

# Visit report

## Wotton Lawn Hospital, Gloucester

---

October to December 2023



# Contents

# Page

About Healthwatch Gloucestershire	3
Why we visited Wotton Lawn Hospital	3
Details of the visit	4
Key findings	5
Recommendations	5
Observations and findings	6
What people told us	9
Acknowledgements	10
Provider response	10
Contact us	10

---

© Healthwatch Gloucestershire

The material must be acknowledged as Healthwatch Gloucestershire copyright and the document title specified. Where third party material has been identified, permission from the respective copyright holder must be sought.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at [info@healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk)

You can download this publication from [healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk](http://healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk)

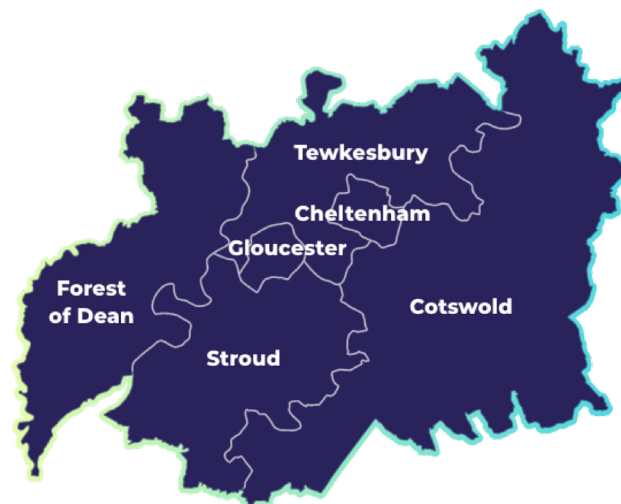
The Healthwatch Gloucestershire service is run by Evolving Communities CIC, a community interest company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales with company number 08464602. We confirm that we are using the Healthwatch Trademark (which covers the logo and Healthwatch Brand) when undertaking work on our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement

# About Healthwatch Gloucestershire

Healthwatch Gloucestershire is the county's health and social care champion. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care.

We're here to listen to your experiences of using local health and care services and to hear about the issues that really matter to you. We are entirely independent and impartial, and anything you share with us is confidential. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice to help you to get the care and support you need.

Healthwatch Gloucestershire is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We cover the geographical area of Gloucestershire County Council, which includes the districts and boroughs of Cheltenham, Cotswold, Forest of Dean, Gloucester, Stroud, and Tewkesbury.



This report is an example of how we share people's views, and how we evaluate the evidence we gather and make recommendations to inform positive change, for individual services as well as across the health and care system. We share our reports with those providing the service, regulators, the local authority, NHS commissioners, the public, Healthwatch England and any other relevant partners based on what we find during the visit.

## Why we visited Wotton Lawn Hospital

We were approached by Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust to discuss if we could undertake a number of visits to the hospital to understand what it feels like to be a patient staying in the hospital.

The Trust wanted an independent organisation to carry out this work to help them with their continuous improvement plans. They provided us with the key areas they were keen to understand further.

We agreed to do this and together with the support of seven appropriately trained staff and volunteers, carried out a total of seven visits across weekdays, evenings and weekends. Posters detailing our visits were put up across Wotton Lawn Hospital and paper copies of the questions were made available to patients and carers/relatives.

# Details of the visit

**Service visited:** Wotton Lawn Hospital, Gloucester

**Visit dates:** Seven visits from October to December 2023; carried out in blocks of two hours by teams of three or four.

## About the service

Wotton Lawn Hospital is an 88 bed acute mental health hospital situated near the centre of Gloucester and provides inpatient services for the county of Gloucestershire. It consists of four admission wards, a nurse-led psychiatric intensive care unit (PICU) and a low secure unit (LSU).

Service users are supported by a variety of healthcare workers including nurses, doctors and allied health professionals such as psychologists, art therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and sports exercise therapists.

## Purpose of the visits

These visits were part of our ongoing partnership working to support improving patient experiences across the county.

## How the visits were conducted

During the visits information was collected from observations and by talking to patients, carers/relatives and staff.

## Disclaimer

This report relates to the specific visits undertaken at the hospital and therefore reflects particular points in time, alongside the feedback we received through the completed questionnaires.

## Visit overview

The visits were undertaken following discussions with senior management at Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust. Areas of focus were agreed for the visits (which are covered in further detail below).

We agreed that we would only access communal areas in the hospital. For each visit we located ourselves in one of these areas. As we carried out seven visits in total, this provided an opportunity to be located in a number of different communal areas. As well as speaking to people, we also took the opportunity to observe day-to-day activities in the hospital.

Our posters detailing our visits were put up across the hospital and hospital management encouraged people to come and speak to us when we were there.

During our visits we spoke to 28 patients, 22 staff and eight carers/relatives. We also received five completed patient questionnaires. Due to the number of visits and encouraging everyone to speak to us, we did speak to some patients more than once. Some of these conversations were quite brief and so did not cover all areas. We also do not know which patients completed the questionnaires and so these could also represent patients we have spoken to directly during our visits.

A couple of points worth noting in relation to us speaking to patients more than once:

- They remained consistent with their feedback about their experiences of being in the hospital.
- Some opened up more when they spoke to us for a second time which suggests they felt more comfortable.

# Key findings

The following are the key findings from the visits and should be considered alongside the further information provided later in the report:

- During all of the seven visits we felt very warmly welcomed into the hospital by patients and staff.
- On the whole, feedback about the activities available to patients was positive, both in terms of what is available on the wards and via the therapy department.
- The majority of people we spoke to felt that more access to calm and sensory spaces would be beneficial.
- The majority of people we spoke to were positive about the locking of the doors at the entrance to the hospital, particularly in relation to unknown people being able to walk into the hospital. Some concern was raised by staff in relation to this possibly leading to increased anxiety for patients.
- Most of the patients we spoke to described feeling safe in the hospital.
- There were mixed responses in relation to patient and carer/relative involvement in care planning.
- All staff we spoke to described feeling safe whilst working in the hospital. There was some concern raised in relation to the lighting outside of the hospital when arriving or leaving in the dark.
- Most people we spoke to felt that the staff were approachable, well trained and communicated well. Good staffing levels were reported.
- Negative feedback about the media was heard in a couple of different contexts from both patients and staff:
  1. Increasing anxiety for patients in relation to staying, and being discharged from the hospital.
  2. The impact of the press being able to freely enter the hospital, this has now been resolved due to the locking the front doors.

# Recommendations

From observations undertaken and feedback from patients, staff, carers and relatives we would like management to consider the following recommendations:

1. Consider how to introduce more calm and sensory spaces into the hospital in a way that they are readily available for patients to access. Ideally these would be ward based, however we recognise that physical space may not support this.
2. Review the effectiveness of the locked front door, particularly in relation to the number of patient incidents, to understand if these have changed in any way.
3. Consider how to develop patient and carer/relative involvement in care planning to ensure that all patient needs are met.
4. Review the external lighting and in the grounds of the hospital to see if any improvements can be made.
5. Consider how to mitigate against negative media coverage when communicating with patients, carers/relatives and staff, to reduce any possible increased anxiety.

# Observations and findings

These are based on what was observed, conversations with patients, staff and carers/relatives during the visits and from the completed questionnaires. We were asked to cover these areas during our visits.

We were very keen to speak to carers/relatives during our visits, however there were limited opportunities to do so. When we did speak to them the conversations were very brief, however these did not raise any concerns in any element of the areas we were considering and appeared to feel that this was the right place for the patient to be. Any specific comments raised by relatives have been included under the relevant section below.

## Safety

Shortly before our visits started there was a change of practice in the hospital, whereby the main internal doors changed from being unlocked to locked. The ability to enter or leave the hospital is now managed by fobs. We were advised that this had been introduced as a safety measure to prevent patients leaving the hospital without permission and to prevent people entering the hospital without permission. The hospital was keen to understand how people felt about this.

We also talked to people about whether or not they felt safe generally when they are in, or accessing, the hospital.

### Patients

We were advised that patients who have permission to leave the hospital (for instance, are not on a Section) are provided with a fob to enable them to do this.

Patients told us that:

- They do feel safe in the hospital and it feels like a community.
- They feel safe because of the care and attention of staff.
- Patients described how other patients can make them feel unsafe but that mostly staff observe and deal with these situations before they become 'out of control'.

Specifically in relation to the locked doors, patients told us:

- They feel safer as staff don't allow people into the hospital who you don't want to see.
- While they do feel safer, they can also feel 'caged in'.

### Staff

Most of our conversations with staff focused on the newly locked doors:

- Overwhelmingly staff felt safer as a result of this as unknown people can no longer just walk into the hospital. We heard examples of how the press had come in uninvited previously.
- Some staff felt that locking the door can increase anxiety with patients and they were concerned that this may increase the number of patient incidents in the hospital.

Without exception all staff we spoke to said that they feel safe when they are in the hospital and well supported by their colleagues. Some expressed concern about the lighting outside when it is dark and that they do not always feel safe when they leave the hospital.

## Care Planning Involvement

We considered this from the perspective of whether patients and/or their carers/relatives have been involved in this process. We do recognise that there are limitations for our findings with this area, as we are not health care professionals. We did not seek to understand why or how patients came to be in the hospital or speak to staff to understand if there are reasons why some patients and their carers/relatives may not have been involved in this process.

One relative told us that they had been involved in this process and that they had felt able to contribute and were listened to. Another relative told us that she would be comfortable to raise any concerns if they arise.

### **Patients**

We had a mixed response from patients about their involvement in care planning, including:

- Some reported they were involved, some with their carers/relatives and were happy with this process.
- Some patients reported that while they have not been involved in this their carers/relatives have.
- Some patients reported that they, and their carers/relatives, have had no involvement in this process.
- Some patients were waiting for this process to start.
- Some patients couldn't remember if they had been involved or not.

### **Staff**

Staff told us that patient and carer/relative involvement does happen as much as possible but there can be capacity issues and that this 'could be better'. We also heard that the mental capacity of the patient can impact on their involvement with this process.

## **Ward environment**

We sought to understand how patients and their carers/relatives felt about the ward environment and specifically whether or not patients would benefit from access to a calm and sensory space on the ward. Currently there are a couple of these spaces in the wider hospital but patients are not able to readily access these without the support of staff.

We did not go onto the wards during our visits and are therefore did not undertake any observations in this area.

### **Patients**

On the whole patients were complimentary of the ward environment. Some of the themes from feedback are:

- Wards are kept clean and tidy.
- Patients appreciate having their own rooms.
- Wards can be noisy and disruptive at times but most patients felt that they are able to find a quieter space to retreat to.
- They are a fun place to be.
- Patients like the communal areas on the ward.

In relation to a calm and sensory space on the ward, we heard the following themes:

- It would make a big difference, because it would be a quiet space to reflect, relax and use when there are incidents on the ward.
- One patient told us how staff had created a space for them to use when the ward gets too busy and that a calm and sensory space on the ward would have helped with this.

### **Staff**

Most of the staff who spoke to us about a calm and sensory space on the wards felt that these would be beneficial to the patients and that they would be used a lot. Concern was expressed about how these could be accommodated due to challenges with the space available. Some staff felt that they would also benefit from this space.



## Experience of activities on the ward and/or in the therapy department

During our visits we heard a lot about activities. Patients and staff told us about a range of different activities available on the ward and those that are facilitated by the therapy department. We also heard from patients that they are supported to pursue their own interests, for example, playing musical instruments, cooking, craft sessions and exercise.

We observed patients being engaged in activities. For example, going on trips to the supermarket, going for walks outside of the hospital grounds, a visit to the hospital by a therapy dog, playing pool in the communal areas (staff were often observed doing this with patients) and carers/relatives bringing musical instruments in for patients.

### Patients

- Most patients felt that there are enough activities for them to engage with, both on/off the ward and in the therapy department.
- Some patients told us that they would like more access to hobby materials, for crafting, books and magazines.
- Some patients told us they would like more activities scheduled and that they would like more opportunity to get off the ward.

### Staff

We heard from ward staff that the level of activities on the wards has improved since the introduction of ward based Exercise and Activity Practitioners.

## Food

### Patients

Most patients told us that they enjoy the food that is provided. They felt there is adequate choice and that their own dietary needs are met. Patients also told us that food and drinks are also available outside of normal mealtimes.

Some patients told us they don't like the food very much, particularly on specific days and that there isn't always enough. A couple of patients told us they would like more choices with vegetarian options.

Some patients told us they would like to be able to cook more of their own food.

We heard from some patients that they are able to order food/takeaways and their carers/relatives can bring food in for them. We observed this happening on a number of occasions during our visits.

We observed a couple of vending machines in the communal areas that offered snacks. We observed patients using these. We also observed that these were often in need of re-stocking and therefore offered limited choices.

### Staff

Staff felt that the food meets the needs of patients and the hospital kitchen does respond to these needs. We heard from staff that patients are able to order in takeaways if they have the money to do so and it is within the allowed timeframes. We also heard that patients have access to ward kitchens for refreshments between mealtimes.

## General

Patients spoke positively about the staff and described them as supportive, that staff listen to them, know/treat them as individuals and that they can speak to staff at any time. A couple of carers/relatives told us that they are very happy with the staff, find them friendly, approachable, supportive and provide a good service.



Staff described a supportive working environment and that they feel able to raise concerns. They also described being offered debriefs after being involved in, or witnessing, incidents. Some staff told us about having an open and respectful atmosphere in their teams which supports them to express opinions etc.

We heard staff talk about how the wider team supports each other when incidents occur. We observed this on a couple of occasions during our visits.

While there were incidents with patients during our visits, we observed these to be managed in a calm and respectful way with staff working as a team to resolve these, demonstrating sensitivity and expertise.

Other than specific patient incidents the following was observed during our visits:

- A calm and friendly atmosphere with staff interacting with patients on an ad-hoc basis; we observed lots of occasions when staff and patients were stood chatting and interacting.
- Staff clearly knew the patients and responded to them accordingly, with interactions that were positive and humour being used in a gentle way.
- Staff communicated in a calm way with patients trying to leave the hospital and not being able to get through the locked doors (these were patients who did not have permission to leave).

We did hear from one patient about the negative impact of reading a news article about the hospital, which increased their anxiety around their discharge and support they would receive following this.

## What people told us

During our visits we asked patients, staff and carers/relatives a particular question and have gathered some of the responses below:

**If there was one thing you could change about Wotton Lawn Hospital and your time here, what would that be and why?**

Patients:

- "Change nothing, everything is first class."
- "As you start to get better, there needs to be more to keep you occupied, such as activities and entertainment etc."
- "I would like a diary so we know how we feel each day."

Staff:

- "Communication could be better; reiterating facts rather than opinions; too much emailing."
- "Shift patterns. A lot of us like long days; more time off. Would like to try 12-hour shifts."
- "Would love 12-hour shifts; continuity of care with patients and would get my life back."

**Below are some of the quotes from patients and staff from conversations that took place during the visit.**

Patients:

- "I would like to say what wonderful care and attention is given. I would like to thank doctors for their amazing work and undivided attention."
- "It's been an excellent experience, looked after from initial assessment through to now where I feel much better. The team have been supportive, informative and above all have a sense of humour."
- "I like using the gym here, but I don't like feeling restricted here."
- "I really like cooking and I can go out accompanied to buy ingredients."
- "Talking to the staff is very helpful. I'm scared they will discharge me before I am ready."

- "I don't want to be here, but know I need to stay here."
- "I'd like to get off the ward and do some more activities; sometimes there aren't enough staff to go out."
- "I feel listened to here."
- "It feels like home."
- "I feel good about my discharge. I understand what is going to happen."
- "I couldn't always see they were helping me; felt quite tough at times."

Staff:

- "I'm so impressed with the team. They manage difficult situations on a day-to-day basis magnificently."
- "I feel I make a difference every day here."
- "Taking risks with patients is difficult."
- "I feel safe here."
- "Really nice place to work; as a newly qualified nurse, there is always someone there."
- "I feel safe coming to work; I trust the team behind me."
- "Love it here."

## Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Gloucestershire would like to thank Wotton Lawn Hospital and Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust for working with us and enabling us to be able to speak to patients, carers/relatives and staff to seek their feedback.

## Provider response

**Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust** said: "We welcomed the opportunity to partner with Healthwatch and value their independent assessment of the views of services users and staff at Wotton Lawn Hospital. We note the overall positive and constructive feedback from services users and note the comments regarding the impact of the Exercise and Activity Practitioners and the recent changes to the access and aggress from the Hospital. We acknowledge and accept the recommendations noted in the report and will support the Matron to reflect on these and consider how this can improve service user and staff experiences in the future."

## Contact us

### Healthwatch Gloucestershire

13 Wheatstone Court,  
Waterwells Business Park,  
Quedgeley, Gloucester, GL2 2AQ

[info@healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk)

0800 652 5193

[healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk](http://healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk)