



## **Patient communication at University Hospitals Sussex reception areas**

**Royal Sussex County Hospital & Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital  
– Interim Summary Report, March 2025**

## Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove would like to thank our volunteers, service providers, service users and staff for contributing to the University Hospitals Sussex Communications Charter Welcome Standards Validation programme. Thank you to Conor, Mizzie, Jo, and Kate for volunteering as representatives on these visits.

## Patient Communication – Validation of the Welcome Standards

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove developed a Communication Charter as part of our outpatient focus, '[Putting good communications with patients at the heart of service change](#)' report. University Hospitals Sussex (UHSx) have used this work as part of the foundations for their Welcome Standards programme.

**Nicole Chavaudra, Director of Patient Experience, UHSx** – our acute trust:



*“We have been exploring the next steps for our Welcome Standards programme, which was borne out of the communication charter developed by Healthwatch Brighton & Hove. It is now a significant programme of training and self-evaluation around a set of criteria aligned to our values. We have been able to deliver demonstrable and quantifiable improvements as a result.”*

A [video](#) produced by University Hospitals Sussex demonstrates the value of the new training on Welcome Standards. This includes a special thanks to Healthwatch for being the co-creator and reviewer of the Welcome Standards.

To provide an independent assessment of the outcome of the training, Healthwatch-trained representatives will ‘mystery shop’ and observe the welcome that patients receive when entering UHSx hospitals and reception areas. In Emergency Departments, representatives will observe and interview patients about their experience rather than ‘mystery shopping’ to avoid interrupting a high-demand service.

This work is being done in collaboration with Healthwatch West Sussex, who are validating the hospitals in their area (St Richards Hospital; Worthing Hospital; Princess Royal Hospital).

Together with UHSx, we were shortlisted in the [UK Customer Satisfaction Awards 2025 awards in the Best Customer Service Partnership category](#).

We were also shortlisted in the [Healthwatch England Impact Awards 2025](#) for this work on communications, one of only 18 Healthwatch teams out of 152 to be recognised.

This report will cover the top-level findings from the visits in 2024. This includes the main reception service at the Louisa Martindale building in the Royal Sussex County Hospital and the Emergency Department at the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital.

## Welcome Standards

We looked at whether the reception services substantially met the Welcome Standards values of:

- **Communication**
- **Compassion**
- **Inclusion**
- **Respect**
- **Professionalism**
- **Teamwork**



### Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings observed on the specific visits set out below. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all service users and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

## Louisa Martindale building – Main Reception – Royal Sussex County Hospital

**Visits:** Four visits by four different representatives (Healthwatch volunteers and staff) in August and September 2024 (including a Saturday). This included observations and 'mystery shopping' e.g. asking questions at reception.

**Overall:** Very positive with only minor recommendations that could improve the service. The service passed on all six standards, fully delivering on three and delivering partially on three.

### Positives:

- The team worked incredibly well together and were generally very professional, especially when there was a need from the public.

- The team were compassionate, even when faced with more difficult scenarios such as ‘finding a patient on a ward for a concerned member of the public’.
- The team were viewed as competent, friendly, and helpful.

**Recommendations:**

- Have opening times of services to hand (e.g. for the hospital pharmacy).
- Have a member of staff always facing the entrance ready to assist.
- Ensure that staff try to keep a courteous expression, even when experiencing some confusion.

## **Children’s Emergency Department Reception – Royal Alexandra Children’s Hospital**

**Visits:** Three visits by two representatives (Healthwatch staff) in September, November, and December 2024. This included observations and surveying patients in the waiting area.

**Overall:** Positive with some areas for improvement. The service passed on all six standards, fully delivering on one and partially on five.

**Positives:**

- Many patients felt they had a good experience and especially appreciated being greeted with a smile and eye contact.
- Staff appeared professional, respectful, and worked well together.
- There was helpful signage with instructions and printed-out maps of the hospital for patients to take.

**Recommendations:**

- Instructions on what was going to happen (and the specific rooms they could sit in e.g. the adolescent room) could be communicated more thoroughly.
- An even warmer welcome would feel comforting and improve the experience, such as allowing the patient/caregiver to explain their situation briefly before instructing them to use the form.

## **Next steps**

Our feedback has been received by University Hospitals Sussex and we plan to visit more reception areas later in 2025.





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