

Enter & View

Spa Medica Romford Eye Care Hospital

South Street, Romford RM1 1TR

24 June 2025



What is Healthwatch Havering?

Healthwatch Havering is the local consumer champion for both health and social care in the London Borough of Havering. Our aim is to give local citizens and communities a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are provided for all individuals locally.

We are an independent organisation, established by the Health and Social Care Act 2012, and employ our own staff and involve lay people/volunteers so that we can become the influential and effective voice of the public.

Healthwatch Havering is a Community Interest Company Limited by Guarantee, managed by three part-time directors, including the Chairman and the Company Secretary, supported by two part-time staff, and by volunteers, both from professional health and social care backgrounds and lay people who have an interest in health or social care issues.

Why is this important to you and your family and friends?

Healthwatch England is the national organisation which enables the collective views of the people who use NHS and social services to influence national policy, advice and guidance.

Healthwatch Havering is your voice, enabling you on behalf of yourself, your family and your friends to ensure views and concerns about the local health and social services are understood.

Your contribution is vital in helping to build a picture of where services are doing well and where they need to be improved. This will help and support the Clinical Commissioning Groups, NHS Services and contractors, and the Local Authority to make sure their services really are designed to meet citizens' needs.

*'You make a living by what you get,
but you make a life by what you give.'
Winston Churchill*

What is Enter and View?

Under Section 221 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Healthwatch Havering has statutory powers to carry out Enter and View visits to publicly funded health and social care services in the borough, such as hospitals, GP practices, care homes and dental surgeries, to observe how a service is being run and make any necessary recommendations for improvement.

These visits can be prompted not only by Healthwatch Havering becoming aware of specific issues about the service or after investigation, but also because a service has a good reputation, and we would like to know what it is that makes it special.

Enter & View visits are undertaken by representatives of Healthwatch Havering who have been duly authorised by the Board to carry out visits. Prior to authorisation, representatives receive training in Enter and View, Safeguarding Adults, the Mental Capacity Act and Deprivation of Liberties. They also undergo Disclosure Barring Service checks.

Occasionally, we also visit services by invitation rather than by exercising our statutory powers. Where that is the case, we indicate accordingly but our report will be presented in the same style as for statutory visits.

Once we have carried out a visit (statutory or otherwise), we publish a report of our findings (but please note that some time may elapse between the visit and publication of the report). Our reports are written by our representatives who carried out the visit and thus truly represent the voice of local people.

We also usually carry out an informal, follow-up visit a few months later, to monitor progress since the principal visit.

Background and purpose of the visit

Healthwatch Havering is aiming to visit all health and social care facilities in the borough. This is a way of ensuring that all services delivered are acceptable and the welfare of the resident, patient or other service-user is not compromised in any way.

The visit

Spa Medica Romford Eye Hospital is a private medical facility providing eye care services, such as Cataract Surgery, YAG Capsulotomy, Aged Macular Degeneration (AMD) Clinics and a Hydroxychloroquine Clinic, to the NHS under contract.

Healthwatch has powers to Enter & View such facilities because of their NHS work. It is part of a chain of such facilities operating under contract to a range of Integrated Care Boards (in this case, NHS North East London).

We decided to carry out an Enter & View visit in order to observe the services provided there and to understand how they relate to services available at Ophthalmology Departments at NHS hospitals such as Queen's Hospital, Romford.

The premises

The team were met by the porter.

The building is modern, well-appointed and easy to find (at the junction of two major thoroughfares on the edge of Central Romford). It has allocated car parking for ten cars, plus a dedicated drop-off bay. The team were told that, although there is no dedicated provision for disabled visitors, efforts are made to ensure that any disabled patients who need to park can be accommodated. There is access for disabled people into the building. Spa Medica is on the ground floor of a large block (with other organisations accommodated in it).

There is no electronic check-in but the porter escorts people to the reception desk, where there are 3 staff. It is a large area so privacy did not appear to be a problem. Inside, the premises are very clean and well-appointed throughout.

The team noticed that, within the reception area, there was a hearing loop system, hand sanitiser, plenty of notice boards, and advice about the translation and interpretation service. There was large-letter signage and what appeared to be good security arrangements. The team were told that the website is managed by Head Office in Bolton. All complaints initially are all sent to Head Office¹ before being diverted to the relevant Hospital Manager/team to look into. It is at this point that the patient's complaint would be then acknowledged in line with the

¹ Using the email address **feedback@spamedica.co.uk**

company's complaints policy and handled locally rather than by Head Office.

Staffing

The team were introduced to the Manager and the Area Manager and also met the staff member who would be covering the Area Manager's duties during a forthcoming extended period of absence; they spent an hour with the team, discussing the service. The Manager had worked for Spa Medica for six years, having moved from their Chelmsford facility to Romford four years ago. The Lead Registered General Nurse had also been with the Company for several years.

When the team commented that patients had mentioned experiencing problems getting through to the hospital by telephone, they were informed that all calls are first routed through Head Office in Bolton. The Manager seemed to be unaware of this being a problem – but said she would take the issue up immediately; we have since been advised that this was immediately escalated to Director-level. The team were told that Spa Medica welcome patient feedback and comment (for example, using Trustpilot).

The staff appeared very conscious of patients' concerns over eye surgery and keen to put them at ease, taking time as necessary to reassure them. Patients are talked through the

procedure and a chaperone is available if they wish (especially where cultural boundaries come into play). Tea, coffee and biscuits were freely available. The team were told that, at the time of the visit, there was a problem with the coffee machine, which they were trying to resolve but, if need be, coffee could be prepared in the kitchen.

Staffing levels

The team were told that the hospital is staffed as follows:

- 3 site allocated Optometrists (with additional cover when required)
- 3 Consultants on contract (who also work for the NHS if they wish) with additional cover called in if required
- 9 Nurses and a Lead Nurse
- 9 Healthcare Technicians (HCTs) and a Senior HCT
- 5 Reception staff,
- 1 Porter/Concierge

All training is done during paid time, both face-to-face and online, and there is a Training Team at Head Office. Salary scales are linked to competency.

The hospital opens to the public at 7.50 a.m. but the staff have a huddle each morning before that. Staff support meetings take place monthly. All staff are trained to work with people living with dementia.

Patients can be referred by GPs but are mainly referred from opticians. They are seen usually within two weeks of referral for pre-assessment and preparation of a treatment plan, and are given written information at that point.

Treatments offered at the hospital include Cataract surgery, YAG laser surgery, VR surgery and AMD Clinics. All patients are dealt with as NHS patients and the hospital has no catchment area. They see around 26 patients in each clinic every day but would like to expand if suitable premises became available so that the list of patients could be increased. They always deal with any post operative issues themselves and do not refer patients to A & E unless necessary, providing 24/7 cover, including transport if necessary.

Staff views

The team were able to talk in private to two staff members individually: a Nurse with 4 years' employment with Spa Medica, three of which had been at Romford, and a Lead HCT, who had previously worked at an optician before joining Spa Medica in December 2021. They both said they felt very supported in their

work, had constant and regular training, and there are 2 diagnostic lead trainers. They both loved their work and had no suggestions for improvements or changes.

Patients' views

When the team first arrived there were a number of patients in reception but by the time the team were in a position to speak to them, only five remained, two of whom declined to speak with them. Of the three who were spoken to:

1. A man who had just had his second cataract done and was waiting for a taxi. He told the team he was very happy with how things had gone, speaking very highly of the service and of the treatment he had received. He had come from Ilford.
2. A man who had had both cataracts done and had come back for some laser treatment to improve performance after his second operation.
3. A lady who had come back after her 2nd cataract to see someone with a view to having laser treatment to improve the outcome of her second eye operation.

Conclusions and recommendations

The team formed the impression that this is a well-run hospital with a close-knit team who like working with each other to provide the best service they can. They recognise there is room for development and expansion if the opportunity occurs, bearing in mind the large, ageing population in the area. The staff were very friendly and generous with their time during the visit.

The only recommendation that the team wish to make concerns the arrangements for patients to contact the hospital by telephone. Currently, there is only one telephone number that serves all Spa Medica facilities, operated from the Head Office in Bolton.

It can sometimes take a long time for the telephone to be answered, and the staff who do answer will not have local knowledge of each of the company's hospitals. This can cause problems, for example for patients phoning in to make last-minute changes to their appointments.

We therefore suggest that the company should explore the possibility of providing to patients a locally operated telephone contact point (even if the main contact number remains at Bolton), which could helpfully include a voicemail facility and/or the ability to request a callback.

In response to this recommendation, Spa Medica have advised that “the decision to have all communications through a central point of contact is to ensure availability of staff to answer any calls at all times as hospitals are not always open and staffed. [They] appreciate that this can be difficult but working that way provides assurance that all calls will be answered and directed to the most appropriate staff.”

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank everyone at Spa Medica Romford for their assistance during the visit.

Participation in Healthwatch Havering

Local people who have time to spare are welcome to join us as volunteers. We need both people who work in health or social care services, and those who are simply interested in getting the best possible health and social care services for the people of Havering.

Our aim is to develop wide, comprehensive and inclusive involvement in Healthwatch Havering, to allow every individual and organisation of the Havering Community to have a role and a voice at a level they feel appropriate to their personal circumstances.

Members

This is the key working role. For some, this role will provide an opportunity to help improve an area of health and social care where they, their families or friends have experienced problems or difficulties. Very often a life experience has encouraged people to think about giving something back to the local community or simply personal circumstances now allow individuals to have time to develop themselves. This role will enable people to extend their networks, and can help prepare for college, university or a change in the working life. There is no need for any prior experience in health or social care for this role.

The role provides the face to face contact with the community, listening, helping, signposting, providing advice. It also is part of ensuring the most isolated people within our community have a voice.

Healthwatch Havering Friends' Network

Join our Friends' Network for regular updates and other information about health and social care in Havering and North East London. It cost nothing to join and there is no ongoing commitment.

To find out more, visit our website at

<https://www.healthwatchhaverling.co.uk/advice-and-information/2022-06-06/our-friends-network-archive>



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