

Urgent care: Julie's story

This is a story about a Bolton patient called Julie who was recently diagnosed with gastroenteritis and stayed at the Royal Bolton Hospital for two days.

'My wife started with stomach cramps and blood loss on Tuesday 10th May 2016, and we rung NHS 111 for advice. I spoke to the operator directly while they were triaging her as my wife is nervous with phones and would have struggled, especially since she was also ill. Thought it was great and understanding of the operator to allow me to do this. The operator confirmed that they had booked my wife an ambulance for her to go to A&E. I said I could drive but they advised us to wait for the ambulance.

After waiting half an hour I rang 999 and said that the operator at NHS 111 had booked the ambulance, but I was happy to drive my wife up to the hospital if that was ok. The operator said they would really appreciate that as they were inundated with calls. I think NHS 111 operators should ask the patient if they can get there first if appropriate, as while it is good they offer transport, it puts more pressure on the system and causes patients to wait and worry.

Once we arrived at A&E, it was very quick from booking in to being triaged by the nurses. My wife's blood pressure reading was though the roof (should be 120 and was 190!) so I think she got rushed through. The staff at A&E got my wife a trolley and she was taken through to the main treatment room which was full of people. After an hour, the doctors said they were going to admit her for observation. My wife was also sent for a couple of x-rays. The porter who took us to the x-ray department was very jolly which really cheered us up, and made the whole situation bearable. He was a great guy and I wished I had asked him his name!

In the treatment room all staff were very helpful and tried to answer any questions, but you could see they were all flying around and were so busy. My wife was asked to give a sample but unfortunately as she was so connected to a number of different machines she really struggled. They left us to sort the sample to give her some privacy, but it may have been helpful if some of the wires had been disconnected for a short time to allow her more movement.

On the ward the staff were lovely and gave us all the information we could possibly need, and gave me a leaflet about visiting times. There was also a handbook on my wife's bed which is a very useful and clever idea.

The one thing that my wife found very stressful was not knowing when she would be discharged. She was only admitted for two days, but the constant thinking she was coming home and then finding she wasn't got her hopes up and then she was disappointed. She was happy to do as medically advised, but would have rather not

known until the staff knew for definite. It was sort of false hope! I must stress that she had excellent care, but everyone prefers to be home in familiar surroundings.

For me personally, the thing I found a bit frustrating was the charge for parking at the hospital. It is £3 for 24 hours, but if you are only able visit once that day (and visiting is at set times), you do feel cheated paying for so much for just one visit. Perhaps 27 hours could be used instead of 24 then at least you would get two visits per charge.

On Thursday 12th May, the doctor who came to see my wife on the ward was very good. He came to see my wife at about 9-9.30pm, as the nurses had said earlier he was still in surgery and would come straight from there. He looked at the blood test results and stated that he was happy to discharge if my wife was happy to go. The nurses had allowed me to stay after the visiting time, as they thought there was a very good chance my wife would be discharged once the doctor had seen her.

One concern we have, is that when my wife was first admitted, the Doctor/Consultant told her that they would give her a sick note for work before she was discharged. However, when she was discharged they told her she would need to get one off her GP instead. This was a disappointment that it was another thing my wife would have to sort. She was also concerned that the GP wouldn't know anything about the problems she had been having, and feared she would be unable to get a sick note.

I contacted our GP practice on the Friday and they didn't have the information from the hospital yet. The receptionist told me it can take up to two weeks to get the information from the hospital. The receptionist suggested we came in to see a GP, but we had been advised by the hospital not too due to the diagnosis of gastroenteritis so a telephone appointment was made instead. I was told that a GP would ring sometime that afternoon. I believe it would be better if they could set a time of when the call would happen; for example, maybe within a specific hour. My wife has a disability and cannot move very quickly, and was worried she would miss the call if she went to the toilet or made a drink in the kitchen. However, I do want to stress that the practice was fantastic and they always are. It is very easy to get appointments, but I have heard of horror stories elsewhere.

The GP phoned that afternoon and he was able to diagnose my wife over the phone. He wrote a sick note and when my wife enquired when it would be ready, he joked it would be ready 'in 3 minutes but you don't have to pick it up straight away!'

My wife is now home and resting, and hoping to return to work soon. She is waiting for an outpatient appointment to be sent in the post as the doctor who discharged her felt that a further investigation was needed; they recommended a colonoscopy because of the bleeding prior to admission.

Finally my wife and I would both like to state that the NHS is absolutely marvellous and we wouldn't want to ever be without it. We just want to pass on some constructive comments to help.'

Points of learning –

- Option of how to travel to the hospital being given to patient if appropriate.
- Consistent advice given about how to obtain a sick note
- Telephone consultations booked at a specific time by GP practices if possible.