

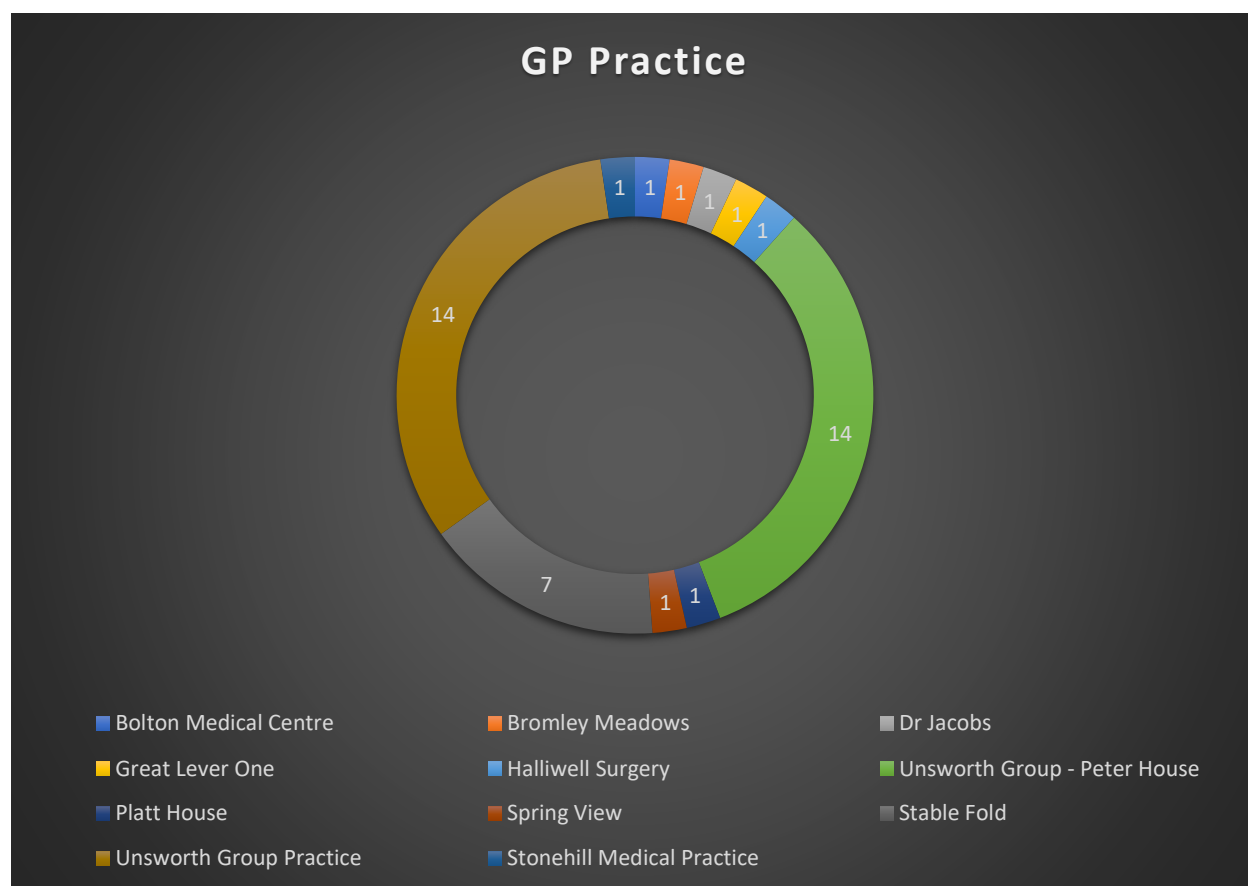
Snapshot Intelligence Report on GP Practices

Sep-Oct 2023

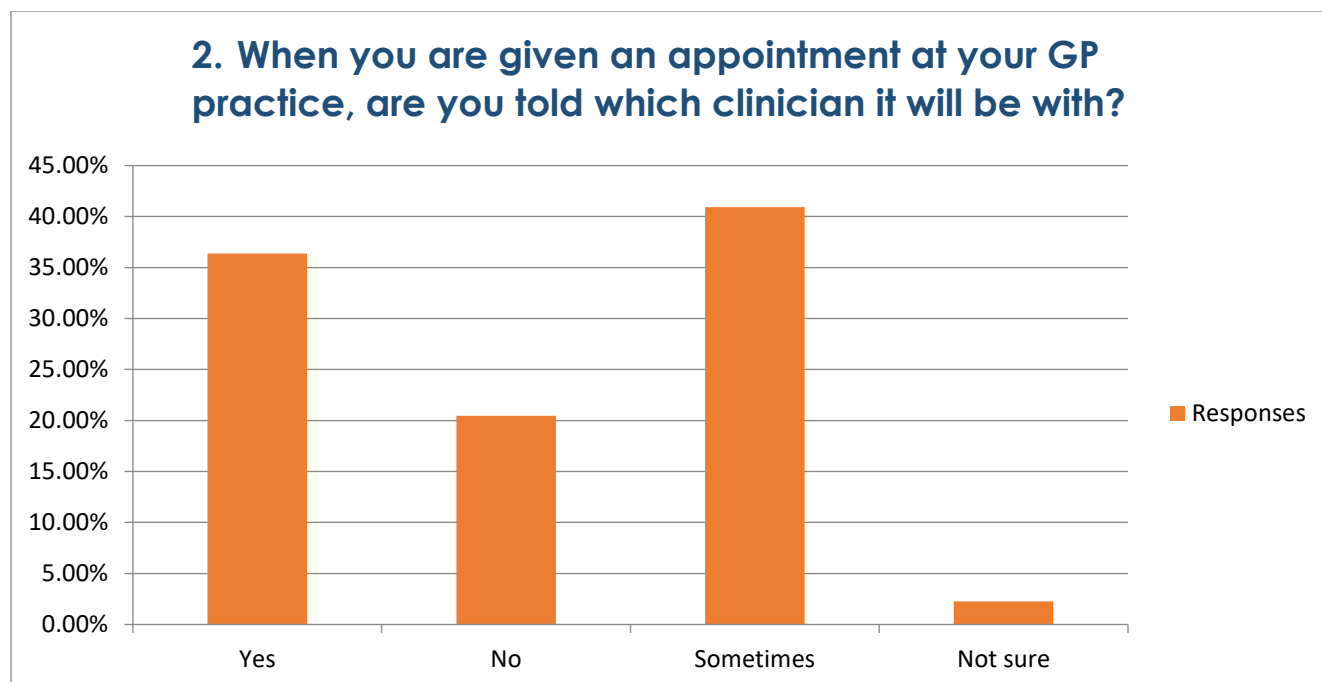
Introduction

Healthwatch Bolton (HWB) continues to receive enquiries from the public about difficulties accessing GPs in Bolton. However, in September 2023 HWB was receiving increased feedback from the public about difficulties with accessing particular GP practices in the area of Westhoughton. Therefore, HWB created a simple survey to allow members of the public to share their experiences. The results are presented in this snapshot report with some recommendations at the end of the report. The survey ran from 21/9/23-31/10/23. (please note that all the comments in this report are verbatim and will contain spelling mistakes etc.)

1. Which GP Practice are you providing feedback about?



Out of a total of 44 respondents, the majority of feedback is about Unsworth Group Practice/ Peter House



Comments

You're that desperate for an appointment you have to take anything

Tho not sure as can never get in .

Never the same person no continuity

Don't care who it is tho, they're all qualified so what does it matter. If I need a female I ask but otherwise it makes no difference in my treatment

Can never get with the same gp.

Unsworth group has too many trainees and the long term doctors are seldom available

You have to ask to get this information

Sometimes I have to ask

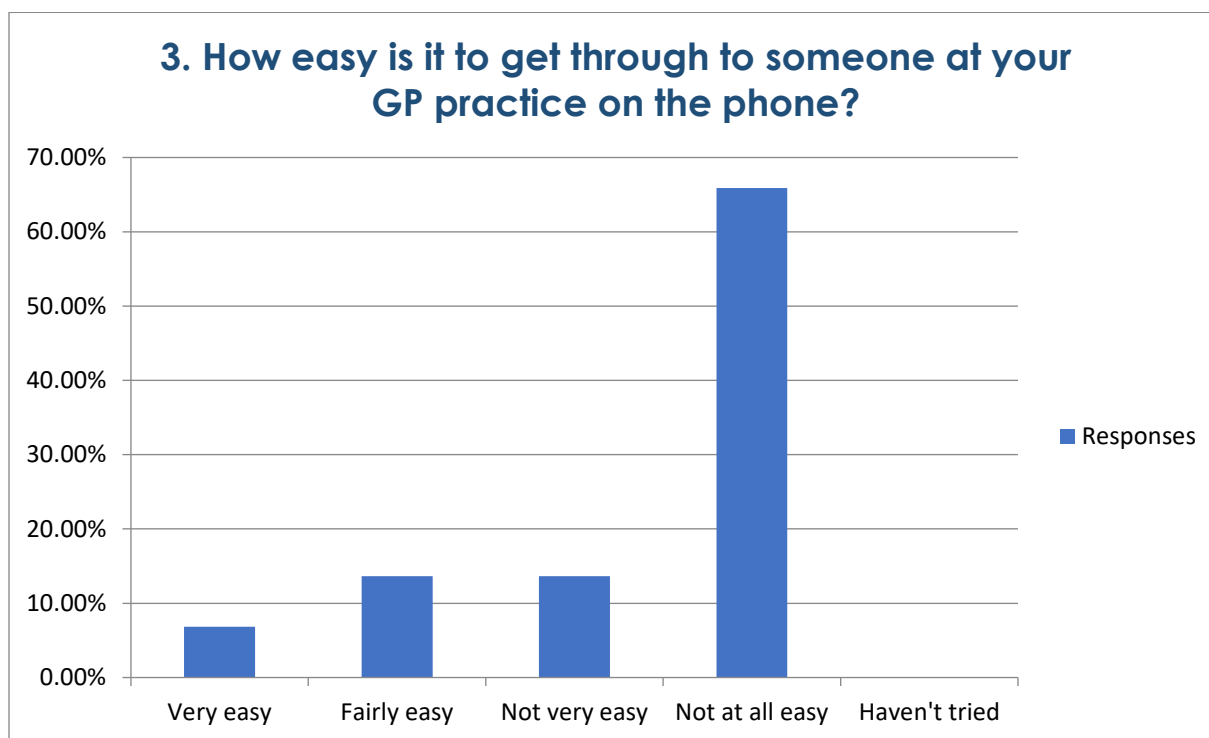
I am told if I ask but not otherwise but reminder texts do include the name

If I ask, I am told.

Usually if you ask for a specific Doctor otherwise they don't always tell you.

But in the past that has changed on arrival!

I always ask if they don't tell me.



Comments:

There are times when the phone lines are just too busy. It's obvious they would rather you used the app but it's not simple or straightforward

They have a call wait facility where it tells you what number you are in the queue.

Had to wait four weeks to see a doctor prearranged appointment

We can wait up to 45 minutes, then we gave up. Sometimes it just stops ringing. When - eventually - you speak to a human being the usual answer is that there are no appointments available, not even telephone appointments.

Rings out - no answer and if there is, all appointments gone or they say appointment available via 911 so ring them!

On average start ringing at 8am. 60+ calls later finally get through to be told no app left. Ring again tomorrow or try 111. Or go to a and e.

"the system sometimes cuts off

You need to repeatedly dial the number to get connected"

Ring and ring at 8am never get through then if you do no appointments .awful.

Have to keep ringing to get through them can be in hold for a long time

No one answers the phone

Impossible to get through on the phone, website impossible to navigate and access. Only appointments that tend to be available are for chargeable services.

Sometimes the phone cuts out or the queue is so long that you gave to wait to just join the queue. I haven't yet called and not have to wait for a significant length of time.

Constantly ringing I've been on for over an hour several times and I don't have the time to sit on a phone when I'm a carer for two people

Called 86 times and still couldn't get through

"Told to phone at 8am for an appointment, when I last attempted to get through I had redialled the surgery number 100 times before I finally was placed in a hold queue for another 15 minutes.

It is almost impossible to gain an appointment.

If you try to book an appointment in advance, minimum wait is 3 weeks+ so patients are panic calling at 8am in an attempt to be seen sooner. "

Ring at the times specified- rings and rings.

Impossible to get through at 8am, people have started to go to the surgery at 7.45am to queue but for those who are too unwell to do this they need more staff answering hones. By the time you get through you are told all appointments have gone.

Always on hold for at least 30 minutes then to be told no appointments

Usual story, unable to get through on the phones at 8am and when I do all appointments are gone. I filled in the online request for an appointment form, it took a week to get a response and 10 days overall to get an appointment.

Rings for ages then cuts off

Fairly easy, the last couple of weeks to be fair. However, there are times when I'm finding myself dialing & the phone just rings through so I do have to try again at a later time of day.

Just constantly rings, and position in que moves down not up

At 8am it is impossible to get through and even when I call later in the day I often have a long wait to speak to someone

Sometimes you can be trying to get through for an hour.

Phones always engaged. Waiting for 40 minutes is common and no appointments left for day when ringing at 8 am.

Unable to speak to any actual human most of the time, constantly told to use other services that are nothing to do with the surgery and feel that we are no longer treated as valuable to them!

When you have to ring for an appointment at 8 o'clock you rarely get through until they've none left.

When you phone it tells you to go online, you can wait to speak to someone but it takes along time. If you can't do online it is very difficult. Sometimes you can get an appointment on the day but it is not always urgent. If not urgent it can be weeks before you see someone.

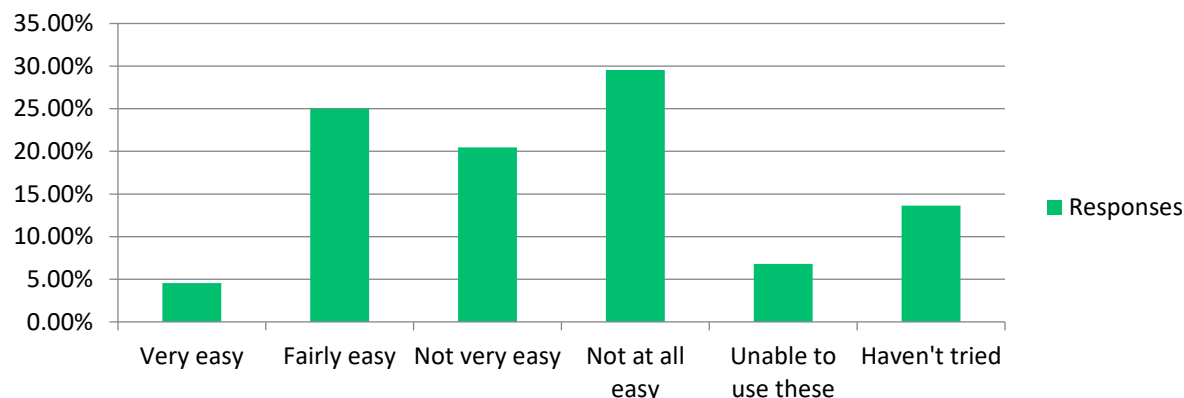
"Everybody needing urgent appointment told to call at 8am. Phones jammed.

Too much information before speaking to someone"

"If I need to make an appointment tibeither see or have triage by phone I tend ti get up early and get to the surgery by 8.00 am before phone calls begin to secure an appointment. This is suggested by the receptionist and seems to wirk okay. Alternatively I will drive over to drop off repeat subscriptions and for other reasons after work as it is less busy at that time the surgery is quiet. Of late I have been offered a late evening and/or Saturday appointment to see a GP at another surgery within the same group and that was most helpful, however I have not had a face to face appointment with a GP since Spring - and almost never can get an appointment to see/speak to a GP after 4.30pm

You will hear the phone connection and then be told what number you are in the queue. People need to understand that in Westhoughton there are three practices and that Unsworth group has 16000 patients in Westhoughton, so it is going to take a bit longer. Once connected to a receptionist it is a quick and friendly experience.

4. Thinking about using digital platforms to contact your GP, how have you found the experience? Digital platforms are things such as the practice website, Ask My GP, e-consult, Online Consult, Patient Access, NHS App)



Comments

To start with it's not easy to see how to access them on their website. It has put my partner off using the service. The methods of allocation of appointments isn't nuanced enough for someone with mental health issues

Very useful

Needs better communication with patients

Says to keep phone with you for next 2 days to await call back but no call received. When called in person to surgery, was told it would be at least 10 days!

My docs never has any app on the my gp app. Still haven't found out how to do an online consult.

I know the services I want to access can't be done online

Handy but it takes away face to face interaction

With regards to our GP practice website is absolutely awful on every level.

It's much easier than trying to call, however you cannot book appointments through it and have to call, unlike a previous practice I was at where I could book an appointment online for within the week.

Don't want to use digital platform

Not been able to get an appointment for 5 weeks

Limited support on how to access or use these services for my practice

"No appointments on there, web consult confusing - just takes to web pages, that I can find myself.

Does not making getting an appointment any easier.

Useful only for prescriptions."

I use to GP booking app if I want to make a routine appointments a few weeks ahead. My husband does not have, nor does he want to have access to a mobile phone.

Still couldn't get an appointment for over 2 weeks

Still not appointments available on apps or online

Never any appointments available

I don't have access to this, no appointments come through on my NHS app.

Can do prescription but no option to book appointments

I have no idea how to do this. I used to be able to book on the NHS app but either there are never any appointments or you can't book that way any more

Sometimes it's difficult to book an appointment with a Dr if you already have an appointment booked, this could be with the Nurse or another Health practitioner.

Never any appointments available if NHS app or doctors website. Not easy to navigate when trying to get prescriptions sorted or to make a complaint

Keep sending emails asking to see my notes and when they bother to reply, many months later, they demand some form be filled in, that I am unable to visit the surgery and pick up, let alone, take the time to fill it in, with help, as have sight issues. Do they care, no they do not!

Difficult to set it all up and sometimes you just need to speak to someone for advice of what to do.

Using the nhs app has proven extremely useful, once you get the hang of it and the practice website is a bit more complex but, is being updated.

They only use this to send out messages but patients can't reply. Very behind on digital access.



Comments

IF WE CAN GET AN APPOINTMENT!!!!

Depending on what the problem is a telephone call might be ok. But it should be MY choice if I want that or to see a doc. Or nurse. Not the receptionist. Or have to accept a phone call in the first instance.

Never asked what I would prefer

Sometimes have to wait for a call back first

Needed an appointment about my eye but was offered a telephone appointment 10 days later. The doctor then had to book a face to face appointment as needed to be examined. This was clearly stated on the form what the problem was, but still given a telephone appointment. Waste of appointment.

Only recently because I am pregnant

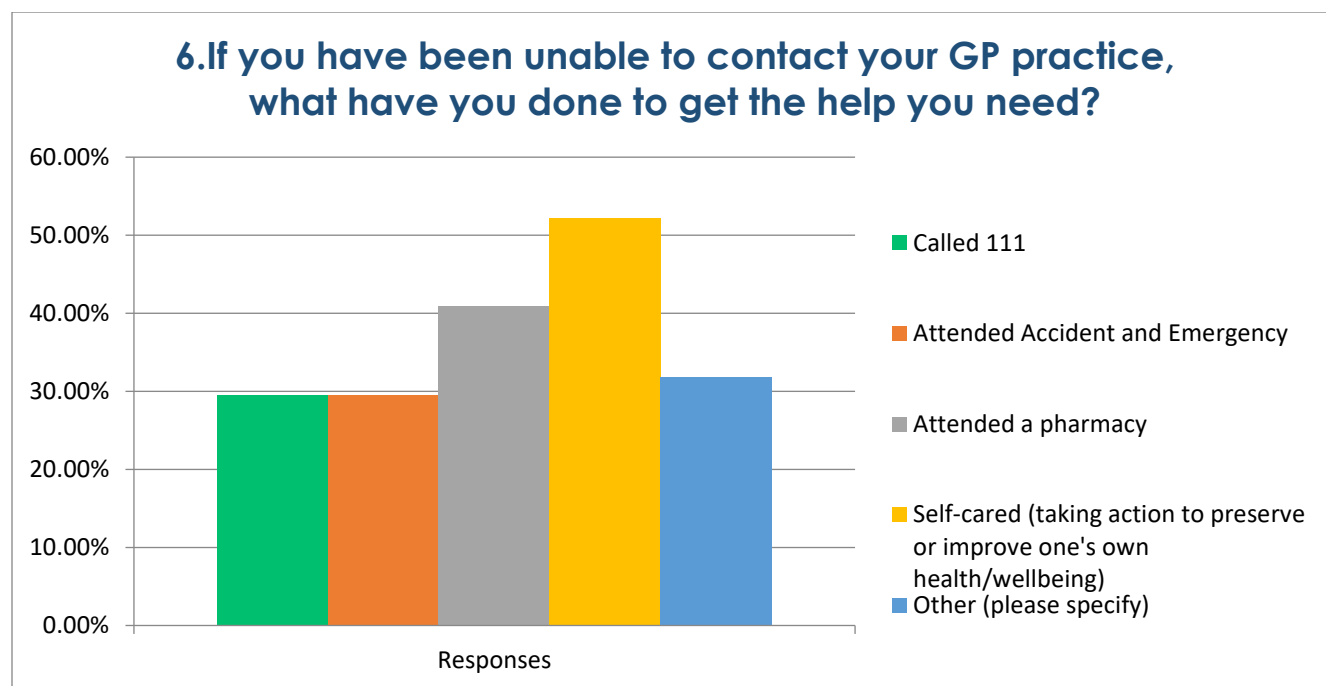
If you don't ask it will always be a telephone appointment

It is there preferences that matter, not ours!

Not always offered face to face

It depends what is available.

There are a number of gatekeepers before you can see the GP. I had to see a prescribing pharmacist, then the nurse then a phone call from the GP before I was eligible to be seen face to face. I had heart and breathing issues.



Comments relating to 'Other'

Visit to GP reception in person

Suffered

Gone to Leigh walk in centre

Walk in centre

Attended the local walk in

Not been needed

Hope it goes away

Never had issues

Put up with the problem

Called 111 and got referred to waters meeting for a flare up on my eczema.

I am always offered an appointment on the day I call.

Walk in clinic at leigh

Coped until they finally bothered to respond and care!

7. Please Tell us anything else

Very satisfied with Stablefold always been sent for further tests if applicable

The staff themselves are really helpful but they are just too busy. With issues related to hospital treatments they are as frustrated as I am at untimely appointments and test

I am a new user at my current practice. I was with my previous practice for over 30 years and just thought it was the norm to never be able to get an appointment, always be kept waiting beyond my appointment time and to never be able to get through on the phone.

There are not enough appointments available to accommodate patients

It is shocking that you cannot get an application when you ring up. Called and even been in and told either call next week or nothing for 28 days

There seem to be a considerable number of doctors, physician associates and other practitioners but it is almost impossible to get an appointment that day or the next day. No wonder the UTC and A&E are always very busy. You are not ill to a timetable if you are in pain you need to see a doctor then, not in 4 weeks time.

The practice has undergone changes in the last few months and it's become quite a dark, dismal and unfriendly place.

Booked a telephone appointment on line 3 weeks in advance via System On Line but call never took place. Contacted surgery and they'd no trace of the appointment. I'd waited 3 weeks!! Luckily I was offered another one the next day

"Can't contact by phone

Can't make appointment

Can't see a gp

Need more gps

When you actually get into the surgery there is no one in.

Being told your seeing a nurse when your actually seeing a hca.

At best you can see the advanced practitioner (who is lovely) but where are the gps"

"On the whole, they do a brilliant job. The phones aren't great and sometimes the receptionists expect everyone to be giving them grief so are curt with you from the outset.

I'm not a big fan of the new layout, the reception desk windows seemed very congested on my latest visit. People have to queue in the walkway of others getting to the corridors to the consultation rooms"

The phone lines need to be answered so access to a GP is available to all who need or have been trying to get appointments for weeks .

Regularly have to wait 6 weeks for a telephone appointment for HRT prescription and a wait of 8 weeks for a face to face. Had calls to move appointments a couple of weeks before date booked because the nurse will be off sick that day

Wants sorting

N/a

Cannot get appointments and due to having a job, cannot sit on the phone at a particular time to try to get an emergency appointment. This health service is not good enough and will result in a lot of health issues not being dealt with, causing strain on the hospitals/a&e and a workforce with reduced health, prospects and ability to work. The affect of a lack of effective healthcare on the local community should not be overlooked.

They sending appointments out getting reminder day before then on the same day of app saying they tried to contact me which was a lie so got a text same day saying the app was cancelled (x) and asked for me to rebook sorry they cancelled it they can rebook it

"Been told I need an appointment with my GP due to blood results but I cannot physically get an appointment.

Receptionists are rude"

The staff are run off their feet with the amount of, mostly horrible, patients yelling at them for non urgent issues. This isn't the 50s anymore, you can't expect the same doctor as always to see you the same day because you have had back pain for 6 months and suddenly decide it's urgent. I've had nothing but good

experiences with the practice and the staff. Seeing the way other patients behave is the only issue I've had.

The reception is not fit for purpose, having installed a new desk and screen you cannot sufficiently hear the receptionist staff and vice versa. Very embarrassing when trying to explain or ask for something personal and having to shout over the waiting room in front of other patients. It is very off putting and anxiety provoking - this is not helpful in particular when you are attending the practice for mental health needs

"Feel they make it your fault you cannot get the appointment you want/need.

Never any routine appointments available- just tell you to keep trying daily for the release of appointments- which can then be another hour the following day. It can take weeks to get this appointment. "

The continuity of care is lacking. I have recently had trouble with chest tightness, constant coughing and breathlessness and even though I have had appointments and now a referral to Cardiology I have seen 5 different doctors through the process. They say 'Have blood tests and come back and see me in 2 weeks' but the wait for blood tests was 3 weeks and trying to see the same doctor for a follow up is impossible.

Have to queue outside the practice at 7:45am to get an app for my children who are 6 and 4. NEVER been given an app over the phone when telephoned for app as when you finally get through there are no apps left, even though it is a contractual obligation to see a child on the same day!

Unable to book appointments online either, never any available

Was given an appointment with a physician associate a few months ago for my little boy as no doctors available. My boys 4yrd, and suffers with chest infections and regular coughing episodes and is now back under the asthma clinic. The PA was very dismissive, couldn't do a referral that I requested to the asthma clinic and forgot to put an inhaler I requested on the prescription. It was Friday evening when I picked up the prescription and realised my boys inhaler was missing. The doctors had shut and the pharmacy wouldn't dispense an inhaler without a prescription. I ended up in a&e Saturday morning with my little boy who was desperate for his inhaler and was struggling to breath. I was sent to the bardoc centre and given an inhaler finally. I never want to see a PA again, useless.

Generally very good if you can get an appointment. I was contacted weeks ago re covid vaccination as someone who shielded but never any appointments available went elsewhere for this

Recently very quick at getting appointments, however I think this is due to being high priority as I'm pregnant.

The reception staff are often curt in their responses and don't seem very helpful but I understand it's due to lack of appointments or too many patients

There are very few appointments available.

Dr Rizwan and Dr Awan surgery is amazing and I would recommend to anybody!

The change over of Doctors seems to be more frequent than it used to be. Also it's a real struggle sometimes to get an appointment

"It's terrible.

Getting an Appointment if you work is impossible. "

Where would you like me to start, bad service, unhelpful, abrupt staff, both the professionals and the lesser admins and the nurses are very hit and miss, some are nice, others are very cold, in personal and abrupt!

"I was told by my chemist to contact my Drs regarding one of my medications as it's has been discontinued who said they'd sort out a replacement. Nearly 2 weeks on I'm still waiting for it to be sorted.

I've also been waiting for the Dr to ring me back since an appointment in July regarding treatment for the menopause. So I decided to ring them back and organise an appointment with the same GP! "

There is not enough face to face for those who prefer that contact. Not everyone can use digital and they need to speak to someone.

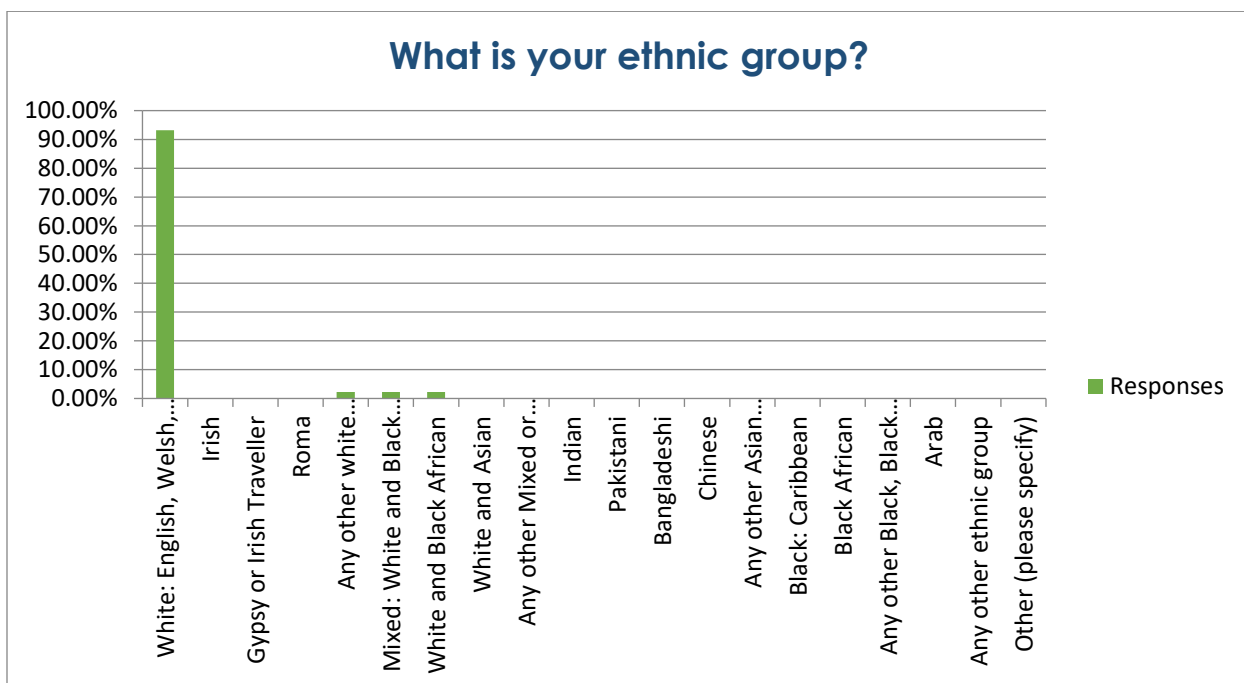
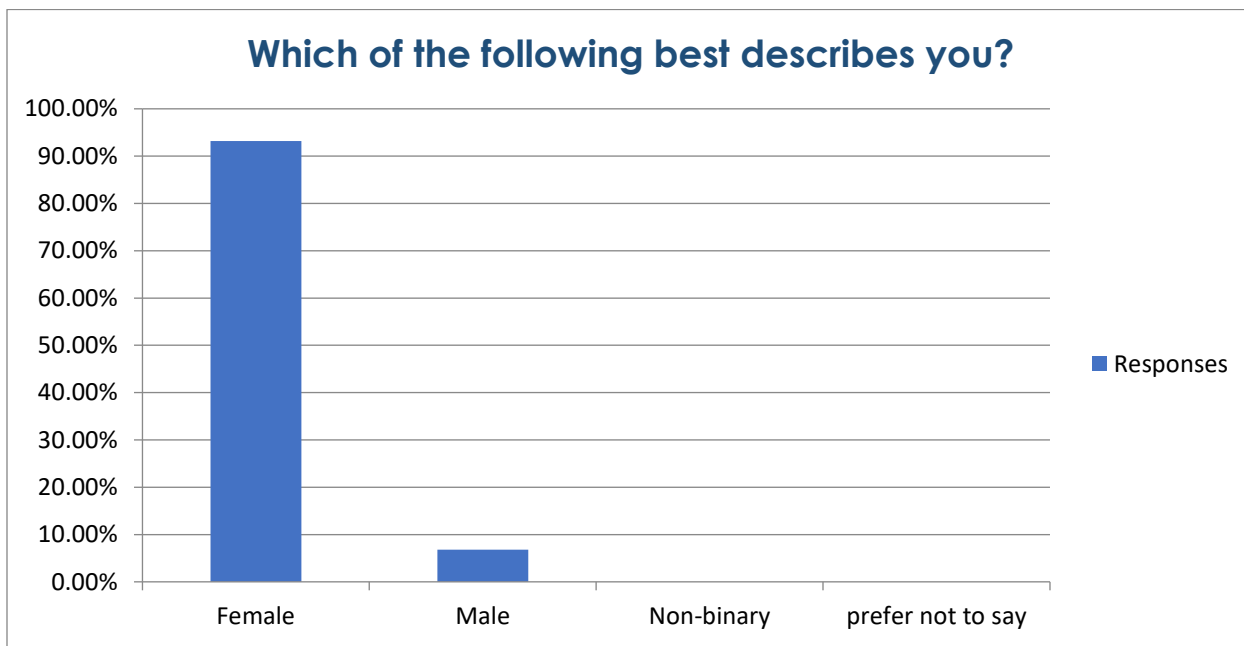
Reception staff are rude and unhelpful

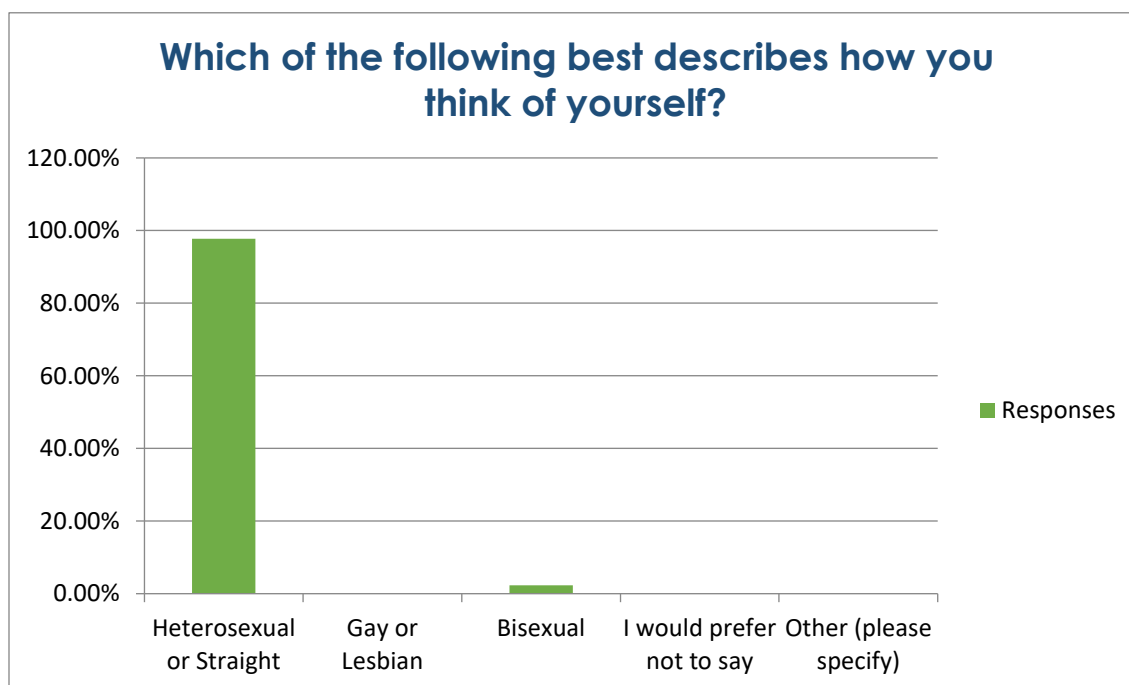
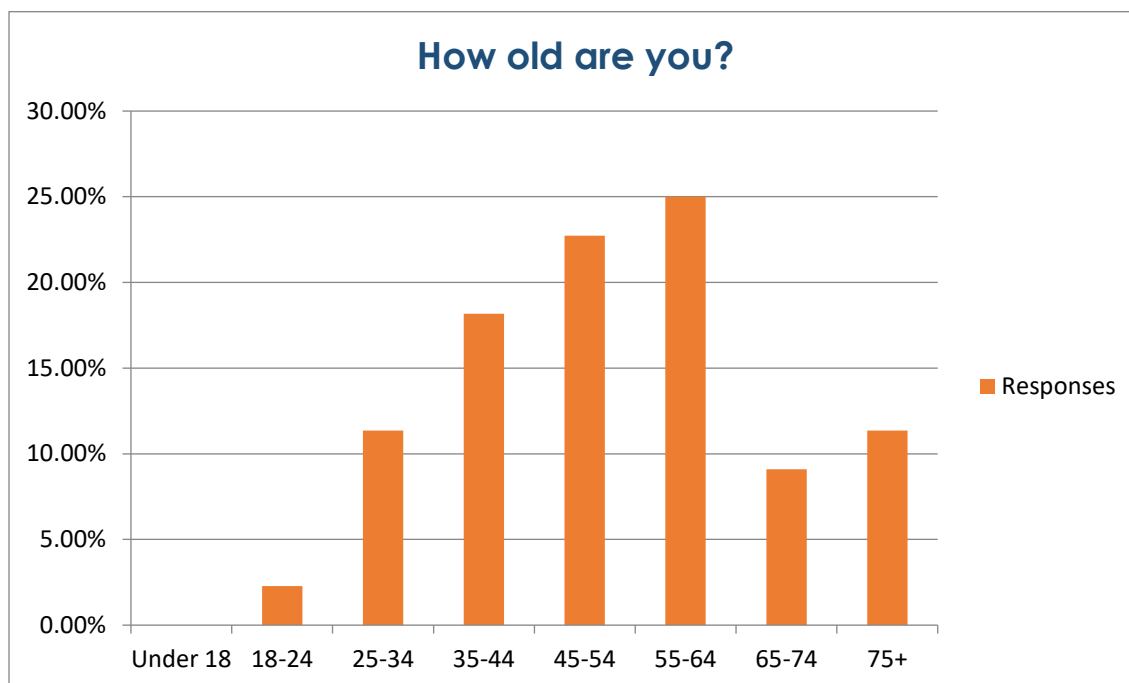
We are always saying there are not enough GP's, clinicians etc...Why can we not approach local and central government with the message that there are too many people for the level of service provided and that it requires changes from the top down to make a difference.

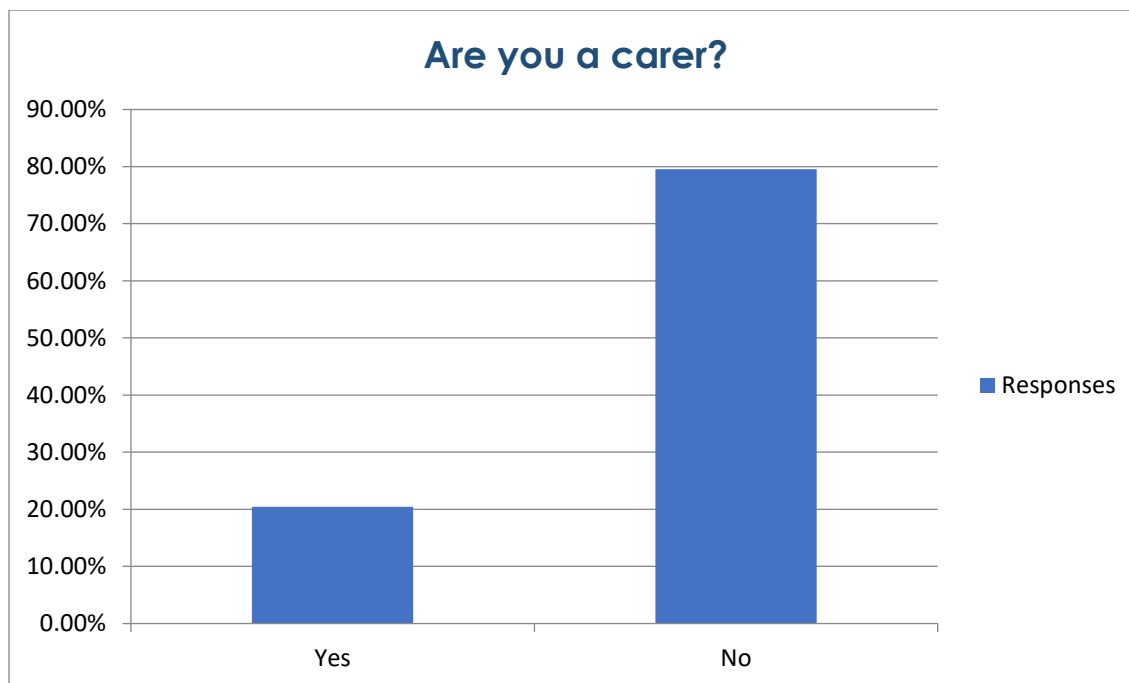
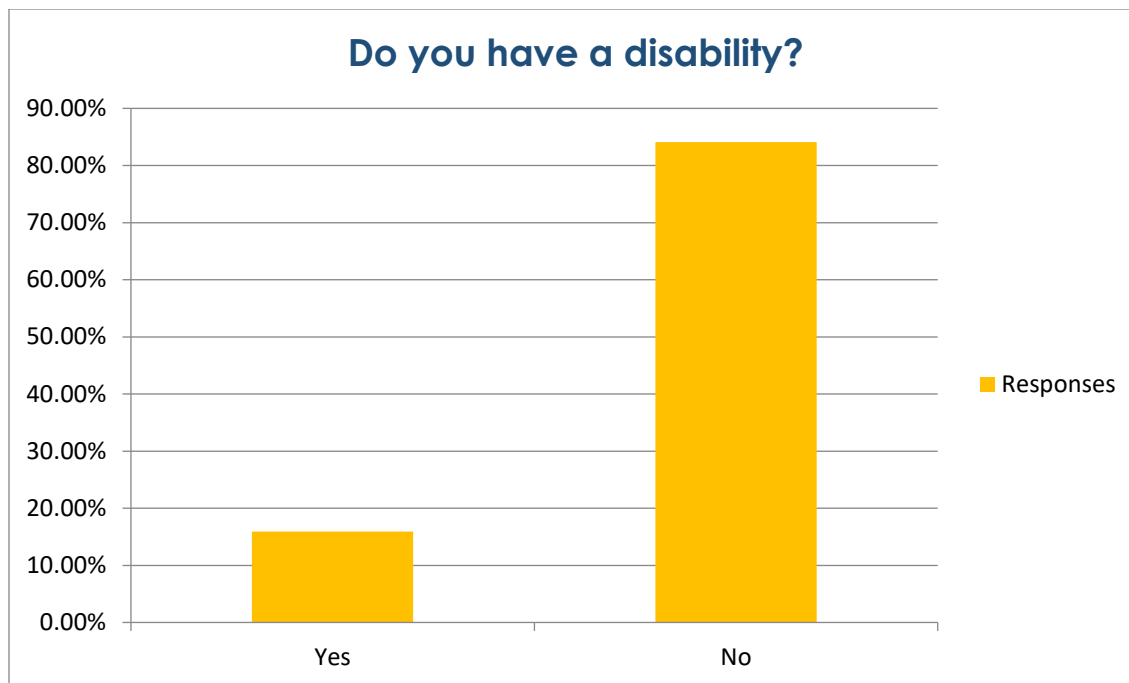
It's hard to pre book an appointment and they impose different rules depending on who you speak to. They've lost repeat prescription requests and left me waiting for a GP call that didn't happen because someone didn't enter it on the

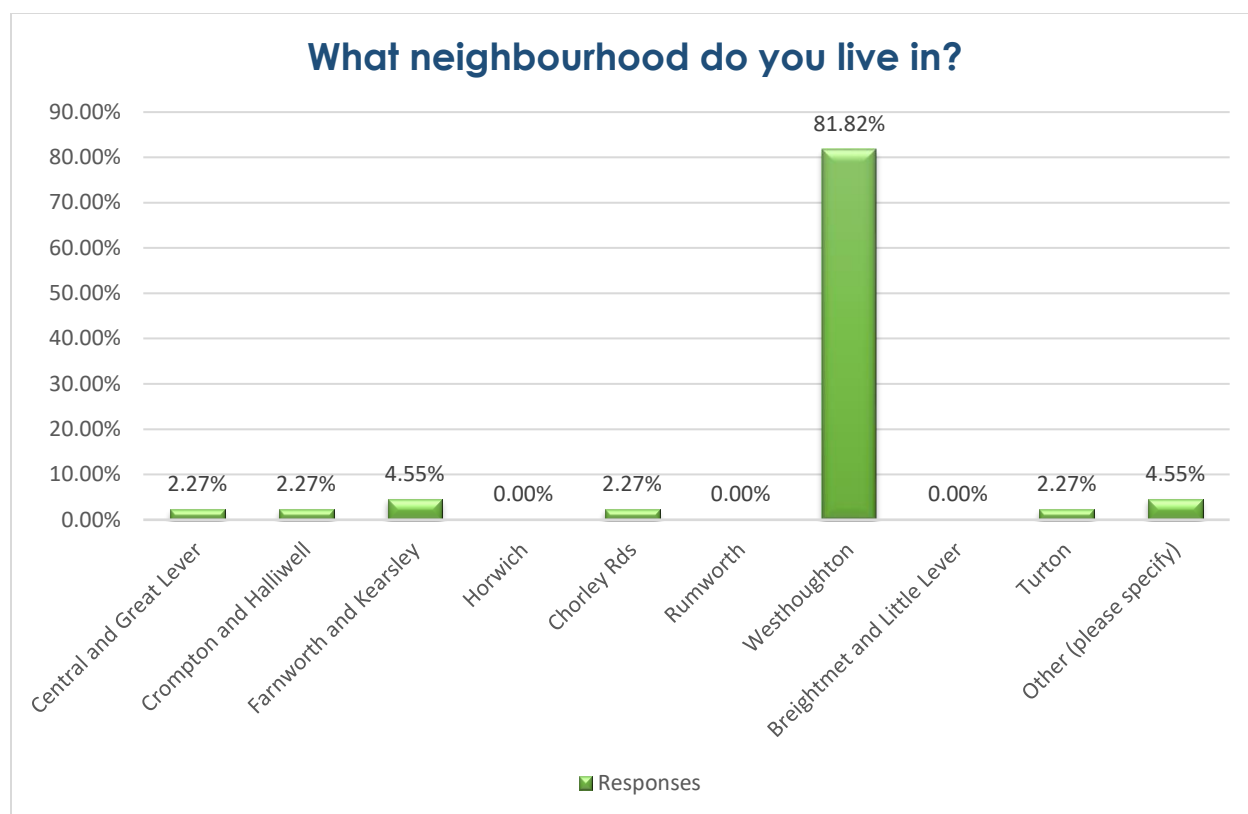
system. Last time I had a GP telephone appointment it was actually carried out by a medical student. It's terrible.

Demographics









Summary

The majority of people who responded to the demographic questions were from the area of Westhoughton, female, White and ranging in ages from 18 to 75.

A total of **44** people provided their feedback.

The main issues people had difficulty with were:

- ✚ Getting through to the GP practice on the phone with 65% of people saying they have difficulty.
- ✚ If people have been unable to secure an appointment with the GP, the majority said they have self-cared with some calling 111 for advice. However 30% of people felt the need to attend A & E and 40% used a pharmacy for advice. A minority of people travelled to an out-of-area walk-in centre.
- ✚ The majority of people knew which clinician they would see at their appointment.
- ✚ Only 11% of people were always offered the type of appointment they preferred with 23% saying mostly offered. 25% of people said they were never offered their preferred type.

The feedback and comments suggest that many people are struggling to get through to the GP practice on the telephone and to access timely appointments. Some say they are constantly having to hang on the phone for long periods of time to get through. People are being told to call at 8am but find it impossible to get through, with some waiting for long periods of time in a queue or giving up altogether. Some people resort to visit the GP practice in person because they cannot get through on the phone, only to find a queue of people waiting outside the GP practice.

Some say that the reception staff are too busy and that the environment in the practice is sometimes difficult for patients because of things like congestion, layout of the practice, and sometimes unhelpful and abrupt reception staff. Some people did acknowledge that staff were also helpful and friendly. From the feedback, there is a sense that practice staff may be finding they are struggling to cope with the level of need from patients.

There was a mixed response to using digital platforms, with some people saying they find them useful for some things such as ordering prescriptions, but some negative comments about navigating websites and not being able to find the information needed.

It is clear from the feedback and from HWB wider intelligence that improvements to the telephone and appointment system are greatly needed particularly at Unsworth Practice/Peter House. It also needs to be taken into account that some people struggle with being kept hanging on the telephone, some people are carers and some people have jobs which means they cannot spend hours trying to call the practice at 8am.

We appreciate there is pressure in the whole of the health and care landscape, but not addressing issues with GPs adds to the burden being put on other services such as A & E having to see people who cannot get an appointment at their GP practice.

Recommendations

1. We recommend that action is taken to address/improve the issues with the telephone system, increase the availability of appointments with clinicians and increase the levels of practice staff.
2. We recommend that GP practices have a form of words on their website/on notice boards in the surgery stating the reason(s) why it is taking longer for people to access a GP appointment.
3. We recommend having some simple information available to patients, to explain some of the future plans to recover and improve access to primary care (the primary care delivery plan).
4. We recommend including stakeholders to promote the Get to Know Where to Go information for patients and the public. This can be included on GP practice/pharmacy notice boards for patients who are not tech savvy.

Response from NHS Greater Manchester to Healthwatch Bolton Snapshot report – Accessing your GP Practice – Nov 2023

In terms of national requirements for improvements around access, Primary Care Networks (PCNs) have been tasked with developing capacity, access and improvement plans (CAIP) under the Network Direct Enhanced Services (DES). PCNs have reviewed patient feedback from the results of the national GP patient survey and Friends and Family Test to inform their respective CAIP, which will seek to make improvements in the following three areas:

- patient experience of contact;
- ease of access and demand management; and
- accuracy of recording in appointment books

As part of the Delivery Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care, the ICB is supporting practices to transition to the Modern General Practice Access Model which involves providing a smooth, equitable experience of access to patients across phone, online and walk-in routes. The transfer to delivery of the Modern General Practice Access Model is being undertaken during 23/24 and 24/25 so improvements will be evidenced over a 2 year period.

From a locality perspective, data on Tableau (a platform-based data analysis tool) confirms that there are access issues across Bolton practices with some PCNs performing better than others. The locality Primary Care Contracts & Commissioning Team has commenced a piece of work, using data at practice level from GP Patient Survey, Friends & Family Test, Complaints, Incidents, Enhanced Access monitoring, Bolton Quality Contract, Access Audits etc., to provide a fuller picture of access across PCNs and to identify those practices who require additional support.

Specifically, we are aware that Unsworth Group Practice (Peter House Surgery) has been experiencing issues in offering the level of access to appointments that we would expect to see for patients and, as a result, we have been actively working with the practice since last September to improve this. Some of the steps the practice has already put in place are detailed below:

- The practice offers a range of appointments for patients – routine and urgent and offer these on a 50:50 split
- These appointments are offered on both a face to face and telephone basis and are offered for both urgent and routine appointments
- Requests for appointments by third parties are assessed by the duty doctor who will determine the need for an appointment based on clinical need.
- This process is repeated as and when correspondence is received requesting an appointment for a patient, i.e. a hospital clinician requesting a patient be seen in primary care. It is, however, standard practice for hospital clinicians to discuss any findings with patients for investigations they have carried out and the practice will be informed in writing and this will be recorded in the patient record.
- The practice allows for booking of appointments up to six weeks in advance especially for long term condition reviews and aging well clinics etc.

The practice has also acknowledged that it has received negative feedback in relation to the employed reception staff and as a result, has undertaken a training programme to retrain all patient facing staff in customer service skills. While this programme is still underway, the practice has further committed to ensuring that this improves by appointing an external staff member to oversee management of the reception area.

All of these changes will continue to be monitored locally to ensure there is demonstrable improvement in access arrangements and patient experience at the practice.

I hope all of this provides you with some level of assurance around the work currently underway to recover and improve access to primary medical services across the locality.

Best wishes,

Kath

Kathryn Oddi

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