

# healthwatch

Middlesbrough



## Report on Findings from the Healthwatch Independent Survey on Access to GP Services in Middlesbrough

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# 1. Background

## 1.1 What is Healthwatch?

Local Healthwatches such as Healthwatch Middlesbrough have been set up across England to create a strong, independent consumer champion. Healthwatch aims to:



- Strengthen the collective voice of citizens and communities in influencing local health and social care services in order to better meet their needs
- Enable people to find the right health and social care services for them by providing appropriate information, advice and signposting.

Healthwatch Middlesbrough works with local people, patients, service users, carers, community groups, organisations, service providers and commissioners to get the best out of local 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 Middlesbrough.

## 1.2 What is a General Practitioner (GP)?



General practice is an essential part of medical care throughout the world. General practitioners (GPs) are also the first point of contact for most patients. The majority of the work is carried out during consultations in the surgery and during home visits.

GPs provide a complete spectrum of care within the local community: dealing with problems that often combine physical, psychological and social components. They increasingly work in teams with other professions, helping patients to take responsibility for their own health.

General practitioners work in primary care and are part of a Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) which have responsibility for purchasing healthcare from secondary healthcare providers, such as acute/hospital and community/mental health trusts and the independent and voluntary sector.

## 2. Aim of the Report

### 2.1. Background and Rationale

The aim of this investigation was to look at the public's experience in accessing GP appointments. Intelligence was received through its engagement activities and Information & Signposting service indicating that some residents of Middlesbrough were having difficulty making GP appointments. Several groups independently contacted Healthwatch Middlesbrough requesting that we look into this further. This information was reported to Healthwatch Middlesbrough Executive Board who determined that an initial exploratory piece of work be carried out to establish:-

- If this was a wider problem for members of the public
- If additional work or investigation was needed
- If any recommendations could be made

It is envisaged that this information will be shared with the Overview and Scrutiny, NHS England and NHS South Tees Clinical Commissioning Group.

## 3. Methodology

Healthwatch used a mixed method approach to ensure a good overview of the public perception of their experience when making an appointment to see a GP. The survey was conducted over the period of January to March 2015.

A Survey Monkey questionnaire was distributed via our website, Facebook, Twitter, Teesside University Staff.

The survey web-link was emailed to all of Healthwatch Middlesbrough 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:-

- Teesside University staff members
- Breckon Hill Community Centre
- Life Store Middlesbrough
- Straightforward (FGM)
- Refugee Ladies Group Newport Settlement
- Regional Refugee Forum

## 4. Findings

4.1 A total of 204 surveys were completed of which 50 were completed via the web-link and 154 filled in manually. All responses were collated via survey monkey in order that they could be analysed.

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. It must be noted that the information gathered was a snapshot and not intended to be a full in-depth study of the subject.

Questions asked included:

When did you last see or speak to GP/surgery? Almost 62% of those who completed the survey had been in touch with their surgery within the last 3 months.

Answered 202 - Skipped 2

Answer choices	Responses	Actual numbers
In last 3 months	61.88%	125
3-6 months	18.81%	38
6-12 months	9.41%	19
More than 12 months	9.90%	20
Total		202

4.2 79.41% of people who responded normally made appointments via the telephone. Over 55% of those people responding to the question stated that they found it difficult to make an appointment to see their GP.

Reasons given for this were:

*“because the phone is so busy and when you get through full”*

*“have to ring at 8am - not got through till 8.20am - no appointments left - asked to ring back next day - wouldn't give me appointment for later in week for following week.”*

*“The system doesn't always work for people who work a distance from Home. Having to wait at home to make a call at 8.00am to find you cannot have an*

*appointment or risking going to work, calling the surgery and getting an app and having to drive back home!”*

*“No credit on phone so walked to the surgery and was told to go home and ring”*

When we asked people if you were not able to get an appointment, or the appointment you were offered was not convenient. What would you do on? Almost one third stated that they would go to a walk in clinic instead.

Other comments received include:

*“Do all GP's only treat one illness at a time? I am 89 and live alone with no close relatives (all abroad) I have to use taxis at £10 a time to visit DR or hospital. It would cost my £10 ph to hire a companion. If I could have a monthly visit from a medical professional it would save the practice and myself a lot of time”*



## 5. Summary

The survey shows that of those who responded 55.33% found it easy to make an appointment and had a good experience of doing so, 44.67% did not.

The main reasons given for the poor experience were:

- Having to ring the same day to make an appointment is very difficult for working people.
- Phone lines being constantly busy.
- No appointments available when people do get through to the surgery.

## 6. Recommendations

Although the survey shows that of those who responded 55.33% found it easy to make an appointment and had a good experience of doing so, 44.67% did not. Therefore Healthwatch Middlesbrough recommend the following:-

**6.1** Individual GP practices are surveyed to highlight if any difficulties in making an appointment are specific to any individual practices. As this is a general report Healthwatch has taken the decision not to name individual surgeries in this document.

**6.2** Those practices who are performing higher in patient experience in this area share good practice. Healthwatch recommend that the possibility of this being discussed at one of the area “Time Out” sessions be looked into.

**6.3** Providers of GP services explore ways to improve the appointment system to make it more convenient for working people. Perhaps looking at the possibility of “saving” some appointments for face to face appointments, appointments via email and appointments for future dates.

**6.4.** The public have a greater understanding and awareness of the appointment system and availability 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 practice nurse may alleviate the pressures on GP appointment availability. Maybe this could be publicised via the TV Information System, leaflets or posters in the surgery. Alternatively perhaps surgery reception staff could offer alternatives when a patient rings for an appointment.

## Access to GP Services Middlesbrough - summary of 204 results

## Q1. When did you last see or speak to GP/surgery?

Answered 202 - Skipped 2

Answer choices	Responses	Answered
In last 3 months	61.88%	125
3-6 months	18.81%	38
6-12 months	9.41%	19
More than 12 months	9.90%	20
<b>Total</b>		<b>202</b>

## Q2. How do you normally book your appointments at your surgery?

Answered 204 - Skipped 0

Answer choices	Responses	Answered
In person	14.71%	30
By phone	79.41%	162
Online	3.92%	8
Other	1.96%	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>204</b>

## Q3. Do you find it easy to make an appointment?

Answered 197 - Skipped 7

Answer choices	Responses	Answered
Yes	55.33%	109
No	44.67%	88
<b>Totals</b>		<b>197</b>

## Q4. If no, why?

## 89 Responses

- You have to wait weeks for an appointment
- Because the phone is so busy and when you get through full
- Because of long waiting list
- Sometimes I don't have credit on my phone. I couldn't call on day I was asked to go a ring otherwise I will be broke the following week
- We need to talk by phone about the illness. Some GP speak with me by phone.
- Difficult to get an apt around my time
- Depends on availability



- Yes if made in person but no if made by phone. Wait a while (quite a while) to speak to someone
- Sometimes yes & no
- Awkward to see Dr
- Very few appointments to pre book
- Always busy if you ask them to come out then you get an appointment
- Have to wait a long time
- A nightmare to get through and when you do they are fully booked
- Can't get through on phone, when do no appointments available
- Have to ring at 8am - not got through till 8.20am - no appointments left - asked to ring back next day - wouldn't give me appointment for later in week for following week.
- Usually engaged signal. You have to ring and wait for a call back from Doctor or Nurse. If you want a certain Doctor, some of them only work part time.
- Never appointments
- Never any appointments
- When ring to ask for appointment say they have all been taken
- They say to call 5.00 there is no appointments left
- Always say gone
- I first walk in and I was asked to go and book by phone or I went and booked after 3days
- No appointment
- You phone at 8.30 and phone always engaged the time you get through there are no appointments
- Waiting times, only phone apt available, slow pick up of call
- Have to phone at 8 or too late
- No, lines are constantly busy when you get through appointments are gone
- Not with the right GP
- Sometime they don't have when I want
- Constantly engage no appointment available
- Busy doctor
- Always say fully booked
- Ring and speak to receptionist then a doctor rings you and says whether or not you need an apt or just a prescription
- Can't get through to get appointment
- Can't get through to explain. The receptionists think they are Dr's
- Don't have times available to fit with work. Have to wait for surgery to call you back.
- Lack of suitable appointments. Did not need an emergency appointment. None available early or late.
- Not easy by phone sometimes have to go in
- Not always
- Always gone
- Have to wait over a week for appointment
- Long waiting time
- Ring early to book all gone (systems)

- Always busy
- Sort of
- Long waiting time for appointment unless emergency
- Time with work
- Can't get appointment
- All appointments gone by time you get through
- Long waiting times cannot book more than a week in advance
- Trying to get an answer before 8.30
- Part time GP's ring on certain days for certain days
- The doctor I prefer to see is normally booked up for at least 2 weeks
- Coulby Newham Medical Practice-getting through on phone the receptionist decides if you can have an appointment
- Cannot get past the receptionist to make an appointment
- Always fully booked
- Cannot get through on the phone to make an appointment-Dr Nath Morrison's
- I belong to Endeavour surgery and it is always busy on the phone and then appointments are full
- Can't get through and then all appointments gone when you get through
- They say phone before 8am but when you do there are no appointments
- Asked to phone before 8am, I phone at 8 they don't answer until 8.15 then all appointments are gone
- Difficult to get a same day appointment if you are ill. Pre-bookable appointments are available, but that needs to be a week or a month in advance. You need to ring in at 8.00am to try to make a same day appointment, if none available, you have to ring again at 8.00am the next day.
- Never any appointments, told to ring at 8 o' clock in the morning.
- Never have any appointments available!!
- You have to make appointment for evening slots, you can only book an appointment from 9am that day. You call at 9am and can never get an appointment. So end up having to take time off work to go morning time when you can just turn up between 9 and 10
- Phone lines are usually blocked from 8:30 am till 9:00 am by which time all appointments are often gone
- Cannot make one without calling at 8.30am on a morning or online takes 3 weeks.
- Because there is never any left even when you phone at 8 30.
- Have to speak to receptionist if luck enough to get through
- By the time you get through to the receptionist all the appointments have gone
- Ring up at half 8 in the morning to be told all appointments are gone for that date, this happens every time I try and get an appointment. Otherwise, I have over a 2-3 weeks wait to book an appointment.
- Couldn't get through on the phone it was constantly ringing out for 45 minutes
- Phone line always engaged

- Long wait before phone is answered and if they have an appointment for that day
- I have Autism. The surgery is always busy and no appointments are available
- My time u get though on phone they all gone.
- It's very difficult to get through in the first place. Then you are told the Dr will ring you back. Then you are given an appointment to see the Nurse.
- As you have to phone on a morning - and it is difficult to get through and when you do all the appointments are gone - very stressful when unwell
- Have to phone at 8:30. I am at work at this time so difficult to make a call
- Rude Behaviour of Receptionist in the surgery Telling lies every time
- I had to ring at 8:30 on the day to get an appointment, and as everyone else is also calling at that time you can never get through, then when you do all the appointments have gone. You then have to ring back at 11:30 for an afternoon appointment, and if it is a minute before, they will refuse to give you an appointment, then as before you ring again and the line is busy. There is no wonder people attend A&E unnecessarily.
- I spend 15 min on the line trying to get a receptionist because all the lines are busy, it's like a cattle market. I manage to call reception and ask for an appointment, then I have to wait for a GP to call me back which can be up to 30 min. I then have to inform work about my plans for that day and that the appointment may be in the middle of the day. After getting the call back I then have to spend 10-15 min on the phone explaining what the problem is, by this time it's well after 9am, then I get an appointment, only if the need is big enough, which I then have to re arrange my day and plan around this, which is fine. I then go to the surgery wait 30 min see the GP explain it all again or am handed a script with the least bit of consultation and sent on my not so merry ways.....it is the most impersonal insincere and poor experience I have had with my GP. I know and appreciate they are busy however respect and conversations are free, or do they want paying for this as well....
- You phone can't get through then their full when you do or go online and he's half day not working or full
- You need to phone at 8am. If you work this is normally the time you are commuting to work and by the time you ring at half past eight there is never an appointment available and you are advised to ring back tomorrow as early as possible.
- Appointments for a few days in advance can't be made, they have to be made on the day and appointments are taken quickly.
- The line is constantly engaged on a good day it can take over 1 1/2 hours to contact the surgery
- Can never get any appointments that day, usually several days later. Very unhelpful receptionist who consistently puts me on hold.
- The system doesn't always work for people who work a distance from Home. Having to wait at home to make a call at 8.00am to find you cannot have an appointment or risking going to work, calling the surgery and getting an app and having to drive back home!

**Q5. How convenient was the appointment you were able to get?**

**Answered 198 - Skipped 6**

<b>Answer choices</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Answered</b>
Very convenient	34.85%	69
Fairly	42.93%	85
Not very	14.14%	28
Not at all	8.08%	16
<b>Total</b>		<b>198</b>

**Q6. 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?**

**Answered 196 - Skipped 8**

<b>Answer choices</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Answered</b>
Go to the apt offered	23.98%	47
Go to an apt for a different day	27.04%	53
Have a consultation on the phone	8.67%	17
Go to A & E	1.53%	3
Go to a Walk in Centre	32.65%	64
Go to a pharmacist	8.67%	17
Contact the surgery at a different time	10.20%	20
Do not speak to anyone or see anyone	6.12%	12
Other	8.16%	16
<b>Totals</b>		<b>196</b>

**Q7. In general, how would you describe your experience of making an appointment?**

**Answered 201 - Skipped 3**

<b>Answer choices</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Answered</b>
Excellent	10.45%	21
Very good	18.41%	37
Good	26.37%	53
Fair	17.91%	36
Poor	17.91%	36
Very poor	8.96%	18
<b>Total</b>		<b>201</b>

**Q8. How long do you usually have to wait at the practice for your consultation to begin?**

**Answered 200 Skipped 4**

<b>Answer choices</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Answered</b>
5 mins or less	13.00%	26
6-10 mins	34.50%	69
11-20 mins	29.50%	59
21-30 mins	15.00%	30
30 mins or more	8.00%	16
<b>Totals</b>		<b>200</b>

**Q9. How do you rate this wait?**

**Answered 201 - Skipped 3**

<b>Answer choices</b>		<b>Answered</b>
Excellent	9.95%	20
Very good	14.43%	29
Good	32.34%	65
Fair	19.90%	40
Poor	14.93%	30
Very poor	8.46%	17
<b>Total</b>		<b>201</b>