

Four in 10 NHS patients face multiple delays in treatment

By Henry Bodkin

NEARLY 40 per cent of NHS patients who have their appointments postponed or cancelled face a second delay within the year, watchdogs have found.

Healthwatch England said patients are facing “catastrophic health impacts” because of last-minute cancellations and delays, with symptoms worsening and mental health issues escalating.

The survey found that 39 per cent of people who had an appointment called off this year experienced cancellations or postponements two or more times.

They include people who faced postponements for planned hospital care, hospital outpatient appointments, diagnostic scans or tests and community health appointments.

Meanwhile, nearly one in five said their appointment was cancelled at the “last minute” – either on the day or as they arrived for their consultation.

The poll found that some 66 per cent of respondents said cancellations to care had affected their lives, reporting ongoing pain, worsening symptoms, deteriorating mental health and disrupted sleep, among other problems.

Just over half said they had not been offered support to manage their condition during the new wait for care and 79 per cent said the NHS had offered “very little” or “no support” on mental health. One stroke patient described how she was told her appointment was can-

celled because “there’s no gap for you”.

On the day of her follow-up appointment with a stroke unit, Andrea Lambert, a teacher from the Isle of Wight, was told that it had been cancelled as a result of staff illness.

“They just said: ‘We can’t do it – there is no gap for you,’” the 62-year-old said. “They told me the earliest they could reschedule my appointment was another six weeks later.

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“I had a lot of questions for my stroke treatment team, but I wasn’t able to ask them.”

Louise Ansari, the chief executive of Healthwatch England, said: “The findings of our research show that many people are facing worsening and, in some cases, catastrophic health impacts due to ongoing delays to care.

“People who often face serious difficulties accessing specialist NHS care, such as unpaid carers, neurodivergent people and those on lower incomes, are also those who are suffering the most from ongoing cancellations.

“If their symptoms worsen or their mental health deteriorates, this in turn puts extra pressure on health and care services.”

