

**Report Title****WHAT PEOPLE THINK ABOUT WAITING TIMES****Organisation**

This report is part of a project commissioned from Healthwatch Bolton by Bolton GP Federation. The work took place at various sites in Farnworth.

**Dates:**

December 2016

**Research Team**

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**Acknowledgements**

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**Disclaimer**

This report relates verbatim comments gathered during the time of our visit. All comments recorded added to Healthwatch Bolton's databank of patient comment.

**Background**

This report is part of a wider project to explore what patients think of 'neighbourhood hubs' and to gather views and ideas about what aspects of such a service would improve their experience of accessing health and wellbeing services.

**Strategic drivers**

One of the new delivery models expected by GMHSCP and reflected in the Bolton Locality Plan is the development of a "Local Care Organisation" (LCO). Primary Care activity is expected to be delivered within the framework of the LCO, as are certain aspects of community based health care. In this context the Bolton GP Federation approached Healthwatch Bolton to develop and deliver a small scale piece of public engagement that would open up this discussion with the public.

## Topics/Themes

***GP: Primary Care: Referrals: Waiting Times: Access:  
Physiotherapy: Podiatry: Ear Syringing: ENT***

## Who we spoke to

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We spoke to **59** people at **five** venues in Farnworth over four days in December 2016. This fieldwork produced **615** comments. **68** comments are used in this analysis.

The Venues were: Farnworth Health Centre (16 people), Kearsley Medical Centre (20 people), Farnworth food bank (6 people), Age UK (13 people) Farnworth UCAN Centre (4 people).

## Method

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Field researchers used a semi-structured questionnaire and conducted informal interviews with individuals on a one to one basis. All comments were recorded verbatim against the relevant question prompts.

People were asked about GP waiting times, what their current experience is and what they consider to be acceptable waiting times.

Comments were analysed as follows;

- What people considered to be an acceptable waiting time for a routine primary care appointment.
- How long people are currently waiting for routine primary care appointments.
- Some respondents talked about onward referrals to other services and we have included their comments.

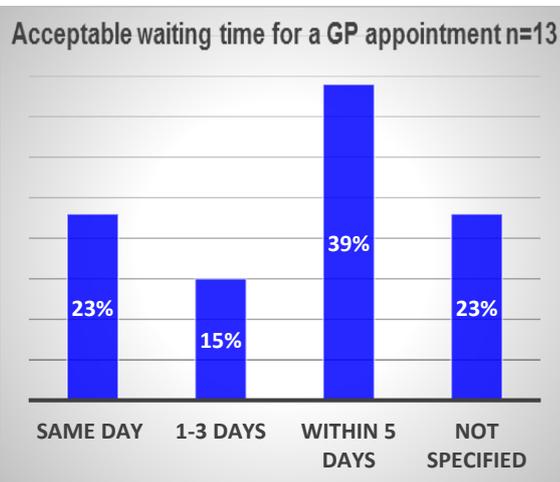
## Analysis

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### Acceptable Waiting Times (GP)

13 people gave a clear answer with regard to what they considered an acceptable waiting time to see a GP. <sup>1</sup>

The majority (39%) of the sample stating that up to five days was acceptable for a routine GP appointment.



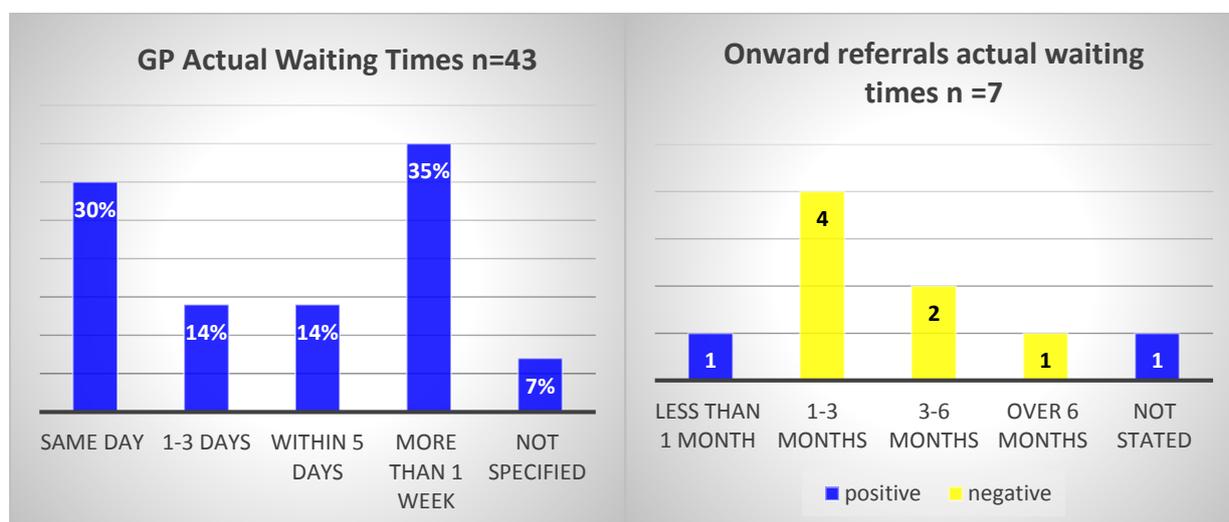
### Current Waiting Times (GP)

- Experiences of current GP waiting times are mixed.
- Just under a third of people (30%) report they are able to get same day appointments (particularly urgent appointments),
- 28% report a short wait of a couple of days (14%) or 3-5 days (14%).
- Thus in total 58% are able to get an appointment within the broadly acceptable time frame of five days.

- However this does leave a large number (35%) of people reporting that they are not able to access routine GP appointments within the broadly acceptable time frame of five days a week.
- Though some people cited longer waits to see named GP's (with earlier appointments available for others) this situation by no means covers all the situations described.
- People described a range of issues at play including; not being able to pre-book appointments, having to ring every morning to try and get an appointment, inflexible booking systems.

### Current waiting times (referrals)

- 21% of respondents (9 people) raised the subject of onward referrals to additional services.
- 78% of these people were unhappy with long waits.
- 22% had waited between 1 and 3 months, 11% between 3-6 months and 11% over 6 months.
- The majority of these waits were for allied primary care professional appointments including, physio, podiatry and even blood tests.



## **Recommendations**

- 1) There needs to be more effort to standardise practice in relation to GP appointments arrangements. This should include things like balance of pre-bookable appointments to new appointments, balance of routine vs urgent appointments, standard set of options for making appointments (pre-book, online, telephone) as well as a clear statement of what is and is not acceptable in terms of waiting times.
- 2) Through the Bolton Engagement Alliance, Healthwatch Bolton/Bolton CVS, plan to extend the work on neighbourhood hubs to other areas, we will continue to ask about what people consider to be acceptable waiting times

- 3) A patient experience outcome concerning waiting times is included in the second report in this series 'Towards a set of Patient Experience Outcomes' - Healthwatch Bolton / Bolton GP Federation. We hope to use this report to influence contract specification and monitoring for Primary Care Services going forward.
- 4) It is hoped that the proposed Neighbourhood Hubs will address the unacceptable waiting times people experience for appointments with allied health professionals such as physio, podiatry and ear syringing. If this is achieved this will clearly improve patient's experience and should lead to better outcomes in relation to early intervention and prevention

## **The Comments**

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### **Comments on acceptable waiting times for primary care**

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#### **Same day**

- *'Same day.'*
- *'If it's serious it should be the same day.'*
- *'If it's an emergency it should be the same day otherwise a week is a reasonable length of time.'*

#### **Within 1-3 days**

- *'2 days for me.'*
- *'Couple of days.'*

#### **Within 5 days**

- *'If it's urgent it should be the same week.'*
- *'5 days is reasonable.'*
- *'One week at the most for a non-urgent.'*
- *'I think for a routine appointment about a week is alright.'*
- *'I would like an on-line appointment within a week.'*

#### **Not specified**

- *'We shouldn't have to wait too long but there is a lot of demand.'*
- *'Nobody wants to wait but unfortunately services are stretched and demand is high.'*
- *'It depends on what's wrong. There is always the Walk in Centre and Out of Hours services.'*

### **Current Experience GP Waiting Times**

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#### **Not specified**

- *'(partner) can't get into see a GP as all appointments are gone because he's in work and can't pre-book.'*
- *'I get in pretty well to see my GP.'*
- *'In my practice there are 7 GPs and you still have to wait.'*

- *'I feel I wait too long - my appointment is never on the same day that I need it.'*
- *'It's very quick, no problems.'*
- *'I've no recent need to see a GP.'*

#### **Same day**

- *'As an emergency the same day. Routine appointments are quick. If you want to see someone particular you may wait a couple of days.'*
- *'If I ring at 2pm I would be seen the same day at my GPs. Ringing at 8am can be difficult as I don't get to sleep till 2am. Going out in the morning isn't always good for me.'*
- *'I can get a GP appointment ok as long as I can get through on the phone in a morning.'*
- *'Online and before 8am I can get an appointment. After 8 you need to get through on the phone.'*
- *'If you ring before 8am you can get in.'*
- *'If I rang before 8am I would get in.'*
- *'If I rang today I would get in to see a duty doctor today.'*
- *'Appointments with the GP are ok if you don't mind who you're seeing.'*
- *'Emergency appointments are seen on the same day.'*
- *'I booked on-line 20 minutes ago and came straight down to the practice.'*
- *'I rang this morning and I'm now waiting to see a GP, normally its longer; I'm not bothered who I see.'*
- *'I'm quite happy as my current practice arrangements mean I would see a GP today.'*
- *'Timings are ok for us. In an emergency we are seen and that's what matters.'*

#### **1-3 days**

- *'If you take any doctor it could be up to 2 days.'*
- *'Within a day or two; there are cancellations available. Overall it's a 9 out of 10.'*
- *'Routine appointments are quick. If you want to see someone particular you may wait a couple of days.'*
- *'On the first or second day; the trouble is what we as patients think is urgent they (the GP) don't.'*
- *'As an emergency the same day. Routine appointments are quick. If you want to see someone particular you may wait a couple of days.'*
- *'3 days and I would like to see my own.'*

#### **5 days**

- *'Usually quick but can be up to a week.'*
- *'It varies at my GP; probably a week for general issues unless it's an emergency but to see a specific doctor it's longer.'*
- *'5 days – I can't make an appointment other than by ringing at 8am.'*
- *'3-4 days or up to a week.'*
- *'It's usually pretty quick - no longer than a week. This time of year a lot of people are ill.'*
- *'I made the appointment last week - I've no complaints.'*

#### **More than 1 week**

- *'It's managing to get an on-line appointment and it can be up to a week or 10 days. If it's urgent you need to ring up.'*
- *'1-2 weeks wait to see my GP.'*
- *'I book on-line so don't have a problem waiting unless I need to see a particular GP when it can wait up to 2 weeks.'*
- *'It takes too long to see a GP; 2 weeks is normal at Piggott Street.'*
- *'My GP is ok but you can't see who you want to as he has a two-week wait.'*
- *'A GP pre-bookable can be up to one month.'*
- *'It's up to a month for a particular doctor.'*
- *'At my GPs its 3-4 weeks if it's a non-emergency. On a Monday all appointments have gone by 09.45. I use 111 who have sent me to the Out of Hours at Waters Meeting. I have had to go to Bury with my little girl.'*
- *'I go to my GP very rarely but waiting for a routine appointment is now about 3 weeks. I think that is too long.'*
- *'It's a 2 week wait.'*
- *'Managing appointments could be better. I couldn't make an appointment recently as I wasn't well and the next time I can get there would be January (this research done in Mid-December) It happens with long term conditions, you may well be ill – these things happen. A better way of managing or changing appointments would help.'*
- *'3 week wait for a GP appointment.'*
- *'It's two weeks for an appointment.'*
- *'I've waited 2 weeks to see this GP but to see Dr X it's a 4 week wait.'*
- *'I rang (my GP) about some sore burning eye symptoms; 2 weeks to wait for an appointment is too long.'*
- *'It can be difficult to see your own GP – you can wait 2 weeks. You can see an emergency.'*

## **Current Waiting Times for Onward Referrals**

### **Less than 1 month**

- *'2 weeks for my daughters ENT appointment.'*

### **Between one and 3 months**

- *'ENT was a 2-month wait far too long to just get in the system when someone is suffering. I said we would accept an appointment at short notice if someone else cancelled but I was told the system did not recognise cancelled appointments.'*
- *'I am currently waiting to see a specialist but it's been 5 weeks and no one has got back to me. They give you a number and you have to ring yourself. My doctor has had to write a second letter. In Rochdale I had more confidence in their referral system and I would be prepared to travel under these circumstances.'*
- *'There is a long wait for ear syringing; it would be good if those services were more local and could be in Farnworth. To get an earlier appointment you need to go to Brightmet which is still 5-6 weeks.'*
- *'4 weeks wait for a blood test.'*

**Three – six months**

- *'It's taken 3 months to get an appointment at podiatry; it all comes down to money.'*
- *'Waited 12 weeks for the 1<sup>st</sup> physio appointment.'*

**6 months or more**

- *'I waited 6 months to see a physio since my consultant appointment.'*

**Not stated**

- *'My recent experience has been good: I needed a neurological scan. The appointment came quickly and I was seen for the scan on time. I was happy with the service at Brightmet Health Centre when I went for my appointment.'*