

Priority Project One
The Patient Experience of
Access to Primary Care
Service - GP



First Findings July
2022

Introduction

Healthwatch Sandwell (HWS) are the independent voice of the public in health and social care services in Sandwell. HWS carry out projects each year that are based on the priorities of the public, service providers and service commissioners. The purpose of the projects is to gather information to help inform and influence change in health and social care delivery in Sandwell.

A priority project for 2022/23 is exploring **The patient experience of accessing primary care services** - this report gives an insight to initial findings.

Background

Residents of Sandwell regularly express frustrations with obtaining G.P. Surgery appointments and there are not enough G.P. appointments available to meet daily demand. Appointment allocation is on a first come, first served basis which may create inequalities in access for patients and not attend to patients with the highest health needs.

G.P. Surgeries are a vital first port of call for people who need care; they are the main 'gatekeeper' to other services. If people cannot get an appointment with a G.P. Surgery, not only can their health and wellbeing be put at risk, but demand on already overstretched hospitals gets worse. People are not always aware of the alternative primary care options and may go to A&E if there is nowhere else to go, or their condition may deteriorate, leading to increased treatment and care because they couldn't get help sooner.

Objectives

The project aims to:

- Gather a picture of patient experiences, challenges, and issues with using the routes to G.P. Surgery appointment booking systems and consequent appointment wait times.
- Explore possible issues with the appointment booking and allocation systems regarding prioritisation of urgent health needs through patient's experiences and discussions with G.P. Surgery Practice Managers.
- Work collaboratively and positively with Primary Care Services to inform upon and promote the range of primary care access options available to patients.

Methodology

HWS staff team and volunteers are engaging with and listening to primary care patients in person in primary care settings such as G.P. Surgeries, Pharmacies and the Urgent Treatment Centre. HWS are also capturing experiences and voices through community outreach, working with the voluntary community sector organisations and social media engagement.

What are people telling us

Booking Appointments

Concerns about who gets the priority. Will the G.P. or other health professional call back?

Appointments not meeting people's needs

Some people say that telephone appointments are convenient, but others are concerned their health concerns will not be properly diagnosed.

Access to regular treatment and medication

People struggling to get appointments for regular health checks. Some people are concerned they will not get the medication and treatment they require to manage their health conditions.

Our surgery offers a call back, but the call back just tells you that there are no appointments.

Its hard to make an appointment at 8pm. I have been in trouble at work because I was on the phone so long.

I was worried about a lump. I was told I would need to send the G.P. a photograph. The lump was on a private part of my body, and I did not want to do this as was concerned about who would see this.

My diabetes review is way overdue. I used to have these regular before Covid. I do not feel well but cannot get an appointment to see my G.P. I have tried the pharmacy but told I must see my GP. - just keep going round in circles.

I couldn't get an appointment so went to the urgent treatment centre. I waited for ages and then it closed.

My medication has almost run out. I cannot get a repeat prescription until I have seen my GP. I cannot get an appointment for 6 weeks. If I have no medication my condition will get worse and I will get infections that will need more treatment.

Julie's story

I have not been feeling very well for a while. I had been to the pharmacy, and they were helpful but told me I should really see the Doctor. I cannot read very well so it was difficult for me to book an appointment online. I tried lots of time to book through the telephone, but I could not get through. It is hard before 8 a.m. as I am at work on some days and told I cannot use my phone.





Someone told me that if I went to the surgery in person before 8 a.m. and wait for it to open I would be able to get an appointment. I found someone to look after my kids and take them to breakfast club at school, so I was able to go. I don't drive so I had to catch the bus. I took two buses and then had to walk. When I arrived, there were six people in front of me. When I got to speak to the receptionist, I was told that the appointments had all gone, and I should come back the next day or phone before 8 a.m. It's just impossible and I have given up. I still feel unwell, it's been two months.

Ravi's Experience

I had booked my appointment online. I was pleased as I only had to wait a couple of weeks. The G.P. was to call me up at 10.30 a.m. I waited until 11 a.m. but still no call. I was unable to wait any longer as I had to take my father to a hospital appointment. Later that day I called into the surgery and explained what had happened. I was told that I should allow a two-hour slot from the time of the appointment - in my case from 10.30 to 12.30. This information was not on the web site when I booked. I was told I would have to book up again and if I missed the appointment, I may not get another one! I went back online and there were no available appointments. I tried for three days until I was able to book but the appointment was not for another 4 weeks.

Experiences of people with learning disabilities and or autism about their GP appointments

People were asked to give ratings to services using dots and emojis to indicate what they thought of the appointment and the Doctor

			
7 people	4 people	2 people	1 person

Some people said that they liked their Doctor but did not like the treatment so did not want to go to appointments.

Me and my Mom go to see the Doctor when I am poorly. I have not been for a long time. My Doctor is very kind and asks me what the matter is. The Doctor listens to me and asks me some questions. My mom helps me understand.

I don't like going to have injections, it makes me afraid, and I don't want to go. The Doctor says "don't look"

I would like to talk to the Doctor about losing weight, but I can only go and see the Doctor if I am poorly.

I have never been on the weighing scales when I have been to see the Doctor when I am poorly.

I like my Doctor.

My mom telephoned the Doctor as I was not very well. It took ages for someone to answer the phone - it made my Mom cross.

I went to see the Doctor. That Doctor was not very nice to me - I had to have a blood pressure test, I do not like this. I had to have a blood test. I did not like this. It makes me scared.

I don't like going to the Doctor as I am scared that I will have to have the needle again. The Doctor was cross as I kept saying no.

The Doctor talks to my Mom about what's wrong with me and my Mom will tell me.

When I go to the Doctors, I see different ones. Some Doctors make me laugh. I would like it better if there were lady Doctors.

Engaging with people at Sandwell Hospital Urgent Treatment Centre



The Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC) is based at Sandwell Hospital, West Bromwich and is accessible to all patients.

It offers G.P. led urgent, but not emergency care, for ailments such as suspected broken bones, abdominal pain, and minor illnesses.

Patients from all areas can attend, however if they are not registered with a G.P. they will be asked to sign up.

The centre is open seven days a week, from 9am to 9pm. Appointments can be made by calling NHS 111, or you can walk in.

HWS will have a profile in the UTC throughout July to understand why people are presenting at the service.

General observations

The waiting room was busy. All seats were taken, and some people were standing.

Some patients do not fully understand when to come to the UTC - for example some could call NHS 111 for advice if they cannot get a G.P. appointment.

Some patients appear not to understand the booking in and assessment system between A&E and UTC.

There is a general impression that the pressure of insufficient G.P. appointments being available to meet demand and the perceived lack of alternative primary care options for patients is presenting as an overload in the UTC.

Next Steps

HWS to continue to build relationships with UTC staff to fully understand the function and process of the UTC

HWS to explore fully the patient journey to further understand the process from a patient perspective

Conclusion

HWS are hearing about inequalities of access that local people are facing when trying to get appointments at their G.P. Surgery and some lack of awareness of the range of primary care options available. HWS will continue to share people's experiences with commissioners and help provide insight to inform and improve services this may include:

- Insight on local needs
- Highlighting inequalities in access to General Practice
- Active signposting for people to help them get the right support at the right time with the right person
- Recommendations to improve services



healthwatch Sandwell

To share your patient experiences contact :

Alexia Farmer Manager 07985214389

Anita Andrews Engagement and Volunteer Lead 07885214421

Sophie Shuttlewood Projects and Partnership Lead 07732683483

Melissa Elders Community Outreach Lead 07885214547

Paul Higgitt ICP Project Officer 07732683463

Loretta Higgins Information and Signposting Officer 07732683449

Visit our Feedback review page:

<https://www.healthwatchesandwell.co.uk/services/>

Or Email: info@healthwatchesandwell.co.uk

