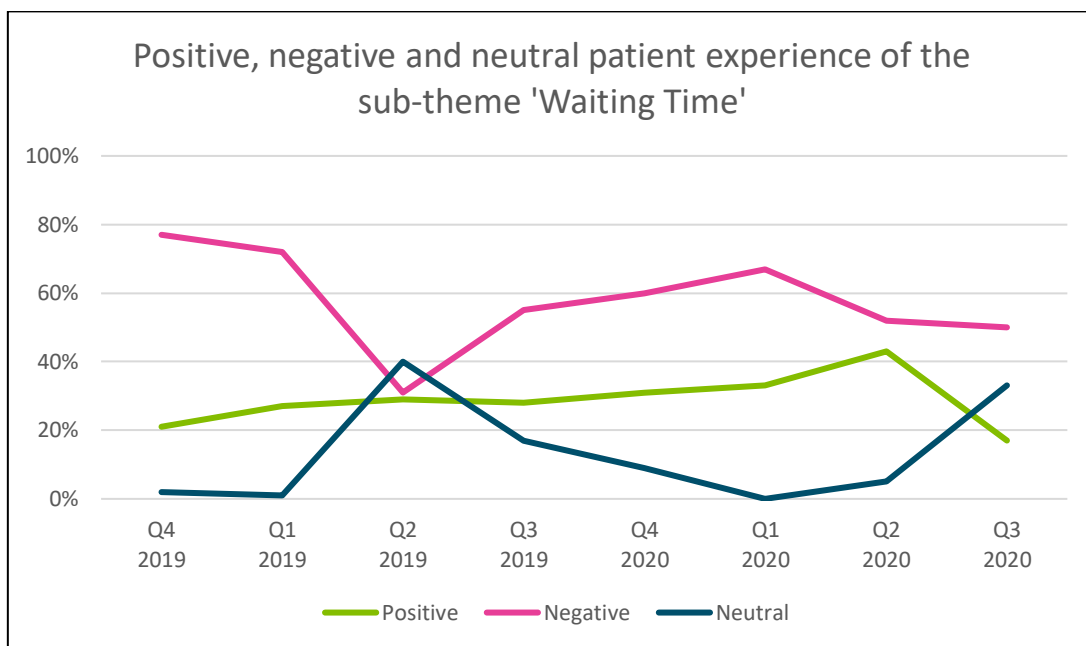


Figure 10. Line graph to show positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter

Sub-themes of 'Administration'

Figure 11 illustrates the sentiment breakdown for the top three sub-themes of **Administration**. During this time, a total of 910 reviews were identified as containing this theme. The main sub-themes, **Booking Appointments**, **Appointment Availability** and **Management of Service**, were referenced in a positive manner for the majority of the reviews, ranging from 53% - 77%. Negative sentiment reviews, therefore, still accounted for a relatively large number of reviews pertaining to the theme of Administration, with

33% and 34% for 'Booking Appointments' and 'Appointment Availability', respectively and accounting for 16% of the reviews that referenced the sub-theme 'Management of Service'. Neutral sentiment reviews have remained consistently low, with a maximum of 13% for 'Appointment Availability'.

These findings therefore seem to suggest that while the administrative arm of Ealing Hospital is suitably meeting the needs of most patients, there is still significant room for improvement.

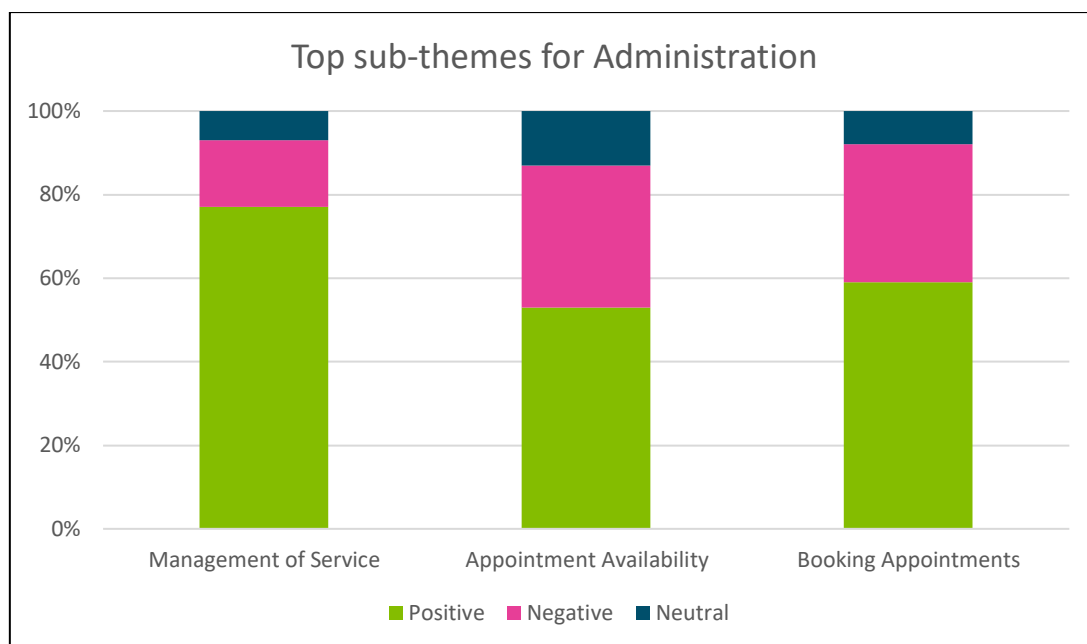


Figure 11. Bar graph to show the top sub-themes for 'Administration'

Conclusion

This paper explored how Access to Ealing Hospital has developed and progressed during the last 24 months (January 2019 - December 2020). A total of 1,911 reviews were collected, predominantly obtained through direct telephone contact and online reviews during the pandemic in 2020. Despite the reduction in reviews collected in Q1 and Q3 of 2020, the overall response of service users has been positive. Overall, the analysis indicates that Ealing Hospital has managed to maintain and even improve the level of access to its services over the past 2 years, thereby highlighting the concerted efforts of the hospital to adapt and continue to support patients during the pandemic.

The positive experiences have consistently outweighed the negative experiences for the most common themes of **Access to Services** and **Administration**. Despite the general low star rating and sentiment for 'Waiting Times', the higher positive reviews across all other main themes and sub-themes show that for the most part, service users have been happy with access to Ealing Hospital services. In some instances, including the overall level of satisfaction with Ealing Hospital Access; the main theme by the same name; and the three other sub-themes ('Suitability of Provider', 'Information and Advice' and 'Convenience/Distance to travel'), there has been a significant increase in positive reviews during the pandemic. This highlights the admirable efforts of the Ealing Hospital team to improve patients' access to services during a particularly trying time for national health and social care and arguably points toward the benefits of utilising digital systems to support care delivery.

Of course, the analysis suggests that there are still areas for improvement as the pressures of the pandemic ease. Further analysis of the specific sub-themes suggests that the amount of time that individuals are having to wait for an appointment is a persistent area of concern, although not a direct result of the pressures of the pandemic. Additionally, a significant percentage of reviews relating to the Administration theme - and its three sub-themes - suggests that patients are still finding it difficult to book appointment times that suit them. These findings indicate that appointment booking is a component of access that remains an area worth addressing to further improve the overall experience for patients at Ealing Hospital. Although this issue may have been exacerbated during the pandemic, findings prior to COVID-19 suggests there are more contributory factors that must be addressed to alleviate these issues.

As the LNWH NHS Trust begins to move toward 'normal' operations, we would advise Ealing Hospital to focus on the ways in which waiting times can be reduced for patients. However, we recognise that changes like this take time. We would therefore further suggest that transparency is maintained with patients around appointment waiting times and appointment booking. Patients have suggested to Healthwatch Ealing regarding both Primary and Secondary Care services that, most often, they are accepting of any delays in their treatment, if they are made aware of these delays and feel like an active member of their own care coordination. This level of patient inclusion is crucial as we move further toward a more integrated care system.

Lastly, as face-to-face consultations resume, we would also expect to see more reviews pertaining to the sub-themes of Access to Services, 'Convenience/Distance to travel' and 'Information and Advice'. We would encourage Ealing Hospital to continue to explore how digital appointments could support in the treatment of patients that are unable to get to the hospital or that simply require advice on how they can best manage their own care.

We hope to work closely with Ealing Hospital to monitor any barriers to access that relate to these sub-themes.

This two-year report provides robust evidence to suggest that the concerted efforts of the members of staff at Ealing Hospital and across LNWH NHS Trust have had a positive impact on the treatment and care that patients receive. What's more Ealing Hospital was able to successfully adapt to the new ways of working during the pandemic and continue to meet and often exceed this achieved standard of care.