



Healthwatch Lambeth

GP Survey Report

October 2014

Background



NHS England London's publication: "**A Call to Action - Transforming primary care in London**", states that

Health and care services provided by GPs and practice nurses are the cornerstone of the NHS - 90% of patient contact with the NHS takes place in general practice. GPs don't just provide care themselves, they also help their patients to navigate the system and access the care they need in other settings. GPs represent a single coordinator of care for people from birth through to the end of their life.

In presenting the case for change, the document states that:

1. London faces a significant financial challenge.
2. Patients in London find access to GPs more challenging than in the rest of England.
3. Across the country, there are significant unexplained variations between practices for key aspects of diagnosis and treatment. London practices face greater challenges than most in delivering high measures of quality and experience.

4. Stark health inequalities exist across London. Many London boroughs fall below the English average on key preventative measures.
5. Most practices in London remain relatively small, and could benefit from shared economies of scale.

In the future primary care services need to provide more:

Coordinated care - providing patient-centred, coordinated care and GP-patient continuity.

Accessible care - providing a responsive, timely and accessible service that responds to different patient preferences and access needs.

Proactive care - supporting the health and wellness of the population and keeping people healthy.

The survey explored these three aspects of care.

NHS Lambeth Clinical Commissioning Group (LCCG), responsible for the quality of GP services, is initiating a series of projects aimed at developing and improving primary care services. This will involve the greater involvement of patients in the design and delivery of services.

Healthwatch Lambeth is working with the LCCG's Primary Care Development Board and the Lambeth Patient Participation Group's Network.

We conducted the survey with Healthwatch Lambeth members to help us understand patients' experiences of using primary care services. The results have been fed back into the whole "transforming primary care discussion" on a local and regional level.



The Survey

Background information

The survey went live on 18 February 2014 and closed on 14 March 2014. Information and data was collected via:

1. Online survey - a total number of 114 completed surveys. Respondents came from 38 GP practices in Lambeth and 6 practices in neighbouring boroughs.
2. Outreach survey with young people at the the Well Centre, a young people's drop in health centre.
3. Group discussion with patients from one GP practice (around 60 participants)
4. Group discussion with Clapham Park 50+ Club (12 participants)





Findings from the survey

Appointments

From the survey, 26 out of the 38 practices provide a combination of ways to make an appointment.

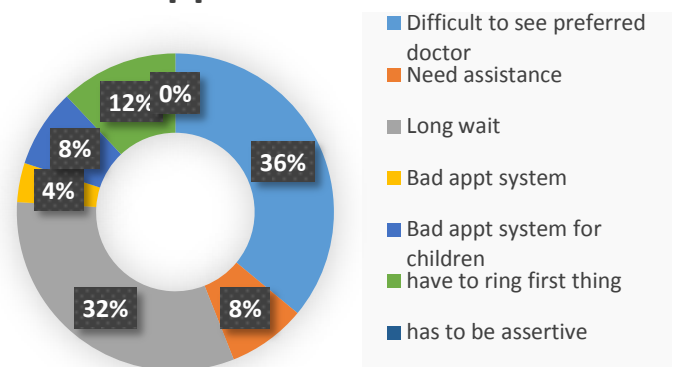
Out of the 38 practices, 15 only offer a telephone triage appointment system. The triage system is where patients who wish to see a GP call the practice; they then wait for a GP to call them back and assess their need and urgency for an appointment.

The survey revealed that patients had good and bad experiences of making appointments through this system. The survey did not ask further questions on the system therefore it was unclear what factors affect these experiences.

However, a patient did say that the system is bad for patients with children. Some commented that it is difficult to get through on the phone in the morning and when you do, you have to be very assertive to get an appointment.

65 respondents (60%) found it easy to make an appointment with their GP compared to the 42 respondents (39%) who said it was difficult.

Difficulty in making appointments



The Well Centre offers two drop-in GP sessions a week. The young people we talked to at the centre told us they didn't have to wait long to be seen and we observed this ourselves.

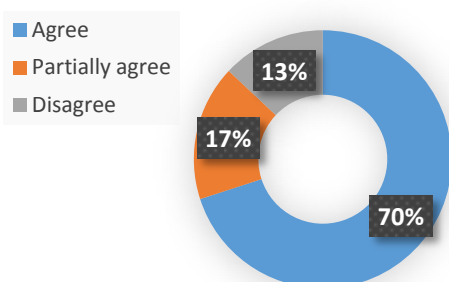


For many patients, the average wait to see a GP is 2-3 weeks. In urgent situations, patients can access emergency appointments, however they have to be prepared to sit and wait in the waiting room. Patients with small children commented that the lack of priority for children to be seen earlier can be stressful for parents, their children, and other patients in the waiting room.

Not all patients need to see a doctor face to face, therefore some people found that talking to their GP on the telephone was enough to resolve their health concerns.

Some respondents were critical of the number of patients the practice has on their list. They commented that this was the reason for the long wait and difficulty in seeing a doctor of their choice.

Longer GP opening hours



Respondents were asked whether they wanted their practices to be open seven days a week and for longer hours. 89 people responded to this question.

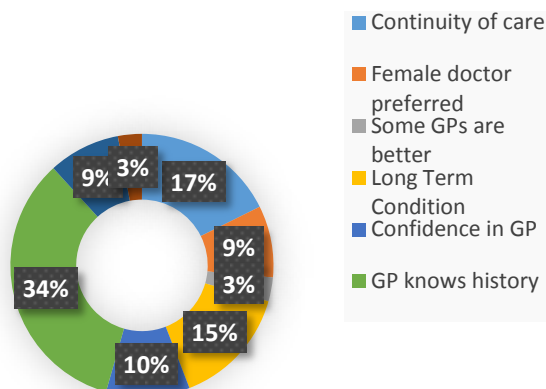
From the responses, 15 respondents agreed that some forms of extended hours in the evenings and Saturday mornings should be provided. This would be useful for people who work. However, they disagreed that practices should open 7 days a week.

11 respondents (13%) totally disagreed with longer opening hours. There were concerns about the strain on staff resources and there is already an out-of-hours GP service that people can access.

The survey revealed that although most respondents agreed that longer or more flexible opening hours are needed, there were concerns over whether current NHS resources would be able to support it. The respondents did not want to see the quality of service affected by the need to resource longer opening hours.

The importance of seeing the same doctor

65 respondents (64%) said it was important to see the same doctor for the following reasons.



Being provided with a uniform standard of quality services was more important for those respondents who said it didn't matter whether they saw the same doctor.

Although over half of the respondents said it was important to see a doctor of their choice, only 30% of respondents were able to. 33% said it was not possible to see their own doctor. One respondent said s/he could not remember the last time

they had seen their own doctor. A number of respondents had not seen their own doctor for about two years.

A number of respondents (22%) said it didn't matter whether they were able to see a doctor of their choice. The important issue was to be able to see a doctor at a time they wanted to and that the quality of service was high.

For young people, trust and confidence influence their decision to see a doctor.

Young people from the Well Centre told us that they chose to visit a doctor at the centre because they felt understood. They added that they felt confident that the GP at the centre would not share information with their parents.

Health promotional activities

Just over half of those who responded (55) thought it would be a good idea for GP practices to hold health promotion events. However, these should be properly resourced and could be carried out with other voluntary sector organisations or other GP practices.

Complaints

Making a complaint about your GP practice can be difficult. This is because the relationship between a GP and his/her patient is a close one, particularly for patients with a long term or complex condition. Therefore, it is understandable that patients are worried about making complaints. They are concerned that this will have an impact on the trust and confidence they have with their GP.

Prior to their abolition, Primary Care Trusts had the power to handle all complaints about primary care services and there was a clear process. Since April 2013, the process relating to primary care complaints has become less clear.

Out of 113 responses received, 14 respondents have complained, 6 within the last two years. Only 4 respondents said that the complaint was resolved, but not always satisfactorily; one said:

“It was resolved only because I took the matter into my own hands and solved the problem myself after doctor's incompetence. No explanation or apology was given by them”

From the survey, 19 respondents told us why they didn't complain. This included:

“The person who I wanted to complain about was the person responsible for complaints and I decided it wasn't worth finding out about a different way of voicing my complaint”

“I might get struck off the practice list”

“I would be viewed and treated badly by the staff as well as I would be seen as a trouble maker. I might be 'accidentally' be given the wrong drugs.”

“I felt like it would be held against me by the surgery and I would be seen as a trouble maker.”



What our information and signposting calls told us about complaints.

Apart from the survey and focus group discussions, we also reviewed the calls to our information and signposting service.

One caller told us that a family member ended up in intensive care as a result of the poor care they received from their GP practice.

Many of our information and signposting calls are from people who do not know how and where to go to make a complaint about their GP.

We have even had a call from a GP asking for information on the correct complaint procedures. We have discovered that many GPs and patients are unaware of advocacy support available to make NHS complaints.

One patient was concerned about confidentiality issues when he made an enquiry with the receptionist about how to make a complaint. He was told he had to give his name and date of birth before he could to speak to the practice manager.

Reasons for unresolved complaints

I withdrew the complaint - it appeared that they were waiting for me to withdraw it.

I got no response from the practice so I changed practice.

"I am wholly disgusted with their handling of my complaint. As a consequence of their actions that required complaint, the behaviour experienced from them plus the quality of their services greatly diminished. They refused to entertain a second complaint about an entirely different matter.

The person being complained about left the practice."



List of Practices in Survey

North Locality	South West Locality
Springfield	2 Prentis Road
Stockwell Group	86 Clapham Manor Street
Waterloo Health Centre	Clapham Family Practice
Hurley	Clapham Park
Lambeth Walk	Gracefield Gardens
Mawbey Group Practice	Streatham Common Group Practice
Binfield Road	Streatham High
Beckett House Practice	Streatham Hill Group Practice
South Lambeth Road Practice	Palace Road Surgery
Riverside medical centre	Brixton Hill
	Hetherington Group Practice
South East Locality	
Vassal Medical Centre	Brockwell Park Surgery
Crown Dale	Tulse Hill
Iveagh House	Rosendale Surgery
Knights Hill Surgery	Pavillion Practice
Herne Hill Group	Brixton Water Lane
Paxton Green	The Corner Surgery



Survey questions

Access to your GP practice

1. Please tell us which GP practice you are registered with.
2. Thinking about the last time you went to your doctor, how easy was it to get a convenient appointment?
3. What appointment system is being used in your GP practice? Please tick all that apply.
4. What do you think of your GP practice opening seven days a week and for possibly longer hours?
5. Is it important to see the doctor of your choice? Please give reasons for your answer.
6. Are you always able to see the doctor of your choice?
7. What do you think of your GP practice organising more health promotion events and special services?
8. Have you ever complained about your GP practice?
9. When did you complain?
10. Did you complain to the GP practice or to NHS England?
11. Is your complaint now fully resolved?
12. Are you happy with the way the complaint has been handled?
13. Would you be happy to talk to us about your experiences of making the complaint?
14. Does your GP practice have a patient participation group (PPG)?
15. If yes, have you ever taken part in any activities organised by your PPG?
16. Would you recommend your GP practice to friends?

Please tell us:

Your age

Are you employed?

Your gender