



For better
mental health

A grayscale photograph of a hand holding a black marker, writing on a white clipboard. The clipboard is tilted, and the text "Ward Watch" is stamped in red on the paper.

Ward Watch

**Mind's campaign to improve hospital
conditions for mental health patients:
report summary**

Executive summary

Mind's Ward Watch report reveals two extremes of hospital conditions:

- **For some patients, the hospital environment has provided the treatment and support needed to help them recover.**
- **For others, poor accommodation and security, safety concerns, insufficient staffing levels and intense boredom have exacerbated existing difficulties and created new ones, subjecting patients to an environment that is inhumane where it should be therapeutic.**

“The whole ward should be demolished and started again. It is unsafe. Drugs are being bought and sold in the ward. Staff do not seem interested in their jobs. Patients are left to wander around with nothing to do (it is a long day). The place smells like an old ashtray. Service users all feel demoralised and get little help from staff.”

“The hospital environment helped me recover by giving me a break from the pressures of my life, which were making my illness worse.”

For mental health patients, a safe and comfortable environment with access to fresh air, exercise and recreation is critical in determining recovery. Poor conditions show a fundamental disregard on the part of hospital staff and management for the basic facts of what determines mental wellbeing. After all, these are the people entrusted with ensuring that the hospital environment helps rather than hinders recovery.

A negative hospital environment represents a false economy for Trusts. It hampers the recovery of patients, which in turn leads to longer inpatient stays and a greater reluctance for voluntary patients to return to hospital if necessary, increasing the need for compulsion.

Mind has identified some excellent examples of good practice regarding inpatient care in hospitals. The challenge is to make them become the norm rather than the exception. Many solutions outlined in this report are cheap and simple. The economic case for replication is strong and the consequences of inaction potentially disastrous.

The Government, Welsh Assembly Government and NHS managers and staff must address with urgency patients' views as expressed in this research and the recommendations outlined.

Mind's key findings

- Two years after the Government's own target for the elimination of mixed sex wards, and less than a year after it claimed that 99 per cent of NHS Trusts met Government targets, 23 per cent of recent and current inpatient respondents have been accommodated in mixed sex wards.
- A striking 31 per cent of respondents did not have access to single sex bathroom facilities. Only 30 per cent of respondents had access to single sex daytime facilities.
- Over a quarter of respondents (27 per cent) said that they rarely felt safe while in hospital. Only 44 per cent of respondents felt safe all or most of the time.
- A staggering 51 per cent of recent or current inpatients reported being verbally or physically threatened during their stay with 20 per cent reporting physical assault.
- Nearly one in five (18 per cent) respondents reported sexual harassment in hospital. Five per cent of respondents reported sexual assault.
- Seven per cent of respondents reported being subject to harassment because of their race while three per cent reported racially motivated assault.
- Ten per cent reported being subject to harassment because of their sexuality. Five per cent reported being assaulted because of their sexuality.
- Fifty-six per cent of harassment or assault episodes were perpetrated by a patient or service user. Thirty-one per cent of harassment or assault episodes were perpetrated by a ward staff member.
- Fifty-three per cent of respondents thought that the hospital surroundings had not helped their recovery. Thirty-one per cent thought that it had made their health worse.
- A mere one in five (20 per cent) of respondents felt that they were treated with respect and dignity by staff. Almost the same proportion (17 per cent) stated that they were never treated with respect and dignity by staff.

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Mind's key demands

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Hospitals should treat the meeting of minimum standards as the starting point for providing a truly therapeutic environment and not as an end in itself.

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Service users must be involved in the planning and delivery of proposed accommodation services.

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The Government and Welsh Assembly Government must finally meet their own targets by ensuring that mixed sex wards are eliminated.

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Urgent action must be taken to improve experiences and perceptions of safety in mental health wards.

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Insufficient staffing levels and the reliance on agency staff, who may not have the training and/or experience to deal effectively with challenging patients and incidents, must be addressed immediately.

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All patients must have access to fresh air, exercise and meaningful recreation.

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