

Title of report	GP Access
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All CCGs have a statutory duty to support NHS England (NHSE) in discharging its duty so far as relating to securing continuous improvement in the quality of primary medical services. (NHS England is the commissioner of primary care including general medical, general dental, and community ophthalmology and community pharmaceutical services.)

GPs and practices are under unprecedented pressure. There are about 340 million consultations annually in general practice in England, an increase of 40 million per year from five years ago. This represents the single greatest rise in volume of care within any sector of the NHS. The increase has not been matched by an increase in GP numbers and staff, or by an expansion in infrastructure, against a background of falling or static resource.

There is now a large and increasing gulf between the workload demands on practices and their capacity to deliver essential services to their registered patients. GPs are being overwhelmed by rising workload, particularly from a growing ageing population with complex health needs. At the same time, there is an emerging workforce crisis with shortages of GPs leaving many practices unable to recruit doctors, and evidence that some experienced GPs are considering leaving general practice altogether. Government policy continues to move services into the community, placing yet more pressure on overstretched GP services struggling to provide enough appointments, with consequential delays to see a GP. Cuts in resources to individual practices via a nationally imposed funding review are exacerbating the problem for many.

In a recent British Medical Association (BMA) tracker survey, 74% of GPs described their workload as unmanageable or unsustainable – significantly higher than any other category of doctor. Both the Centre for Workforce Intelligence (CfWI) and Health Education England (HEE) workforce task groups have reported that the current workload demands on GP practices are unsustainable, given current GP workforce levels.

Q18. Overall experience of making an appointment Base: All		
	%	N
Very good	39	1251
Fairly good	39	1264
Neither good nor poor	13	414
Fairly poor	7	216
Very poor	2	73
Total		3218

In July 2014 Surrey Healthwatch published a report¹: Getting an appointment with your GP: Experiences of the People of Surrey, containing views about primary care services and recommendations for improvement in a range of areas.

Having elicited comments from over 1,100 members of the public and groups, the report stated:

***“Prioritising Access:** People generally understand the importance of prioritising access to GP appointments according to need, but are frustrated at what they perceive to be inefficiencies and barriers within many GP appointment booking systems.”*

Surrey Healthwatch made a number of recommendations and the CCG have in response to this established a Primary Care Co-Commissioning Group working in collaboration with NHS England Area Team to improve access and establish practice development plans that build on the good practice that already exists in the area and supports practices to redesign their systems to improve access, in its broadest meaning, for all.

A more recent G&W patient survey² reported in July this year, completed by 2435 patients of which 71% had seen or spoken to a GP in the last six months, included the following reported findings:

- 27% said it was very easy to get through to the surgery by phone 48% said fairly easy;
- 44% said receptionists were very helpful, 44% said they were fairly helpful;
- 84% of patients book appointments by phone 24% in person, 12% booked online;

¹

http://www.healthwatchesurrey.co.uk/sites/default/files/healthwatch_booking_a_gp_appointment_report_v6.pdf

² CCG report (July 2015 publication)

- 45% were aware that they could book appointments on line and 34% were aware that repeat prescriptions could be ordered online. 43% didn't know what on-line services were available;
- 72% of patients said that they were satisfied or fairly satisfied with the opening times and 69% said that opening times were convenient;
- Only 2% of patients said that extended opening hours would make it more convenient to see someone, the majority of patients stated that evenings – after 6.30 and Saturdays would be most convenient for them;
- 89% said that the experience was good and the majority would recommend their surgery to someone else.

This survey shows that the majority of patients surveyed were able to easily book an appointment and were happy with the service received. However more could be done to raise awareness of online resources and opening times could be extended beyond the current times for certain individuals. G&W CCG continue to work with NHS England to support NHS England's vision to see general practice play an even stronger role in supporting people to keep in good health, as part of a wider joined up system of local health services at the heart of local communities.

There are a range of factors that contribute to whether patients feel they have good access to general practice care, including practice location, opening times, ease of appointments and speed of access. Performance by access criteria is now part of the quality monitoring system for general practice, which is currently the responsibility of NHSE. This relates to access to primary care during core hours (8am to 6.30pm on Monday to Friday inclusive).

This paper briefs the Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny Board on how the CCG review access to general practice care, outlines initiatives in place to improve patient access to services and describes how the CCGs are supporting the provision of additional capacity in primary medical care.

Key elements

The CCG review patient and carer experience of health care services using a variety of sources.

- Feedback from patients and carers via NHS Choices, Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), Patient Network Groups, Patient Participation Groups, Healthwatch and complaints received into the CCGs.
- The national GP survey undertaken twice a year by Ipsos MORI. (Also used by NHSE).

Convenient Access

Evidence suggests that the majority of patients want more convenient access to GP appointments.

All GP practices in Guildford and Waverley have the opportunity to deliver extended hour's access scheme (DES). The scheme requires practices to offer routine appointments at times outside of practices core contracted hours (08:00 to 18:30) to allow patients to attend the practice at a time when it is more convenient for them (e.g. at weekends, early mornings and evening). Currently, 14 of the 21 GP practices in Guildford and Waverley offer an extended hours service, meaning that 158,471 patients have access to a GP in the evening or on a Saturday morning.

It was clear from the survey that people would like to be able to book appointments in a variety of ways. As a result, available booking methods in practices have been looked at to ensure different ways of booking an appointment are available to meet the requirements of all patients.

The online booking service and SMS has been publicised and is an option for the majority of patients. Offering online booking as an option relieves pressure on telephone booking and is a viable option to improve access. Special provision is given to babies and young children, elderly patients and those with complex health needs. Same day and extended appointments for these patients are seen as a priority.

A campaign to help patients get the most from their GP appointment will be promoted to raise awareness of current available services and what to expect. Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) made up of a group of volunteer patients and staff from the GP practices, have been encouraged to discuss the services on offer, and how improvements can be made for the benefit of patients and the practice.

Conclusion

Access to GP practices is considered an important aspect of good patient care; patients need to know they can access their health services at the point of need, using a variety of options. The CCG is committed to working with the primary care providers to establish accessible GP services as described in the Healthwatch Surrey report.

The CCG continues to develop alternative options that extend and improve access to population groups who may have experienced difficulty in accessing GP appointments.