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In January 2015 local patient champion Healthwatch Leicestershire spent a week at Leicester Royal Infirmary (LRI) in four departments talking to 262 patients. The result of this research is the report 'A Week in Leicester Royal Infirmary (LRI): The Patient Perspective', published today.

The health watchdog spent time in Accident and Emergency (A&E), Discharge Lounge, Ophthalmology and the Ears, Nose & Throat (ENT) Department finding out what changes patients and staff would make to improve the experience of using services at LRI.

These departments were specifically selected following findings from the June 2014 Healthwatch Leicestershire report 12 hours in A&E, as well as issues raised by the public during Healthwatch Leicestershire's 'My Voice Counts Tour' engagement events.

Healthwatch Leicestershire staff, board members and volunteers were given unprecedented and unlimited access to patients and staff at the LRI, enabling them to capture honest and unbiased experiences, gain useful insights and see the services being delivered first-hand.

The report found that access to alternative and perhaps more appropriate care continues to be an issue for A&E services: 44% of patients surveyed at A&E had visited the department in the last 12 months, 33% of patients came straight to A&E without seeking alternative care and 35% of patients attempted to get a GP appointment before presenting at A&E, yet 1 in 3 was unsuccessful.

One patient from North West Leicestershire told us: "I phoned the GP and got no help, only a promise to phone back and half the time even that does not happen".

The report also found that patients continue to be positive about their medical treatment, rating their overall experience at 5.8 out of a top score of 7 (excellent). The vast majority of patients surveyed (82%) also said that their expectations of the service were met 'very much' or 'extremely'.

Gillian Adams, Vice Chair of the Healthwatch Leicestershire board commented:

"It is encouraging to hear that overwhelmingly the patients we spoke to had a positive experience at LRI.

Waiting times in outpatients' clinics continues to frustrate patients and we hope LRI will use our findings to review and improve their appointments systems. Reducing the number of patients in A&E is a complex issue; 1 in 3 of the patients who tried to get a GP appointment before coming to A&E were unsuccessful.

Patients tell us that GP access is hugely variable. We know from talking to patients that some GP practices have an appointments system that works well, yet other practices don't, leaving patients unable to see their GP when they need them.

We are recommending that all GP practices in Leicestershire offer both pre-bookable appointments as well as on-the-day appointments."

Healthwatch Leicestershire staff have met with the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Urgent Care Programme Delivery Lead to discuss recommendations and have also offered to meet individual departments at the LRI to discuss the findings. The watchdog will continue to work closely with stakeholders to help implement its recommendations and improve health services.

The full report is available now from www.healthwatchleicestershire.co.uk and will be shared with John Adler CEO UHL, UHL patient experience managers and health leaders across Leicestershire.

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

About Healthwatch Leicestershire

Healthwatch Leicestershire is an independent consumer champion for health and social care in Leicestershire. The organisation helps to shape and improve local health and social care in our community. Healthwatch Leicestershire is part of the Healthwatch national network, established by the Government to ensure local patients and users have a greater input to shaping and designing local services.

About Healthwatch England

Healthwatch England is the independent consumer champion for health and social care in England. The organisation has independent statutory powers, as stated in the Health and Social Care Act 2012, to ensure the consumers' voice is heard and best practice is delivered in health and social care nationally. Healthwatch is also focused on providing leadership, guidance and support to the development of the Healthwatch network. To find out more please go to www.healthwatch.co.uk.