



LINK Report: Access to GP Surgeries



July 2010

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1 Background

LINK's Board decided to investigate the issue of access to GP's in February 2010 after we had heard from a number of sources that they have been experiencing problems in making appointments. The issue was raised during LINK's outreach work at Howdon and Wallsend Children's Centres. It was raised again at the North West Awareness Raising event in October and was identified by LINK members as a priority issue at the Annual LINK event in January.

In order to find out if this is a borough wide issue, or attached to specific surgeries, LINK developed a brief survey to be distributed across North Tyneside. The survey reached people through a variety of outlets:

- Coffee mornings in Wideopen, Dudley, Meadow Well, North Shields and Killingworth
- Children's Centres
- The Learning Disabilities Federation
- Sent to members of the Learning Disability Partnership Board
- Sent to Skills for People
- Sent to Age Concern
- A LINK membership mailing
- LINK's Website

214 people returned completed surveys over a two month period. 51% of those who completed the form were LINK members and 49% were non members. A copy of the survey is attached at the end of this report.

2 Summary of Findings

The majority of responses that LINK received were positive. Most people had little problem making an appointment at their GP surgery, particularly if this was in advance. When asked how easy it is to make an appointment, 88% of people answered 'easy' or 'fairly easy' when booking in advance, and 59% gave the same response when booking an appointment on the same day. Only 3% of people answered 'nearly impossible' with regards to making an appointment in advance,

although 14% said the same was true when making an appointment on the same day.

Figure 1: Responses to the question 'How easy do you find making an appointment on the same day?'

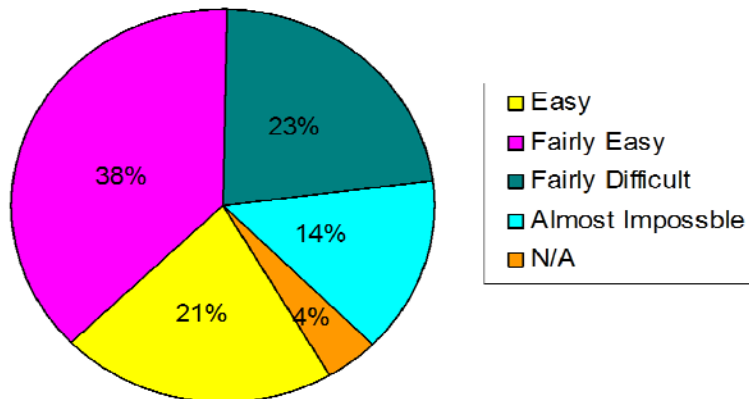
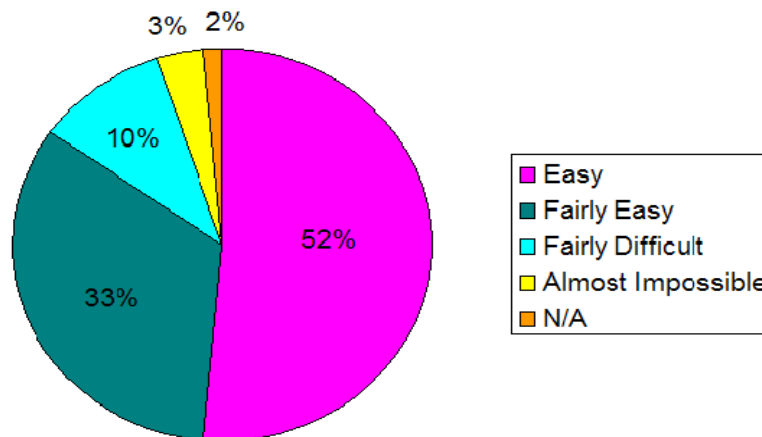
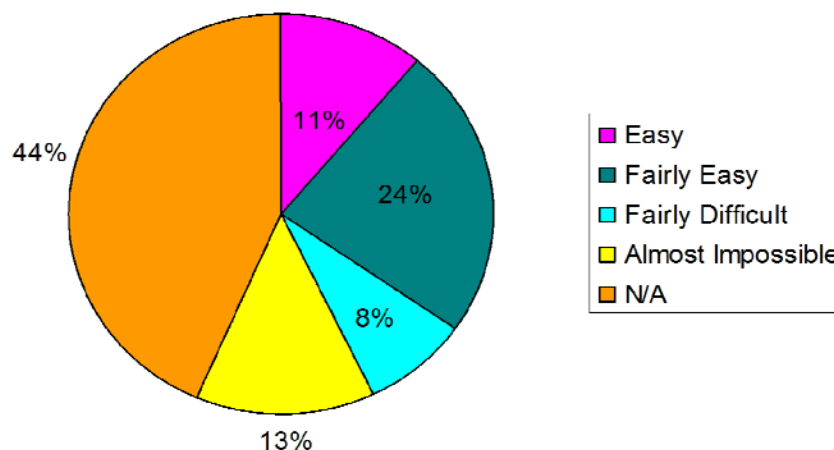


Figure 2: Responses to the question 'How easy do you find making an appointment in advance?'



When it came to making appointments outside of traditional working hours, the majority of survey respondents answered that they had never tried or never needed to do so. Of those who had tried, 35% found it 'easy' or 'fairly easy' and 24% found it 'fairly difficult' or 'impossible.'

Figure 3: Responses to the question ‘How easy do you find making an appointment outside of traditional working hours (9am to 5pm)?’



However, despite these generally positive views, several problematic areas were identified and several GP surgeries were repeatedly mentioned by survey respondents who were not happy with the service they have received. See section 2.1 for the themes that emerged.

Only six respondents had made a complaint to their surgery in the last 12 months, of which only one said that they did not get an appropriate response.

Full information on findings can be found in the summary at the end of this report.

3 Themes

While we are aware that our sample of 214 is small, this has allowed us to identify some common themes across the borough. It will also allow us to identify those surgeries that seem to be particularly difficult for patients to access.

Appointment booking systems

A total of 150 responses said that making an appointment with their GP was ‘fairly difficult’ or ‘almost impossible’. The biggest difficulty was in making same day appointments. Respondents spoke of difficulty in getting through to the surgery on the phone at the specified time:

Telephoning the Surgery

“You have to ring at 8am or 12pm exactly – phones are engaged and when you get through finally they say all the appointments have already gone.”

“Appointments can be booked online, so all the appointments are taken by the time you get through on the phone.”

“If you do get through you are unlikely to be able to see your own doctor.”

“Difficult to ring in at 8:30am as I am driving to work. By the time I can call the surgery there are no appointments left.”

In addition to the above comments, parents at the Children’s Centres often said that they found it very easy to make same day appointments that were for their children, but that it was harder to make appointments for themselves.

Accessing a Doctor

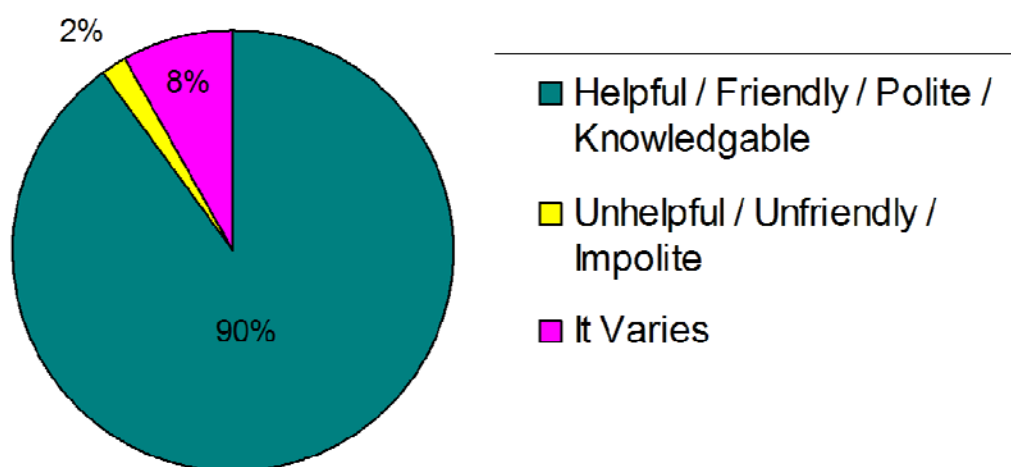
Nine respondents said that they had difficulty getting an appointment with their preferred doctor. Two also mentioned that making an appointment to see a female doctor was problematic.

“You have to wait longer if you want to see a female doctor.”

“The doctor I see always changes.”

Staff Attitudes

Of the 209 respondents who answered the question regarding staff attitudes, the overwhelming majority were happy with the staff at their surgery (see Figure 4).



“The whole team are excellent – a credit to the health service.”

“Very approachable and very good at dealing with last-minute requests is getting tablets/booking ambulances. 10 out of 10!”

“I cannot speak highly enough of the staff at my surgery. I have a serious and ongoing illness and without fail they make sure that my needs are met.”

However, of the six respondents that had made a complaint, two were relating to staff. Negative comments about staff usually referred to front of house staff and included:

“Receptionists’ attitudes can be upsetting...as if you are a nuisance.”

“One receptionist is particularly surly.”

“Some are polite and friendly, but unfortunately some are unhelpful and not friendly at all.”

“Receptionist hard to get passed, you feel you have to explain to unqualified staff your health worry for yourself or family members, which might be a sensitive issue.”

“Receptionist asks too many personal questions.”

Other negative comments that we received

“Unless you can plan 6 months in advance when to be ill you have no chance of an appointment with your own GP.”

“It’s as if you are invading their time and privacy.”

“Mistakes with appointments, repeat prescriptions not ready or lost.”

“Would like to be able to get an appointment when you want.”

“It takes a long time to be seen even when you have an appointment.”

One respondent told us of a catalogue of errors with her surgery stretching back several years, from a failure to diagnose a child with Asperger’s syndrome, poor attitudes of health visitors linked to the surgery and the failure of surgery staff to provide important information needed for benefits claims when given several weeks to arrange it. This individual chose to change surgeries rather than make a formal complaint.

Other positive responses we received

“They provide a good service. Appointments are available usually within 24 hours if not the same day.”

“I am very impressed with the service I receive. I am diabetic and I feel well supported and that the staff go out of their way to help.”

“I have been with my surgery for 20 years and have never had any problems with staff. The doctors are always good and efficient.”

4 Recommendations

Feedback from this questionnaire was generally positive with many people making comments about how easy it is to access their GP and how helpful they have found staff.

However, four surgeries have been identified in this survey as being difficult to access. Common themes within these four surgeries were

- Difficult to get an appointment with patient’s own GP
- Concern about being prescribed medication without thorough medical examination
- Waiting times
- Difficulty in making same day appointments due to phone in system
- Unhappy reception staff

Recommendations to these four surgeries from LINK, based on this feedback are:

- A review of current booking systems, as has taken place at other surgeries in the borough
- Considering more flexible hours and appointments outside of traditional 9am to 5pm hours to enable patients to see their preferred GP at a preferred time
- Staff training to raise awareness of the patient experience and to improve staff attitudes when dealing with patients.

5 Action

A copy of this report was sent to North of Tyne PCT, who were asked to respond to the report within the statutory 20 days (Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007). Where a GP surgery has been portrayed negatively we contacted them directly and asked for their comments on the findings and information on how they plan to improve their service (referencing LINKs recommendations), again requesting a response within 20 days.

6 Response

Responses that were received from the PCT and the four surgeries mentioned above are attached at the end of this report.

7 Next steps

Following the above responses, the LINK Board (under staff guidance) decided in September whether the responses were sufficient in reassuring the public that patient concerns are being taken seriously and being acted upon.

LINK would like to thank all those who took the time to complete the Access to GP survey.

Access to GP Surgeries

LINK Survey

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey from North Tyneside Local Involvement Network (LINK). The aim of the survey is to find out people's experiences of accessing GP appointments. The results will be used in our ongoing work to improve health and social care services in North Tyneside.

While quotes and personal experience may be used in LINK's reports, all personal details will be treated with the strictest confidence.

1: What is the name and location of the GP surgery that you use?

2: How would you rate the following when it comes to your GP surgery?

2a. Making a same day appointment:

Easy Fairly Easy Fairly Difficult Almost Impossible N/A

Any comments?

2b. Making an appointment in advance:

Easy Fairly Easy Fairly Difficult Almost Impossible N/A

Any comments?

2c. Making an appointment outside of traditional hours (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Easy Fairly Easy Fairly Difficult Almost Impossible N/A

Any comments?

3. How would you describe the staff at your GP surgery? Tick all that apply.

Helpful Polite Friendly Knowledgeable

Unhelpful Impolite Unfriendly It varies

Any Comments?

4. Have you made a complaint about your GP surgery in the past 12 months, either directly or through a patient support service e.g. PALS or ICAS?

Yes No

If yes, please describe the incident here (specifying dates if possible):

If you have any further comments about accessing your GP and appointments, please describe them here:

If you are happy to talk to us in more detail about this subject, please tell us your contact details:

Name:

Address:

Telephone Number:

Are you a LINK member? Yes No, but I would like to be* No

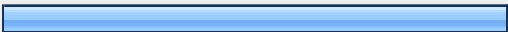
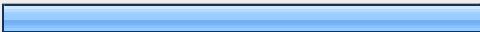
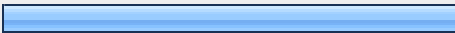





*A member of the LINK team will provide you with a membership pack either directly or by post. Thank you for your time!

LINK Survey: Access to GP Surgeries


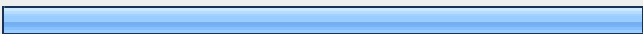
1. What is the name and location of the GP surgery that you use?		Response Count
		203
	<i>answered question</i>	203
	<i>skipped question</i>	9

2. How would you rate the following when it comes to your GP surgery?						
	Easy	Fairly Easy	Fairly Difficult	Almost Impossible	N/A	Response Count
Making a same-day appointment	21.0% (44)	37.6% (79)	22.9% (48)	14.3% (30)	4.3% (9)	210
Making an appointment in advance	51.5% (105)	33.3% (68)	10.3% (21)	3.4% (7)	1.5% (3)	204
Making an appointment outside of traditional hours (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm)	11.1% (23)	23.6% (49)	8.2% (17)	13.5% (28)	43.8% (91)	208
	If you have any comments, please write them here					94
					<i>answered question</i>	211
					<i>skipped question</i>	1

3. How would you describe the staff at your GP surgery? Please tick all that apply.

	Response Percent	Response Count
Helpful 	76.6%	160
Polite 	72.2%	151
Friendly 	68.9%	144
Knowledgable 	35.9%	75
Unhelpful 	1.4%	3
Impolite 	1.4%	3
Unfriendly 	2.4%	5
It varies 	21.1%	44
Other (please specify)		33
answered question		209
skipped question		3

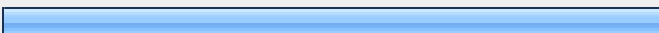


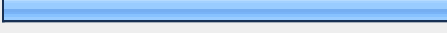
4. Have you made a complaint about your GP surgery in the past 12 months, either directly or through a patient support service such as PALS or ICAS?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes 	2.9%	6
No 	97.1%	201
If 'yes' please describe the incident here		7
answered question		207
skipped question		5

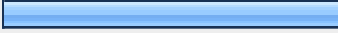

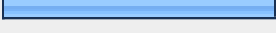
5. If you have any other comments about accessing your GP and appointments, please describe them here. (E.g. transport issues, language barriers, physical access)

	Response Count
	66
<i>answered question</i>	66
<i>skipped question</i>	146

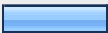
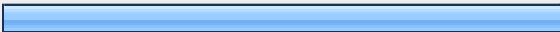
6. If you are happy to talk to us in more detail about this subject, please provide your contact details.

	Response Percent	Response Count
Name 	100.0%	111
Address 	76.6%	85
Email address 	12.6%	14
Telephone Number 	67.6%	75
<i>answered question</i>		111
<i>skipped question</i>		101

7. Are you a LINK member?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes 	50.7%	74
No, but I would like to be 	8.2%	12
No 	41.1%	60
<i>answered question</i>		146
<i>skipped question</i>		66


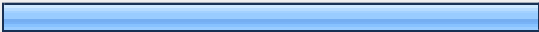
8. Monitoring Information. Are you:

	Response Percent	Response Count
Male 	15.4%	4
Female 	84.6%	22
<i>answered question</i>		26
<i>skipped question</i>		186

9. How would you describe your ethnic background?

	Response Count
	23
<i>answered question</i>	23
<i>skipped question</i>	189

10. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes 	18.5%	5
No 	81.5%	22
<i>answered question</i>		27
<i>skipped question</i>		185

RECEIVED 04 OCT 2010

BEAUMONT PARK MEDICAL GROUP

HEPSCOTT DRIVE
WHITLEY BAY
NE25 9XJ
Tel 0191 2514548

45a MARINE AVENUE
WHITLEY BAY
NE26 1LZ
Tel 0191 2530321

Johanne Mears
North Tyneside LINK
North Tyneside Voluntary Organisations
Development Agency
The Shiremoor Centre
Earsdon Road
Shiremoor
NE27 0HJ

29 Sep 2010

Dear Johanne,

Thank you for your call on Tuesday and the follow up e-mail. My apologies you did not receive a reply to the letter sent out in July.

As a public facing service we welcome comments from our patients and other interested parties and strive to make improvements where shortfalls have been identified.

With regards to the comments raised by our patients and the difficulty they have in booking appointments, we have recently restructured our appointment system to free up additional appointments for "on the day" appointments. We believe that this has improved the situation for our patients but we will continue to evaluate the services we are offering to ensure that we are making the best use of the resources we have available.

We look forward to seeing a final copy of the report and we would welcome further feedback from your organisation.

Yours sincerely



Paul Ellison MBE MInstLM MCMI
Strategic Manager

WIDEOPEN MEDICAL CENTRE

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2 August 2010

Private and Confidential

Ms H Claydon
Development Worker
North Tyneside Local Involvement Network
The Shiremoor Centre
Earsdon Road
Shiremoor
NE27 0HJ

Dear Ms Claydon,

Re: Patient Access Survey

Thank you for your letter of 27 July 2010 following a recent survey regarding access to GPs. It is very unfortunate that Wideopen Medical Centre has been identified following less favourable feedback from patients.

Gauging patient perceptions with the day-to-day task of offering a patient responsive service can at times be a difficult aspect in primary care. The practice is always looking at ways to improve and based on previous surveys we have introduced internet appointments to help ease the access to appointments. Furthermore, the practice recently enhanced access to GP services such as online prescriptions.

More recently the practice introduced a Did Not Attend policy to deal with the number of wasted appointments by patients who DNA. The objective is to reduce the number of DNAs – this in turn will free-up appointments for patients requesting same day appointments. Whilst there is no ideal solution, we believe we have made some changes to help with GP access albeit relatively small, however if we can reduce the number of DNAs it will ultimately help with GP appointments.

The practice has been established for many years and apart from the recent retirement of our Senior Partner in December there has been no GP changes; therefore I am unable to clarify the point made about Doctors change quite a bit.

I think it is fair to say that public services have an ever increasing task of offering a safe, reliable and efficient service. Patient choice is at the forefront of the coalition government and general practice is trying to achieve access to primary care within its existing staff infrastructure. I am sure many practices would agree that it is always work in progress.

I have enlisted the help of Mrs Christa Thompson, Patient Experience Manager at NHS North of Tyne regarding customer service training for the reception staff following our own customer satisfaction questionnaire. We are hoping to deliver bespoke training to our reception team to help overcome general admin errors, that from time-to-time we all experience at some point.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S L Fox', written in a cursive style.

Mrs Sharon L Fox
Practice Manager

MARINE AVENUE MEDICAL CENTRE

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Dr Brian W Critchlow, MB, BS, MRCS, LRCP
Dr Clare W Robson, MB, BS, MRCP, Dip. Obst., ROCCG
Dr Karen J Buchanan, MB, BS, MRCGP, DRCOG
Dr Richard F Scott, MB BS, MRCS, MRCGP

RECEIVED 17 AUG 2010

Hannah Claydon
LINK Development Worker
North Tyneside Local Involvement Network
The Shiremoor Centre
Earsdon Road
Shiremoor
NE27 0HJ

11th August 2010

Dear Hannah

Thank you for your letter dated 27th July regarding feedback given in the LINK report on Access to GP Surgeries.

As you acknowledge, the feedback was given from a very small representation of the population of North Tyneside, however we always welcome constructive feedback as it gives us the opportunity to assess how the Surgery is operating.

With regards to each of the points raised, I have responded to each of them individually below:-

1. *Don't always get to see preferred GP.*

We do endeavour to book patients in with their preferred GP wherever possible, however there are limitations such as when a GP works part time hours which do not suit an individual patient, holidays etc.

2. *The most popular GP is difficult to get an appointment with.*

The recent Patient Survey showed that 75% of our patients would prefer to see one particular GP. The GP concerned has been practicing the greatest number of years and has therefore had contact with nearly all of the patients. This particular GP works full time, starting surgeries at 8.30am and last appointments at 6.30pm. She has even worked the occasional Saturday. It would be physically impossible for her to work any more hours. However, also in the recent Patient Survey the responses given for whether or not they were able to get an appointment with their preferred GP, showed that three quarters were able to get an appointment either "Always/Almost Always" (51%) or "A lot of the time" (22%).

3. *One GP resorts to prescriptions immediately.*

I will be raising this with the GPs' at the next Partners' meeting so that they can discuss it further.

4. *Receptionist did patient screening and made mistakes.*

It is not possible to assess this without knowing the full details behind this comment. However, our reception staff do not triage patients. They do sometimes make enquiries to ascertain if the patient can be helped by a telephone call, if they are able to come to the surgery, or if they would be more in need of a visit. This is to enable the patient to receive the most appropriate contact with the GP whilst also ensuring that the GPs can maximise their patient contact.

5. *Wrongly diagnosed – had to see 3 doctors.*

Again this is not possible to investigate fully without knowing the details of the individual case.

6. *Difficult to get doctors letters, even when plenty of notice given.*

The GPs do try to deal with any requests for letters as quickly as possible but their time in the working day can be limited due to the surgeries & home visits. We are currently in the process of becoming a training practice but we will not start to have registrars until next August. Provided our patients will be willing to accept appointments with registrars, this should enable the Partners to give more time to matters outside of their remit.

I hope that this helps answer the remarks put forward but if you would like to discuss any of the issues further, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Sylvia McKeag-Smith
Practice Manager

RECEIVED 24 AUG 2010

Nelson Medical Group

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Dr. A. Rabet
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By Appointment Only

www.nelsonmedicalgroup.co.uk

23 August 2010

Hannah Claydon
Development Worker
North Tyneside Local Involvement Network
The Shiremoor Centre
Earsdon Road
Shiremoor
NE27 0HJ

Dear Ms. Claydon

LINK Report: Access to GP Surgeries – Nelson Medical Group

Thank you for your letter highlighting some areas where it appears our service has not been of its usual high standard.

I would like to reassure you that all members of Nelson Medical Group are committed to providing the highest possible standards of care to all of our patients. However we do appreciate that unfortunately at times things can go wrong and this gives us an opportunity to view our services from the patient's perspective.

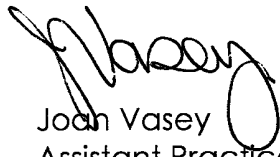
We are very surprised by these comments as we consistently performed above average in our GP Patient Survey which is a large and detailed survey.

- ✓ 77% responded Yes they were able to see Doctor on the same day or next 2 days the surgery was open.
- ✓ 94% responded they found our receptionists helpful.
- ✓ 80% responded they were Very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the surgery opening hours.
- ✓ 71% responded they either 'Always or almost always' or A lot of the time' saw their preferred doctor.

- ✓ 49% responded they found it easy to get test results on the phone – this compares with the national average of 35%.

As always we will look at the service we provide and be aware of any improvements we can make, these concerns will be discussed at our next Practice Meeting which is attended by all member of the Practice.

Yours faithfully



Joan Vasey
Assistant Practice Manager

c.c. Peter Berry
Head of Primary Care

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24 August 2010

Johanne Mears
North Tyneside LINK
The Shiremoor Centre
Earsdon Road
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NE27 0HJ

Dear Johanne

Thank you for sending us the copy of the report on the survey carried out by the LINK in May and June about access to GPs in North Tyneside.

We were pleased to see that the majority of feedback was positive from those people who responded.

We note the LINK's comment about the size of the sample. You will be aware that there is a national GP access survey that has been carried out this year which surveys a sample of patients in each practice quarterly. The results are given for each practice, by primary care organisation and by regional area to allow comparisons between services to be made across the country.

The national GP Access survey results for the practices that are identified in your report for the year 2009 -10 are set out below.

Surveys in themselves can provide a statistically significant sample (that is, if you were to ask more people in the practice the same questions, the same number of people would have similar views). The national survey allows us to do this, but does not give a sense of individual comments or perception in the community, so we were interested to receive the results of the LINK survey to add to what we know.

In our comments about the LINK survey, we have looked at the national and the LINK report and these are set out below (the responses to the national surveys for the practices you mention are attached). All the practices will be aware of their national survey results.

1. Appointment systems (telephoning for an appointment)

Practices are expected to have systems in place to ensure that those patients who need a same day appointment are able to contact the practice and book a timely appointment to meet their need. We agree that asking patients to contact surgeries at specific times and not being able to get through on the phone is problematic and can be frustrating for patients. We have checked the national survey results in this respect.

Getting through on the phone – in three of the four practices you mention, the practices are equal or are above the national average for ease of getting through by telephone.

2. Making appointments at times that suit them and with their preferred GP

Getting appointment times – three of the four practices you mention exceed the national average for patients able to book ahead for appointments (note that the practice that is below the national average is not the same as where patients have reported difficulties getting through on the phone).

There are results on the national survey which suggest that three of the four practices perform worse than the PCT average with regard to patient satisfaction with being able to get an appointment quickly. Arguably, these figures are on smaller numbers and not 'statistically significant', however we agree that this is an important message from patients. The LINK survey also reflects patient concerns about this. Where a practice is significantly (statistically) below the national average in any of these areas we would normally contact them about their plans to improve the service, as part of our normal contract monitoring process. We will be copying our letter to them, although no doubt they will make further comments to you directly about this.

Seeing a preferred GP – three of the four practices are on or above the national average for booking an appointment with a preferred doctor.

Extended hours – only one practice out of the four does not offer this service. As you know, GPs are independent contractors and although we encourage and make financial incentives available to practices for them to offer extended hours to their patients, it is their choice not to do so.

Although patients are not able to use this service at their own practice, they do have access to the Battle Hill Health Centre should they need to see a GP urgently. This service runs 7 days a week between the hours of 8 am and 8 pm and has been widely advertised in the local press and local information. We would be interested in your views about promoting this further.

3. Staff attitudes towards patients accessing the GP

The national survey shows that generally staff are thought to be helpful. In the case of the four practices you mention, three out of the four practices are above the national average in this respect. We have noted that patient satisfaction rates are generally very strong for this measure in the national survey.

We will of course be copying our response to the practices for their comments about possible service improvements.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Chapman', written in a cursive style.

Rachel Chapman
Director of public engagement and communications

National GP Access survey results 2009-2010

	Beaumont Park	Nelson	Marine Avenue	Wideopen	North Tyneside PCT	National average
Total responses (n)	263	353	389	393	7,825	-
Offers extended hours	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	-	-
% Easy access by phone	86	74	77	76	76	68
% Able to see a doctor quickly*	84	77	66	67	82	80
% Able to see a preferred GP	64	68	75	62	63	62
% Able to book ahead	83	85	77	51	75	71
% Reception staff helpful	96	94	95	89	93	93
% Recommend practice to others	67	54	69	43	67	62

A full breakdown of these results are available from the GP Access survey website <http://results.gp-patient.co.uk/report/main.aspx>