

Emergency Department Impact Report

Improving Patient Experience in Emergency Department Settings

Healthwatch Cornwall would like to thank the Emergency Department team at the Royal Cornwall Hospital for their openness, transparency, and willingness to engage in this work. We appreciate the access provided to observe and speak with staff and patients, and the thoughtful responses offered in light of our findings.

This report by Healthwatch Cornwall assesses patient experience in the Emergency Department (ED) at Royal Cornwall Hospital (Treliske). It's grounded in lived experiences and collaborative feedback, driving tangible improvements across various service dimensions.

We also extend our sincere gratitude to the individuals and families who shared their stories and experiences as part of this research. Your voices are at the heart of this report and are instrumental in driving meaningful change in urgent and emergency care services across the Emergency Department, Royal Cornwall Hospital.

Executive Summary

This report demonstrates the direct impact of Healthwatch Cornwall in driving measurable improvements within the Emergency Department (ED) at Royal Cornwall Hospital (Treliske).

Through amplifying the voices of patients and families, Healthwatch Cornwall catalysed a focused response that is already transforming key aspects of emergency care delivery. Without this intervention, many long-standing patient concerns would have remained hidden or unresolved.

Healthwatch Cornwall gathered real-time feedback from patients and families who had recently used the Emergency Department. This evidence exposed critical issues affecting patient experience, dignity, and wellbeing. In response to Healthwatch Cornwall's findings, the hospital's leadership has committed to a series of immediate and longer-term actions to improve confidentiality, comfort, accessibility, communication, and support during long waits.

Key examples of Healthwatch-led impact include:

- **Confidentiality improvements** through the creation of private discussion spaces.
- **Redesign of waiting areas** to improve comfort for all patients, including those with mobility needs.
- **Expanded access to food, water, and healthier vending options** for those facing long waits.
- **Clearer signage and better wayfinding** across the Emergency Department.
- **Increased focus on cleanliness and staff responsiveness**, including reinstating regular senior nurse walkarounds.

Healthwatch Cornwall's intervention acted as the catalyst for a renewed culture of patient-centred improvement, validated by strong endorsements from Emergency Department senior staff.

Moving forward, Healthwatch Cornwall will continue to lead progress monitoring, run targeted campaigns ("Voices from the ED"), and drive systemic change by ensuring that patient experience remains central to the redesign of urgent and emergency care services in Cornwall.

Why Healthwatch Cornwall Matters

As the independent champion for people who use health and care services, Healthwatch Cornwall:

- **Created a safe, trusted platform for patients and families to share honest feedback.**
- **Delivered robust, evidence-based insights rooted in lived experience.**
- **Fostered open, transparent collaboration with ED staff and leadership.**
- **Acted as a crucial bridge between public experience and institutional action.**

This work not only highlighted challenges but inspired clear, measurable commitments to change — putting people, not systems, at the heart of emergency care redesign.

Key Findings: Healthwatch-Driven Changes and Commitments

Confidentiality Improvements

- Designated private discussion areas under consideration.
- Enhanced signage reinforcing confidentiality protocols.

Waiting Room Comfort

- Review of seating for comfort and accessibility.
- Balancing infection control with the urgent need for dignified seating.

Food & Drink Access

- Nurse in Charge (NIC) ensuring water and cups are always available.
- Exploring expanded access to food outside of shop opening hours.
- Reviewing vending options to offer healthier choices.

Facilities for Long Waits

- Revisiting options for mobile phone charging facilities.
- Considering improved TV content to create a less stressful environment.

Parking & Accessibility

- Sharing patient feedback with external parking providers.
- Improving communication of alternative access routes.

Improved Signage

- Collaboration with the Health & Safety team to enhance wayfinding, especially for pedestrians.

Cleanliness & Response

- Cleaning teams briefed on patient concerns.
- Request for additional cleaning support actioned.
- Senior nurse walkarounds reinstated to proactively monitor standards.

Better Information for Patients

- Clearer communication plans around waiting times, triage, and care pathways underway.

Referral Clarity


- Ongoing work with system partners to ensure referrals only occur when services are available.

Case Study Spotlight: Healthwatch Made a Difference

Case Study: “Comfort During the Wait”


Identified by:	Healthwatch through patient feedback.
The issue:	Uncomfortable, inaccessible seating caused distress for vulnerable individuals during long waits.
Intervention:	The ED is redesigning seating to meet patient needs, prioritising both hygiene and dignity.
Healthwatch Cornwall's Impact:	A direct result of Healthwatch advocacy, ensuring that patient comfort is no longer an afterthought but a fundamental aspect of care.

Stakeholder Feedback



"We appreciate the insights provided by Healthwatch Cornwall and are dedicated to implementing changes that enhance patient care."

— **Emergency Department Senior Management**



"The findings highlighted many areas we had suspected but not fully validated — this was a much-needed reality check."

— **Senior Nurse, Royal Cornwall Hospital**



"We are already making changes, like reinstating walkarounds and pressing for improved signage."

— **Head of Estates**

Looking Ahead: Sustaining the Momentum

Healthwatch Cornwall will:

- **Conduct a 6–9 Month Review** to evaluate progress against commitments.
- Maintain a **regular presence** at ED service **improvement meetings**.
- Launch the **"Voices from the ED" campaign**, amplifying patient stories through multimedia.
- **Host Feedback-to-Action Workshops** quarterly, bringing together patients and staff to co-create improvements.
- **Develop a Storybank** — a living library of anonymised patient narratives — to inform training, reporting, and service design.

Why This Matters

The Healthwatch Cornwall report is not just a summary of issues. It is a call to action and a proof of concept for compassionate, patient-driven reform.

By combining the voices of patients with strong institutional partnerships, Healthwatch Cornwall is shaping a healthcare system that listens, learns, and evolves — for the benefit of all.

Campaign Materials Outline: "Voices from the ED"

1. Campaign Toolkit

- Overview document
- Consent forms (digital & print)
- Story prompts & tips

2. Digital Assets

- Campaign branding
- Social media templates
- Short video scripts and interview templates
- Canva-ready quote cards

3. Outreach Materials

- Posters for ED waiting areas
- Email templates for press and community partners
- Leaflets for EDs and GP surgeries

4. Internal Engagement Tools

- PowerPoint briefing deck
- Storybank starter pack
- Facilitation guide for Feedback-to-Action Workshops

5. Monitoring & Impact Tools

- Story tracking sheet
- Participant feedback form
- Impact summary template

Conclusion

Healthwatch Cornwall has shown that real change happens when patient voices are not just heard, but acted upon.

This report sets a powerful precedent: with the right approach, even the most complex, high-pressure healthcare environments can become more compassionate, responsive, and patient-centred.

Together, Healthwatch Cornwall and the Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust are building a future where every patient is not just a number in a waiting room, but a valued partner in shaping better care.



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