

Healthwatch Hampshire
Westgate Chambers
Staple Gardens
Winchester
SO23 8SR

Portsmouth CCG
Fareham & Gosport CCG
South East Hampshire CCG

20th July 2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

Services for Armed Forces Veterans in Hampshire

On behalf of Healthwatch Hampshire and Shore Leave Haslar we are writing to you regarding services for Armed Forces Veterans in Hampshire, specifically in the South East Hampshire area. We understand that the CCGs are responsible for commissioning all secondary and community services required by Armed Forces' families, services for Veterans and Reservists when not mobilised and bespoke services for Veterans, such as Veterans mental health services.

On leaving the Armed Forces, Veterans become responsible for managing all aspects of their transition to civilian life, which includes managing their health care. Shore Leave Haslar, through their work with Veterans had anecdotal evidence that service leavers often didn't register with a GP and neglect other areas of their health.

Shore Leave Haslar were recently awarded funding from Healthwatch Hampshire to carry out a survey to find out what barriers, if any, are encountered by Veterans when accessing healthcare. The survey asked about access to services for treatment of ongoing medical conditions, mental health support and rehabilitation. It also asked participants if they had registered as a Veteran with their GP. The full survey and results are available on the Healthwatch website: www.healthwatchhampshire.co.uk.

GP Services

Much of the feedback obtained from the survey focussed on interactions with GP Practices. After reviewing the results we would like to make the following observations and request further information regarding the responses obtained¹.

¹ As part of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, health providers and commissioners must respond to Healthwatch within 20 working days.

1. Participants were asked if they had registered as a Veteran with their GP. Of 91 respondents, 36% were unsure and 26% had not registered. When asked why, the overwhelming reasons were that they were not asked or did not think it mattered. **How do GP Surgeries in your area ensure that people registering for the first time are asked if they are a service leaver or Veteran so that it can be recorded?**
2. A number of respondents commented that medical records from the Ministry of Defence had not been received by their GP so their medical records remain incomplete. **How does the CCG ensure that there are effective processes in place for the transfer of medical history when leaving the Armed Forces?**
3. Some of the feedback received suggests that some Veterans feel that GP's are not aware of local services available for Veterans and are therefore unable to effectively signpost people for more support and information.
 - **We recommend that all GPs surgeries have copies of the NHS information leaflet entitled 'For those who served: Meeting the healthcare needs of Veterans in England'² readily available and that all healthcare professionals are fully conversant with the contents of these materials.**
 - **We recommend that all GPs surgeries have a copy of the 'Royal College of General Practitioners' booklet entitled 'Meeting the Healthcare needs of Veterans - A Guide for General Practitioners'³ readily available and that all healthcare professionals are fully conversant with the contents of these materials.**
 - **We recommend that Veterans in your area who require extra support/help/services are initially signposted to Veterans Outreach Support in Portsmouth (Details attached). We also note that the NHS Choices website has been significantly updated and where appropriate, Veterans should also be signposted to this resource.**

Secondary Care Services

The Armed Forces Covenant provides the following guidance on healthcare for Veterans:

"Veterans receive their healthcare from the NHS, and should receive priority treatment where it relates to a condition which results from their service in the Armed Forces, subject to clinical need. Those injured in Service, whether physically or mentally, should be cared for in a way which reflects the Nation's moral obligation to them whilst respecting the individual's wishes. For those with concerns about their mental health, where symptoms may not present for some time after leaving Service, they should be able to access services with professionals who have an understanding of Armed Forces culture."

Feedback received as part of the survey suggests that some Veterans are not having their treatment prioritised as stated in the Covenant. **Can you assure us that everything possible is being done to uphold this guidance in your area? How is this monitored to ensure the best possible service for Armed Forces Veterans?**

² <http://www.britishveterans.co.uk/documents/MeetingthehealthcareneedsofveteransinEngland.pdf>

³ <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/media/1163063/veteranshealthcareneedsgps.pdf>

We are writing to you to ask you to consider this patient feedback so that we are able to return to participants and provide further information about their concerns. A selection of comments and more detailed analysis is included in the report compiled by Shore Leave Haslar. A copy of their report is attached to this letter.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,

Steve Taylor
Manager, Healthwatch Hampshire
On behalf of Shore Leave Haslar

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cc: Healthwatch Portsmouth
Veterans Outreach Support (VOS)