



**Report on Findings from the Healthwatch
Independent Survey on Access to GP Services**

April 2015

1. WHAT IS HEALTHWATCH?

The Health and Social Care Act (2012) established Local Healthwatch as the new consumer champion for health and social care services for adults and children in England. Healthwatch Redcar and Cleveland aims to be a strong, independent, trusted and effective voice and a champion for local people, influencing health and social care delivery and supporting people to access health and social care services. It will strive to ensure the best possible quality and choice in health, social care and wellbeing services for the benefit of all living and working in Redcar and Cleveland.

2. AIM

Healthwatch Redcar and Cleveland received intelligence through its engagement activities and its Information & Signposting service that indicated people were experiencing difficulties in making appointments at their GP surgeries.

It was determined that an initial exploratory piece of work be carried out to establish:-

- If this is a wider problem for members of the public
- If additional work or investigation is needed

It is envisaged that this information will be shared with the People Services Scrutiny and Improvement Committee, NHS England and NHS South Tees Clinical Commissioning Group and providers of GP services within Redcar and Cleveland.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to reach a diverse and representative section of the community Healthwatch Redcar and Cleveland conducted a survey structuring its questions around making GP appointments. The survey was conducted over the period of January to March 2015.

The survey web-link was emailed to all of Healthwatch Redcar and Cleveland's existing individual members and shared on its Facebook and twitter sites.

Hard copies of the survey were sent to those members who do not have internet access and also distributed at outreach venues and engagement events which included:-

- Roseberry Residents Association
- Redcar & Cleveland College
- Live at Home support Group
- Neighbourhood Action Partnerships
- Older People's Partnership
- Healthwatch outreach at Redcar Library
- The Parent and Carers Alliance (TPACA) Event
- Distributed through The Junction's network.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 A total of 193 surveys were completed of which 70 were completed via the web-link and 120 filled in manually. All responses were collated via survey monkey (a web based survey software) in order that they could be analysed.

TOTAL NUMBER OF SURVEYS COMPLETED	193
SURVEYS COMPLETED VIA WEB-LINK	70
PAPER SURVEYS COMPLETED	120

A total of 10 questions were asked on the survey and a detailed breakdown of responses to each question can be found in Appendix A. As well as statistical data, some qualitative data was also collected as some questions allowed the respondents to give additional responses. This data provides a deeper insight into issues affecting people when making an appointment.

4.2 In general 129 (67%) of people who filled in the surveys had visited their GP within the last 3 months and the most frequently used method of making appointments was via the telephone with 163 (85%) people.

4.3 Of those questioned, 129 (67%) thought it was easy to make an appointment. Of the 64 (33%) that did not find it easy 62 of these people gave further comments as to why they felt it was not. The main themes from these comments are:-

- *Lack of availability of GPs*
- *Difficulty in telephoning the practice, ie delays in the phone being answered or being put on hold for a long time.*
- *No available appointments*
- *Being offered a telephone consultation first to see if you actually need an appointment*
- *Limited availability of early or late evening appointments for working people*

4.4 Of those who responded 160 (83%) people thought that their appointment was either fairly or very convenient.

4.5 135 (73%) people were able to make an appointment with the person they wanted to see. Of those who made additional comments the main issue seems to be availability.

‘It depends on whom is working’

‘When you are ill and need to see a GP you just have to go with who is available which is never who you want to see’

‘Accept any available doctor’

4.6

How soon were you able to get in to see your GP?	
Same day	37.30% 69
1-2 days	23.24% 43
3-4 days	15.14% 28
4-5 days	4.32% 8
1 week	7.57% 14
More	12.43% 23

112 (60%) of people who answered the survey were able to make an appointment within 2 days of contacting their surgery and 50 people (27%) between 3 and 7 days. Of those who specified it took more than 1 week the reasons were varied. Some patients elected to see a nurse practitioner or have a telephone consultation. Only 5 patients specified the length of time over 1 week and it is not known whether these patients required urgent or non-urgent appointments. 2 patients were unable to make an appointment.

4.7 For those who were not able to get an appointment or the appointment that was offered was not convenient 69 (36%) people indicated that they would go to the appointment that was offered, 46 (24%) would go to an appointment on a different day and 52 (27%) would have a consultation on the phone.

4.8 128 (66%) people had a good to excellent experience of making an appointment which reflects the figure of those who found it easy to make an appointment.

4.9 There were variations in the waiting times at GP surgeries for the consultation to begin and although no additional comments were requested on this those who filled it in manually stated that this often depended on who was seen before them and that it quite often varied.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the survey shows that of those who responded 67% found it easy to make an appointment and had a good experience of doing so, 33% did not. Therefore Healthwatch Redcar and Cleveland recommend the following:-

- 5.1 Healthwatch Redcar and Cleveland recommend that individual GP practices are surveyed to highlight if difficulties in making an appointment are specific to any individual practices.
- 5.2 Healthwatch Redcar and Cleveland recommend that providers of GP services explore ways to improve the appointment system to make it more convenient for working people to access services.
- 5.3 Healthwatch Redcar and Cleveland recommend that the public have a greater understanding and awareness of the appointment system and available pathways within GP practices. Difficulties in making a GP appointment may be a barrier to some patients in accessing services. Greater promotion of alternative appointments available, such as an appointment with a nurse practitioner may alleviate the pressures on making GP appointments.

Appendix A

Q1. When did you last see or speak to your GP?	Responses
In the last 3 months	66.84% 129
3 - 6 months	13.47% 26
6 - 12 months	14.51% 28
more than 12 months ago	5.18% 10
Total	193

Q2. How do you normally book your appointments at your surgery?	Responses
In person	11.92% 23
By phone	84.46% 163
Online	3.63% 7
Other (please specify)	0.00% 0
Total	193

Q3. Do you find it easy to make an appointment?	Responses
Yes	66.84% 129
No	33.16% 64
Total	193

Q4. Responses
GP not available every day
Had to wait for phone to be answered
Telephone consultation from GP, if he sees you in person or leaves prescription
No appointment available at the time
I work out of town and I try to make early morning or late evening appointments to limit time out of office.
I have to make a telephone appointment to the doctor first. Although I think this may have changed now and face to face appointments are now available but you may have to wait a few days.
Have to phone then doctor has to phone me to see if I need appointment.
It varies - sometimes it is
Can't always see the GP have to wait weeks
Never any appointments available that are suitable
Always busy

Never any appropriate appointments
Appointments go quickly
Never any appointments
Never have any
Easy to make an appointment but difficult to get through
Easy if you are not bothered who you see
Have to continually call at inconvenient times to get through
But mainly with nurse practitioner and GP referral from her
No doctors available to see
Usually there are no appointments available unless it is a serious emergency. Sometimes I can ring at 8.30 and all appointments are taken and this could happen a few days in a row.
Never any appointments available
Too long to wait
New system
On phone a long time and have to ring very early
Not if I wish to see the doctor designated to my overall care.
Never any appointments for over a week. Have to ring at 8.30am for an urgent appointment and hope that there is one available.
Difficulty getting through on phone, on hold ages or call gets cut off as I've been on hold too long. By the time I get through there are no appointments left and I'm told to ring back the next day, then it's the same when I ring the following day. Pre - booked appointments are too far in advance. Last week I rang the survey over 20 times in 8 minutes as it was either engaged or I was cut off.
Generally not many slots available if you work full time
We have to wait for doctor to phone back to have telephone consultation, then the doctor decides if they need to see u and then give u an appointment for that day. Can wait all day sometimes.
Because they want to know why you need appointment
Too long a time to wait for an apt, if you want a named gp most only work part time so impossible to get in within 1 - 2 weeks!
You have to book on that day, and my son needs to know the day before what is going on, or something different that is going to happen.
Lack of appointments Obnoxious and obstructive receptionists
Surgery usually calls back - you have to tell receptionist your problem and she gets the doctor to ring you back
The call back service is impractical as you are never given a time that the Dr will call. Then when they do call, very often you don't get asked to go to the surgery and I prefer a face to face service.
Booked appointments usually quite far in advance, emergency appointments are easy to come by
All urgent appointments were full and I needed to see someone that day.
Have to wait for GP to call to see if I can have an appointment
I don't like the phone consultation followed by apt system. I can't have my phone on at work to wait for an appointment for the GP. She is accommodating of this, but it is inconvenient for everyone.
Waiting time
Although it takes a few attempts to get through, if I need an appointment soon as possible I may have to wait three weeks, even so at times days that I can go, they do not do that "service" on the days I am free.
I can never get to see my doctor. Never get an appointment, always phone at 8 am then none left
Phone up, get quick response wait for doctor to phone back
We have to wait for a phone call from the doctor first
Because you only get a telephone consultation
Takes too long to get an appointment
You only get offered a telephone consultation.
They do not offer appointments that suit people who work.
Appointments don't suit my hours of work.

Told to ring in the morning to book app't for that day, cannot book ahead. However most times I have rang from just before opening time through to 5mts after before getting through only to be told no app'ts left. Cannot understand how all app'ts can be gone within a couple of minutes. If this is due to app'ts being acquired online then this is unfair on people who do not have online access.
You have to ring early on the morning and are only offered a telephone call that can be at any time during the whole day.
You can't get in to see the Dr you want and the receptionist seem hell bent on not letting u see anyone
The receptionists seem to be screening everyone to check they have a valid reason to see the doctor. And so they are making a practice of asking why you want that appointment.
Telephone system keeps patients on hold for long periods while appointments could be all taken before surgery reception answers the telephone attempting to call at 8.00am
Problems of getting through especially from 8.30 till 10.30
normally have to wait for an appointment4/5 weeks
Limited choice of times and day
All appointments are done via a telephone consultation with a gp first.This means that I have to walk around work with my mobile phone until I have spoken with a gp and then they give you an appointment for the afternoon. This is not practical in my work
Busy phone lines , lack of appointment availability
Have to call on the morning for an appointment so difficult to plan around my 9-5 job. Rarely appointments early or later.
There is a 2 week waiting list

Q5. How convenient was the appointment you were able to get?	Responses
Very convenient	36.79% 71
Fairly	46.11% 89
Not very	13.47% 26
Not at all	3.63% 7
Other	2 responses
Total	193

Q5. Comments
Rarely able to get one
Phoned on 17th Dec. 1st available GP appointment 29th Dec

Q6. Were you able to make an appointment with the person you wanted to see?	Responses
Yes	73.37% 135
No	26.63% 49
Other (please specify)	15 comments
Total Respondents: 184	

Q6. Comments
Don't know the names of GP's
It depends upon whom is working.
Varies
Can't usually ask for a specific doc. Usually allocated one to speak to and then that doctor decides whether you need to be seen
Get who your given
Not always available
surgery operates 'doctor first' system
sometimes
Not bothered who I see
Sometimes
Had to see nurse instead of doctor
Was offered appointment with a different doctor.
When you are ill and need to see a GP you just have to go with who is available which is NEVER who you want to see.
totally depends on which GP is available at that time.
Accept any available Dr

Q7. How soon were you able to get in to see your GP?	Responses
Same day	37.30% 69
1-2 days	23.24% 43
3-4 days	15.14% 28
4-5 days	4.32% 8
1 week	7.57% 14
More	12.43% 23
Other (please specify)	21 comments

Q7. Comments
8 days
Had to see practice nurse
7 plus days
usually re book 3 months time
It depends upon initial telephone call
To speak to then sometimes appt could be next day or so
Only on this one occasion usually it could take upto 3-4 days.
Doctor phoned me
3 weeks
Only after ringing back back on the 3rd day I managed to get seen on that day.
17 days

Didn't get in usually
Did not make appointment
If my GP not on duty I would see another GP on the same day
Only after having a phone consultation
4-5 weeks
You can make appointments to actually see a GP without a telephone call first
Nurse Practitioner not GP
Unable to book appointments in advance
had to accept a phone call from the doctor

Q8. If you were not able to get an appointment, or the appointment you were offered was not convenient. What would you do on that occasion?	Responses
Go to the appointment that was offered	35.75% 69
Go to an appointment for a different day	23.83% 46
Have a consultation on the phone	26.94% 52
Go to Accident and Emergency (A&E)	1.04% 2
Go to a Walk in centre	9.33% 18
Go to a pharmacist	3.63% 7
Contact the surgery at a different time	8.29% 16
Do not speak to anyone or see anyone	5.70% 11
Other (please specify)	4.66% 9

Q8. Comments
Dial 999
Go to see nurse
Phone 111
Depends on the situation
DEPEND WHAT WAS WRONG AND HOW SERIOUS
Would have to phone back following day and wait for doctor to phone u back to have a telephone consultation.
Depends on issue and what is offered. If urgent go to walk in centre.
All depends on the circumstances!
Not an issue

Q9. In general, how would you describe your experience of making an appointment?	Responses
Excellent	15.03% 29
Very Good	22.28% 43
Good	29.02% 56
Fair	17.10% 33
Poor	12.95% 25
Very Poor	3.63% 7
Total	193

Q10. How long do you usually have to wait at the Practice for your consultation to begin?	Responses
5 mins or less	13.47% 26
6 - 10 mins	35.23% 68
11 - 20 mins	32.64% 63
21 - 30 mins	12.44% 24
30 mins or more	6.22% 12
Total	193