

## HEALTH

# Many patients opting for private treatment to avoid NHS delays

By Katie Grant  
CONSUMER AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

Increasing numbers of Britons are paying for private healthcare rather than wait for NHS treatment.

Record NHS waiting lists have driven a surge in patients going private since the onset of the pandemic, with spending almost doubling at one major provider.

In England alone, a record 5.6 million people were waiting to start hospital treatment at the end of July.

Spire Healthcare, which operates 39 hospitals across Britain, has reported an 81 increase in self-pay spending between April to June compared with the same period in 2019.

Justin Ash, chief executive of the hospital group, said: "There is a sea change in the market about going private.

Because GPs are under so much pressure people are going online and booking a consultant."

Even some of the NHS's staunchest supporters have begun seeking treatment elsewhere.

Kate Robinson, 56, persuaded her mother, a retired NHS nurse, to go private.

Aged 82, Ms Robinson's mother had become "very cut off" during Covid and needed cataract surgery. The pensioner had already had one eye done on the NHS prior to the pandemic, but her daughter did not want her to have to struggle on for months before getting her other eye treated so arranged for her to have the surgery with Optegra, a private specialist.

**5.6m**  
The number of people waiting to start NHS hospital treatment in England in July

"I've worked in private healthcare so I had insight into how excellently it works – speed is a priority," Ms Robinson said. "[My mother] has great loyalty to the NHS but she was so relieved there was an alternative. It was as professional as the NHS and she was very well looked after."

The procedure, which cost just under £2,000, was carried out a few weeks after Ms Robinson's mother inquired about the surgery.

Claudia Ariano, 27, recently moved from one part of London to another and has found it impossible to secure an NHS dental appointment at any of her local surgeries.

"One practice said I'd have to wait until November and another said it didn't have an estimated date [for taking NHS appointments] at all," Ms Ariano. This week, concerned about her gum disease, Ms Ariano decided to pay £60 for a private appointment.

Suzy Wheal, from Chichester, was diagnosed with lymphoma in 2019. She relied on a mixture of NHS and private care when assessing treatment options, using her medical insurance to get second opinions from a private oncologist and radiologist.

While her NHS doctors advised chemotherapy followed by radiotherapy, Ms Wheal, 41, was determined to have proton beam therapy at the Proton Therapy Centre in Prague.

She paid around £35,000 for her treatment. "The NHS cancer train is first class," Ms Wheal said of the speed which with she began receiving treatment. However, she added: "Getting a diagnosis [via the NHS] is so hard."

NHS," said Tim Gardner, senior policy fellow at think-tank the Health Foundation.

He added: "They tend to have their own nurses but don't tend to directly employ a separate set of doctors. They are [mostly] NHS doctors spending part of their time in private practice to supplement their income.

"Staff [numbers] are going to be a critical constraint on the NHS being able to treat more patients and get rid of this backlog.

"If they are spending more time practising in the private sector that might be taking away time from the NHS, which may have an impact on people who can't afford to go private."



Parents' main concern was their child catching Covid ANTHONY DEVLIN/GETTY

## EDUCATION

## Half of adults fear children's return to the classroom

By Jemma Crew

Around half of adults are worried about their child going back to school or college after the summer holidays, figures suggest.

Nearly half (48 per cent) of adults with dependent children said they were very or somewhat worried about their child returning to education settings, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said.

Almost a quarter (23 per cent) said they were somewhat unworried or not worried at all.

The main reasons for those worried was fear about their child catching coronavirus (58 per cent), spreading coronavirus (31 per cent) and concern about

**58%** of parents worried about their child catching coronavirus

their mental health and well-being due to changes in the school or college setting (30 per cent).

A quarter were worried about how prepared their school or college will be for keeping pupils safe, while 15 per cent were worried about sending them back before the vaccine roll-out has finished.

The ONS analysed responses from 3,387 people, including 470 responses from adults with dependent children, between 25 August and 5 September.

## PEOPLE

## Mother and daughter with cancer worried about schools reopening

By Aasma Day

A mother who endured the anguish of her teenage daughter being diagnosed with a rare form of cancer as she herself was treated for the disease has revealed her mixed feelings as her 11-year-old son has finally returned to school.

Nicky Hutchinson, 50, was diagnosed with Hodgkin Lymphoma, a cancer of the lymphatic system.

The family was then dealt a huge blow when daughter Erin Chappell was diagnosed with a rare cancer of the uterus in January 2020.

They both had chemotherapy during the pandemic.

Ms Hutchinson's 11-year-old son Luke made the decision to stay out of primary school as the family shielded to protect his mum and sister – but they are living in trepidation now that he's started secondary school.



Nicky Hutchinson and daughter Erin Chappell both had chemotherapy

"He is very on edge and is terrified of coming into contact with someone with Covid and bringing it home," Ms Hutchinson said.

"Masks are no longer mandatory in secondary schools but Luke will be wearing a mask all the time and that is his choice. He has said if he is asked to take his mask off, he will walk out of school."

Ms Hutchinson admitted that although she is glad to see Luke get back to normality by returning to school, she is fearful of the family being exposed to the virus, particularly as mitigations in school such as mask wearing and bubbles have been dropped.

"I have very mixed feelings about Luke going to school," she told *i*.

"You only get one chance of starting secondary school for the first time and it is so important.

"I want Luke to go to school for the interaction and social skills and for the chance to be an 11-year-old kid and do normal things. But I have resigned myself to the fact that I will probably catch Covid."

The Department for Education said the success of the vaccination programme means schools and colleges can deliver face-to-face education to pupils with minimal disruption.

## SOCIETY

## Private care could affect backlog

By Katie Grant

As more people opt to fund their healthcare themselves, or take out private health insurance, there is a danger of creating a "two tier" system, with wealthy people paying for speedy tests and treatments and the less well-off being forced to wait with no option to skip the queue.

There is also a risk that NHS patients will get pushed even further down the line as NHS doctors performing private procedures prioritise paying patients.

"By and large, private hospitals in the UK don't have a fully separate workforce from the