

Feedback about GP Practices in Suffolk
An update for the Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee

Introduction

- 1.1 As part of arrangements for intelligence sharing, Healthwatch Suffolk devised an information paper as a briefing for the Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee to receive at its meeting on 20th January 2015 in respect of the counties GP practices.
- 1.2 Following discussions at the meeting, the Committee has asked Healthwatch Suffolk to produce an update on any intelligence received following the publication of the initial briefing, which is available from <http://www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/our-reports>.
- 1.3 This update is intended as a supplement to the previous briefing. The data reported concerns all feedback logged onto the Healthwatch Suffolk Service User Feedback database between January and March 2015.
- 1.4 The initial briefing paper sought to consolidate intelligence held (e.g. service user commentary) and work completed by Healthwatch Suffolk concerning the provision and delivery of GP services in Suffolk.
- 1.5 It is important to note that the paper did not draw upon sources of intelligence and data that are external to Healthwatch Suffolk. It did not claim to be a complete assessment of the state of GP services in Suffolk. Statistical assurance was not given that the data and themes presented were a true representation of public opinion regarding the services.

Updated themes and figures

- 2.1 To date, a total of 6,379 individual records have been logged onto the Healthwatch Suffolk information database.
- 2.2 Of those, 2,861 (45%) are attributed to the service type “Primary Care Service, GP Surgery/Health Centre”. It is important to note that some comments may have been duplicated in order to recode them to other services or topics.
- 2.3 An additional 295 comments have been added to the database since the publication of the last briefing at the end of January 2015 (an average of around six per day).

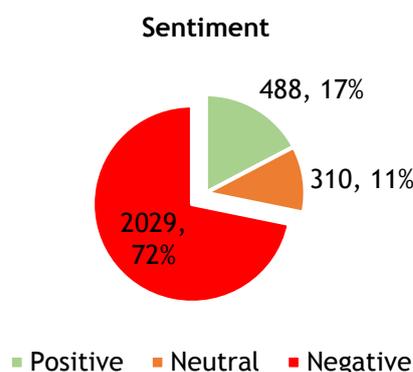


Figure 1: Sentiment of all comments including those extracted from our targeted project in Haverhill.

- 2.4 The pie chart above indicates that comments recorded onto the Healthwatch Suffolk database about GP practices in the county remain predominantly negative in sentiment although, as described previously, it is important to note that “sentiment” should be considered subjective. It is entirely possible that any given individual may interpret the same comment in differing ways.
- 2.5 Healthwatch Suffolk has taken steps to ensure that individual differences in data interpretation are kept to a minimum where possible.

Ongoing Healthwatch Suffolk GP Survey

- 2.6 Since mid-October 2014, Healthwatch Suffolk has been obtaining views on GP practices across the county by promoting responses to a short survey.
- 2.7 In total 604 people have responded from across the county. 182 additional responses have been received since 17th December 2014. All comments from the survey are included within the analysis below.
- 2.8 Healthwatch Suffolk is pleased to report that high levels of positivity remain evident in the survey from patients about the overall service provided by practices. Out of 604 survey respondents, 486 (82%) said that they were happy with the overall service provided by their GP Surgery. 95 (16%) respondents were not.

Themes (January - March 2015)

- 2.9 In the previous briefing the following trends were reported (please see full briefing for details):
- Booking and waiting for appointments
 - Local economy and accessing services
 - Opening times
 - Continuity of care
 - Patient triage
 - Staffing
- 2.10 Since 1st January 2015, a total of 248 comments have been recorded onto the database. Themes include:
- Booking and waiting (55 comments - 845 in total on Healthwatch Suffolk database)
 - Care continuity (11 comments - 62 in total on Healthwatch Suffolk database))
 - General comments (17 comments - 194 in total on Healthwatch Suffolk database)
 - Opening times (8 comments - 157 in total on Healthwatch Suffolk database)
 - Quality (38 comments - 274 in total on Healthwatch Suffolk database)
 - Staffing (28 comments - 890 in total on Healthwatch Suffolk database)
 - Telephone (14 comments - 41 in total on Healthwatch Suffolk database).

- 2.11 The remaining 77 comments submitted January - March 2015 relate to various other coding options including “choice” and “environment” but not in sufficient numbers to warrant a trend.

Booking and waiting

- 2.12 In the previous briefing, Healthwatch Suffolk concluded that first contact with the practice is a key issue. This conclusion was drawn on the basis of negative comments attributed to codes concerning booking and waiting for appointments on the database. Indeed 845 comments have been attributed to “waiting” and “booking”, 640 of which are negative in sentiment.
- 2.13 In our ongoing GP survey, 208 (35%) individuals have told us that they were not confident they could get an appointment at their GP surgery when they need one. 360 (60%) respondents said that they could and 28 respondents said that they did not know.
- 2.14 347 (58%) told us that they either strongly agree or agree with the statement “When booking an appointment to see a GP, I feel like I am able to see a doctor as quickly as I would like to.” 158 (27%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- 2.15 Since 1st January 2015, 55 comments have been attributed to the “waiting” and “booking” codes. 43 (78%) of those comments have been identified as negative and six (11%) as positive in sentiment. Examples of positive comments include:

“I really like being able to turn up at the surgery and know that I will be seen by the doctor if I wait. I recently had a problem on my hands so went down, waited a short time to be seen and was given cream. So I didn’t have to go back another day I was also able to have my blood test done as well.”

“Can usually get an appointment on the day for myself and children. Very good at getting my young children seen quickly. Usually get in with our own doctor but have sometimes had to see duty doctor, although this was our choice rather than waiting to see our own doctor later on in the week.”

“Appointments are always available, usually same or next day, not next week as happened at our previous surgery.”

- 2.17 Examples of negative comments include:

“I recently moved to xxxx from Norfolk where I was happy with my GP service. I have discovered that it is very difficult to make an appointment with the xxxx, many bad reviews online. So I am still travelling to xxxx to my old surgery which is excellent - phones are answered by a human being!!”

“I arrived at 7.45 outside the doctors, freezing cold with about nine other people in the queue. The staff were inside but did not unlock the door until 8am. The elderly lady in the queue felt unwell having to wait in the cold. If only they could let us in the building into the warm. Trying to get through on the phone for an

appointment is very difficult so queuing is the better way to get an appointment on day.”

“I have been registered with this surgery for three years and have tried to make appointments on 4 different occasions and have not been able to see a doctor yet. The last time I had to go in person because they never answer the phone and was told to try again in six weeks. I think the lack of help is unacceptable and my only option is to try and change my doctor.”

Continuity of care

- 2.18 In the previous briefing, a theme of note was “continuity of care” and comments logged since 1st January 2015 serve to strengthen this theme. In total 11 comments have been recorded against this theme within this period.
- 2.19 For the most part, issues associated with continuity of care correlate with a desire to see the same doctor on each contact. Ten out of the 11 comments are negative in sentiment. Examples include:

“See my own doctor within a week of asking for an appt. Having been through a patch of ill health and chemo, I found it difficult to face different Drs. who did not know my history and obviously had not had time to read up notes. Fell personal care very important especially for older patients with ongoing treatment”

“I have now lived in xxx for 3 years. During this time I have had 5 different named doctors (2 of which I never met)”

“I would like to be able to see my own doctor”

General comments

- 2.20 A total of 17 comments have been coded as “general comments”. These are largely positive (12, 71%) in sentiment, noting that the person concerned would not change or improve anything about their local practice. Examples include:

“Always been there for me.”

“I’m pleased with it the way it is.”

Opening times

- 2.21 As reported in our previous briefing, one of the barriers to access concerns practice opening times which had 120 comments attributed to the theme. A total of eight additional comments have been coded as related to “opening times” since 1st January 2015. Seven of the comments are negative in sentiment. Examples include:

“Saturday opening would be beneficial to people who work full time”

“To open on a Saturday morning would be good”

Quality

- 2.22 The theme of “quality” has 38 comments attributed to it. Such comments may relate to many issues where patients have offered a perception about the quality of the service offered. 12 of the comments are negative in sentiment and 20 are positive in sentiment. Examples include:

“Telephoned for support with pain in left hand and numbness in fingers, doctor diagnosed problem being in nerves in spine. Medication prescribed. No appt. offered, all diagnosed & prescribed over the phone. Patient concerned not thorough enough.”

“I have been to the surgery a number of times since my daughter was new born. The doctor we see never seems to be particularly thorough and never seems too interested. The doctor once saw my daughter (then 7 months old) in the morning and said her chest sounded perfectly fine - 8 hours later she was in hospital being kept in for a week with bronchiolitis. This exact same thing happened 4 weeks later... You do not expect this blasé service with a baby!!! It was a different doctor the second time. We have since changed surgery. When I called reception to request my daughter's doctors notes (as entitled) I was rudely questioned to why I wanted them!”

“xxxx informative, helpful, understanding, and flexible. Reception staff are particularly good especially as we have family circumstances that need taking into consideration. They are very accommodating and polite on the phone.”

Staffing

- 2.23 From responses provided in our ongoing GP survey across the county, it is pleasing to report that it is clear many people are happy with the manner in which they are treated by practice staff.
- 2.24 494 (83%) individuals in our ongoing GP Survey consider that staff (receptionists, practice nurses and GPs) have “always” or “often” treated them with compassion, kindness, dignity and respect. 13 (2%) answered “rarely” or “never”. 89 (15%) respondents answered “sometimes”.
- 2.25 Since 1st January 2015, a total of 28 comments have been recorded against codes associated with practice staffing and most concern staff attitude. Seven of the comments are positive and 12 of the comments are negative. Nine comments are neutral in sentiment. Examples include:

“Nurses brilliant, named GP, treat people as individuals”

“Attentive GP who showed they cared and allowed time to talk and explain.”

2.26 Examples of negative comments include:

“Reception staff extremely rude and seem under pressure to turn people away, upon being lucky enough to get through you are asked 'is it urgent' and are pushed for details of problem, if it was really urgent I would go to A&E, and it's not something that can wait 3 weeks as they suggest!”

“I had problems with doctor's receptionists being uncaring”

“Reception staff are very efficient but not much evidence of compassion”

Telephone

2.27 14 comments are associated with patient experiences of contact with their local practice by telephone. Ten of the comments are negative in sentiment. Generally, the comments relate to problems with getting through to practices to book an appointment. Examples include:

“This is the worst doctors I have ever had to use in my life. It is impossible to get through when you call. I have been trying to get an appointment this morning and have so far called 91 times to just hear the engaged tone...”

“Being able to get through on the phone. It is easier to queue up outside to get an appointment.”

Summary

- 3.1 It is important to acknowledge that this paper is intended as a summary of data recorded directly by Healthwatch Suffolk only. It is not a full or scientific assessment of the state of GP practices in Suffolk and does not account for other external sources of intelligence such as NHS Choices, the friends and family test or compliments and complaints recorded by the practices.
- 3.2 This update is intended as a supplement to the previous briefing. The data reported concerns all feedback logged onto the Healthwatch Suffolk Service User Feedback database between January and March 2015.
- 3.3 Healthwatch Suffolk is investing in information systems that will enable it to obtain and analyse feedback from more sources. It is hoped that this will enable it to provide easy access to live data about the health of the counties services that will enable patients and service users to make informed choices about their care or the care for their friends and families.
- 3.4 It is considered that the Committee might assist Healthwatch Suffolk to encourage GP practices, local commissioners and other service providers to share patient experience comments and intelligence with Healthwatch Suffolk to ensure that it is able to consistently report holistically on services and provide a balanced view.

- 3.5 The Committee is asked to note the contents of this paper and use it to inform discussions as appropriate.