

Patient experience of anxiety related to appointments

Rona Inniss

Introduction

People with a range of conditions attend the neurology outpatient department and see different healthcare professionals. NHS Digital report that in 2022 to 2023 there were 124.5 million outpatient appointments across the NHS, and our Trust carried out over 1.5 million face-to-face outpatient appointments.

The neurology department is one of many outpatient departments catering for a broad range of needs and abilities. This study sought to understand the experience of people attending appointments, asking how anxious they were, and if they experienced any difficulties in attending.

Methods

A short, self-completion questionnaire was offered to people who attended an appointment over a two-week period in November 2023. The non-validated questionnaire comprised a dichotomous 'yes/no' question, a multiple-choice question and two Likert scale questions.

During the two-week period approximately 200 people each week were scheduled to attend an appointment and 77 people completed the questionnaire.

Results

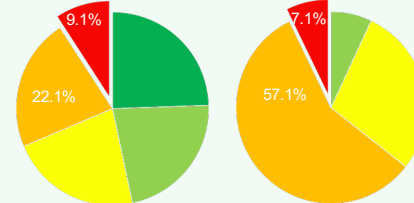
18% (14 out of 77) of respondents reported problems attending their appointments and 9% (7 out of 77) reported increased anxiety thinking about their appointments.

Of the people who reported problems 64.29% (9 out of 14) reported that their baseline anxiety was significant (3 or over 3 out of a maximum score of 4), and 21.43% (3 out of 14) reported increased anxiety thinking about their appointments.

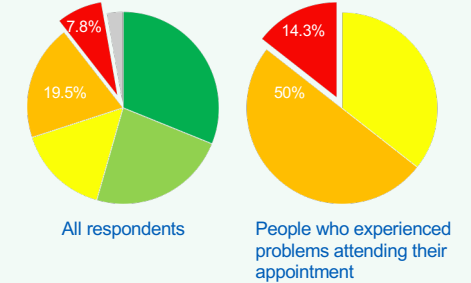
29% reported transport problems,
14% got lost inside the hospital,
14% reported unclear information on the appointment letter,
14% reported it took longer to walk through the hospital than expected

Anxiety Self-reported anxiety score 0 - 4

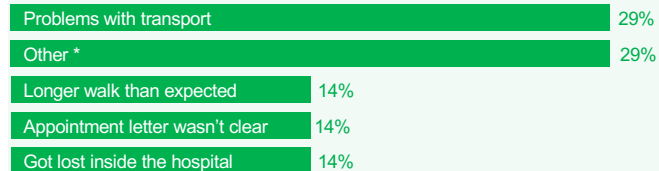
'How anxious do you feel generally?'



'How anxious do you feel about your appointment?'



Difficulties getting to appointments



* Other included difficulty getting into London, slow walking, and traffic



Scan QR code for references or go to <https://bit.ly/3Q4vqoH>

Limitations

Patient care was prioritised. Questionnaires were not offered when the department was very busy or if people were distressed. These situations are likely to be when significant problems and anxiety were experienced, and future work should seek to address this gap.

Implications

Improving the quality and type of information on appointment letters and enhancing wayfinding may lessen problems that people experience when attending appointments and consequently may reduce patient anxiety.

Working together through collaborative patient groups may improve people's experience; easy wins could include re-writing letter templates with patient groups, adjusting signage to include approximate walking times and reviewing wayfinding.