

Accessing Health and Social Care - The Public Opinion

Research undertaken across towns in Central Bedfordshire showing a summary of local resident's views and experiences of health and social care services in their area.

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Executive Summary

Introduction:

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) was set up to improve health and social care services for today and shape them for tomorrow. HWCB therefore need to work with the public to capture patient experience and build data that's accurate, useful and relevant to its partners, services, institutions and the community and voluntary sector.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's mission is to *'put the voice of local residents at the heart of health and social care and to play a vital role in gathering the views and understanding the experiences of patients and the public, and through this to influence the provision of high quality services across Central Bedfordshire'*.

Working towards its mission, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire commenced a research project to explore local resident's experience of access to health and social care services in their local area, using a snapshot survey. The survey specifically included resident's experience of access to Hospital, GP and social care services.

The outreach project 'Just Ask 2014', which enabled Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire to approach local residents to complete the survey, spanned an eight month period between March and October 2014. Over 800 local residents were spoken to during the outreach programme and 334 people completed the survey. The majority of participants were female and all participants resided, or accessed a health or social care service, in Central Bedfordshire. The age range of all participants spanned 14 – 95 years.

From the information and feedback received, HWCB were able to gain a better understanding of local residents' experience of service provision in their area; to identify areas of good practice and to highlight areas for improvement.

Background:

Central Bedfordshire has a population of 264,500 people¹ which is expected to increase to 287,300 by 2021. The county covers 716 square kilometres making it the 11th largest unitary council in England by area and one of the least densely populated².

The largest towns in Central Bedfordshire are Leighton-Linslade, Dunstable, Houghton Regis, Biggleswade, Flitwick and Sandy. Positioning of these towns and the lack of a General Hospital within Central Bedfordshire necessitates residents accessing various hospitals in neighbouring counties including Bedford Hospital in Bedford Borough, Milton Keynes Hospital in Buckinghamshire, Lister Hospital in Hertfordshire and Addenbrookes in Cambridgeshire.

¹ Central Bedfordshire Council Key Facts and Figures, Jan 2015, page 4
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/Images/Key%20Facts%20and%20Figures%20January%202015_tcm6-10164.pdf#False

² Central Bedfordshire Council Key Facts and Figures, Jan 2015, page 6
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/Images/Key%20Facts%20and%20Figures%20January%202015_tcm6-10164.pdf#False

The Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG) is responsible for planning, organising and buying NHS-funded healthcare for the 441,000 people who live in Bedfordshire. This includes 29 GP practices in Central Bedfordshire. All GP practices in Central Bedfordshire are members of the BCCG which is divided into four locality areas; Chiltern Vale, Leighton Buzzard, Ivel Valley and West Mid Bedfordshire.

Approximately 36,600 residents of Central Bedfordshire live with a health problem or disability that limits their day to day activities³. Being able to effectively access health and social care services is therefore very important to residents of Central Bedfordshire.

Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this research was to engage with residents of Central Bedfordshire to learn more about their experience of accessing health (GP and Hospital) and social care services in their local area. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire captured feedback on the services accessed and whether local residents viewed their experience as positive or negative.

Questions included the following:

- The methods used to make an appointment to see their GP and ease of method(s);
- Whether people feel listened to during their appointment with the GP or Consultant and if they feel able to make an informed choice regarding treatment;
- The length of time waiting to access secondary services and their experience(s) of the service;
- How social care services are accessed and experience of the service.

Method and Approach

For this research project we used a snapshot survey (detailed at Appendix 1) completed by local residents, primarily utilising the 'Just Ask' outreach programme. A qualitative approach was used, designed to identify key trends, as well as a quantitative element to establish the magnitude that any trends identified, were affecting local residents.

In addition, numerous surveys were completed via Survey Monkey, although the majority of surveys were completed during HWCB's outreach programme called 'Just Ask' 2014. The 'Just Ask' programme was conducted during an eight month period between March and October 2014 visiting different towns and villages in Central Bedfordshire. During the programme, HWCB staff and volunteers approached members of the public to ask if they would like to take part in the survey. Individuals were also prompted to give additional information about their experience of a health or social care service if applicable.

All data received through completion of the survey and conversations with local residents of Central Bedfordshire was recorded and analysed for the purpose of this report.

³ Central Bedfordshire Council Key Facts and Figures page 24
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/Images/Key%20Facts%20and%20Figures%20January%202015_tcm6-10164.pdf#False

Key Findings:

Access to GP Services

In general, the majority of local residents spoken to throughout the length of this research project were satisfied with the service they receive from their GP Practice; however there is room for improvement in many areas, particularly when accessing the service. Research into access to GP services was divided into three groups, as detailed below.

1. Booking an appointment:

The majority of people (65%) book an appointment to see their GP via the phone; this is slightly lower than the 88% reported in the NHS England GP Patient Survey 2015⁴. The majority of respondents who completed the survey cited frustration with the current booking system at their GP surgery, particularly when calling in the early morning to be advised that all appointments had been allocated when eventually getting through.

At the time of the study, 27 of the 29 surgeries based in Central Bedfordshire use an online booking system. However our research shows that only 14% of people utilise this system which is a similar figure (13%) as reported in the NHS England GP Patient Survey 2015. Further investigation would be needed to identify the reason why there is a lack of 'on line' booking which could be due to lack of awareness. The NHS England GP Patient Survey 2015 also states that, of the people accessing services in Bedfordshire, only 7% were *prepared* to book an appointment online, with most people preferring to book in person (43%) or by phone (40%).

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's research also indicates that 67% of people stated they felt it was easy or acceptable to get an appointment to see their GP, which is reflected in the Bedfordshire data from the NHS England GP Patient Survey 2015 which states that 78% of people reported it was 'very good' or 'fairly good' to get an appointment.

2. GP listens to concerns:

The majority of participants (73%) stated they felt that their GP listens to their concerns although 8% felt they were rarely listened to. This closely matches figures as reported in the NHS England GP Patient Survey 2015, where 87% felt the GP was very good or good at listening and 11% feeling it was neither good, poor, nor very poor.

Most participants from our research who reported dissatisfaction with their GP identified the reason as *'the GP not having enough time'* which instigated the feeling of rarely being listened to. Other concerns included rarely being able to see the same GP which created an inability to build up a trusting relationship.

⁴ NHS England GP Patient Survey January 2015 <http://results.gp-patient.co.uk/report/13/Topline.aspx>

3. Sufficient information to make an informed decision:

Participants in our survey were also asked if their GP gave them enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment. 59% reported they felt they were given enough information whilst 12% felt they were rarely given enough information to make an informed decision about treatment. Indications are that possible reasons for this include time constraints (GP time) or lack of explanation e.g. side effects of medication etc.

Data Correlation:

The research data with regard to access to GP Services was divided into three different groups. This was designed to show how those who find it easy, acceptable or difficult to make an appointment offered an opinion as to whether their GP listened to them. Results were as follows:

- Of those who found it **easy** to make an appointment, 89% felt the GP mostly listened to their concerns;
- Of those who found it **difficult** to make an appointment, this figure fell to 50% who felt the GP mostly listened to their concerns.

Of those who found it *easy* to make an appointment, only 2% reported that the GP rarely listened to their concerns. This figure was compared to those finding it *difficult* to make an appointment; in this instance the figure rises to 18% when reporting that the GP rarely listens to their concerns.

A similar trend emerged from the data relating to the question whether people felt they received enough information regarding treatment. Results were as follows:

- 78% of people who found making an appointment **easy** felt they received *enough* information regarding treatment.
- 44% of people who found making an appointment **difficult** felt they received *sufficient* information regarding treatment.

Of those who found it *easy* to get an appointment, only 4% felt they rarely received enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment. This figure was compared to those who found it *difficult* to make an appointment; in this instance the figure rises to 24% who felt they rarely received enough information to make an informed decision.

This research would therefore indicate that local resident's experience of making an appointment with their GP appears to have an influence on their opinion of the service received. Specifically whether they feel their GP listens to them and provides enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment.

Additional comments regarding access to GP services are detailed, by locality area and GP Surgery, in the main body of the report (Section 2).

Access to Hospital Services

Local residents of Central Bedfordshire, who completed our survey and were spoken to throughout the length of this research project, had all accessed GP services and a smaller majority had experience of Hospital Services. Overall, people who had experience of hospital services were satisfied with the service received, although there are clearly areas for improvement.

The results relating to experience of hospital services, from the respondents who completed the survey, showed that 58% of people were 'very satisfied' with the care they received and 24% 'satisfied'. However, 18% of those who completed the survey, expressed disappointment relating to their hospital experience; main reasons given were 'waiting times'.

The majority of waiting times were within current targets e.g. within the 18 week waiting target and within 4 hours at Accident and Emergency. However those who fell outside of these times expressed dissatisfaction with the service. In addition, the majority of these patients advised Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire that anxiety levels over waiting times could have been reduced had they been given sufficient and regular information. HWCB also received comments from patients where the care they received fell below the level expected.

Positive comments regarding specific hospital services were also received and some of these are detailed in the main body of the report (Section 2).

Access to Social Care Services

Survey questions included access to Social Care Services and local resident's experience of the level of care. The main purpose of the research was to highlight trends or patterns of experience rather than isolate particular services. This was due to the nature of the survey and the large number of different services and providers within each social care service.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's research shows that 79% of people, who completed the survey, found it either 'easy' or 'acceptable' to access the care and support they needed, although 29% stated they found it 'difficult'. The comments received from respondents relating to difficulties, would indicate that local residents were unaware, initially, where to go to access the support needed or that services took a while to be implemented.

Following receipt of social care services, respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the level of care and support received. The majority of respondents (73%) were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the care received. However, research also showed that 27% were 'disappointed' with the level of care received. Additional comments relating to disappointment concerned the absence of care at home following a hospital stay (despite arrangements in place), issues with domiciliary care agency workers and the absence of a known single point of contact for social workers.

Additional comments regarding social care services are detailed in the main body of the report (Section 3).

Recommendations

Following the conclusion of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's research project to explore local resident's experience of access to health and social care services in their local area, we have made the following recommendations to help improve local resident's experience of GP, Hospital and Social Care Services, provided across Central Bedfordshire, as follows:

- 1) GP practices conduct research to identify use of their online booking system and the possible barriers to use.
- 2) GP practices to promote their online booking system and consider its future use for booking emergency appointments.
- 3) Practice Managers apply Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's research which indicates – 'Improving the patient's experience of how they make an appointment with their GP will potentially help to increase their overall satisfaction level of care provided'.
- 4) Hospital Trusts consider informing patients of the length of wait for treatment at the earliest opportunity and to advise if this is likely to fall outside the 18 week target, with clear options for treatment at another facility made available to the patient.
- 5) Hospital Trusts advise patients how to escalate their complaints if they are not satisfied with the response received and a response system instigated where hospitals inform their patients of the changes they have made (in response to complaints) in order to improve the level and quality of care.
- 6) Hospital services signpost patients to Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's website to comment and review the service received, which will help to inform local residents when deciding where to receive treatment, (Choose and Book).
- 7) The Local Authority improves access to information, advice and guidance concerning social care services and how they can be accessed.
- 8) Local resident's, accessing and known to social care services, be allocated one point of contact to discuss any issues or concerns relating to their social care needs.

Finally, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire recommend that additional research is carried out to determine why it is that the majority of people do not use the online booking system. HWCB would also recommend that all surgeries promote their online booking system and consider its future use for booking emergency appointments. Each surgery would benefit from more people booking online as this would ease pressure on telephone bookings.

Accessing Health and Social Care - The Public Opinion

Main Report

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Introduction:

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From the information and feedback received, HWCB were able to gain a better understanding of local residents' experience of service provision in their area; to identify areas of good practice and to highlight areas for improvement.

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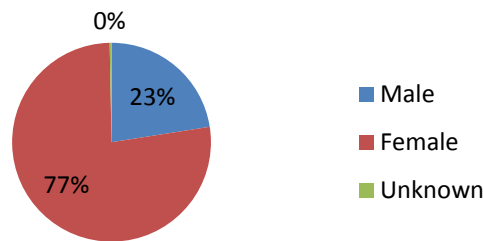
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Participants

Over 300 people completed the survey covering an eight month period. 77% of respondents were female and 23% male. While a similar number of males were approached to complete the survey, it was found that males were more likely to decline to participate.

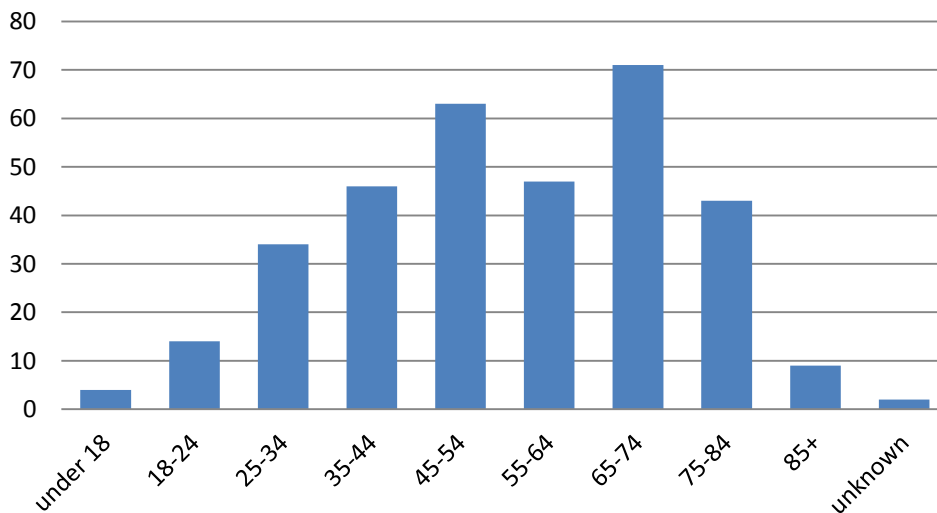
Males and Females completing Surveys



Graph No: HWCB/2/2014

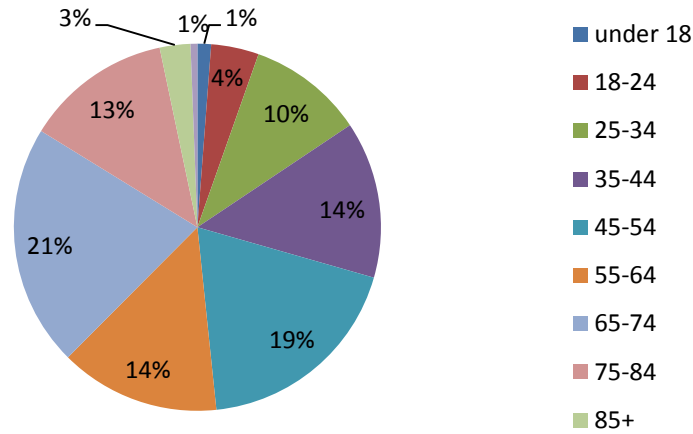
The age range of respondents is shown on the graph below (HWCB/2/2014). The largest response came from the 65 – 74 age range. As the majority of the ‘Just Ask’ events were conducted on a weekday morning this may have contributed to the lack of younger respondents participating as they were more likely to be in work.

Age range of survey respondents



Graph No: HWCB/2/2014

Age range of survey respondents



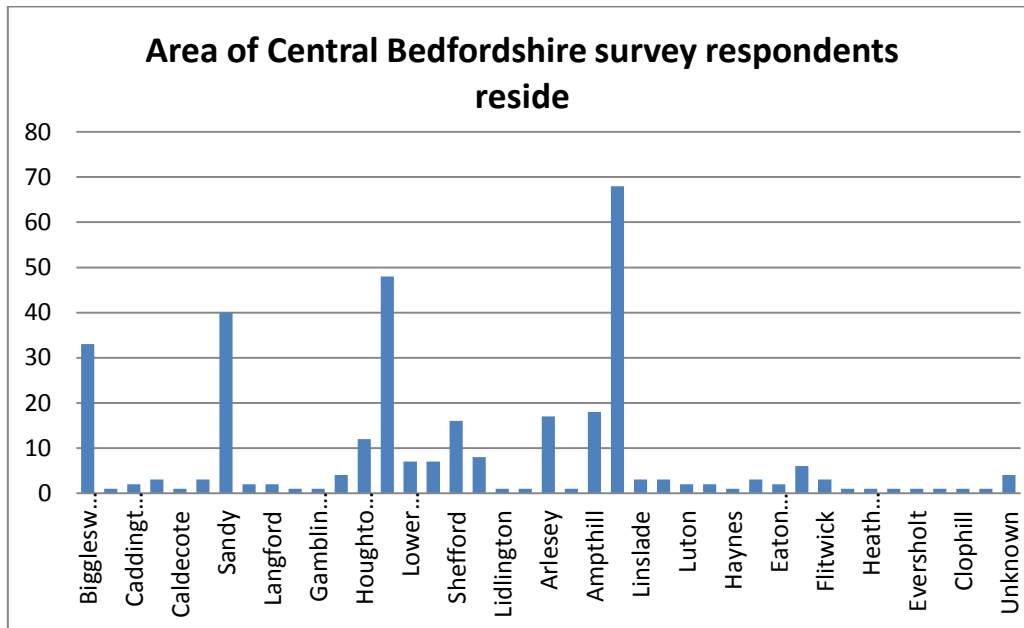
Graph No: HWCB/3/2014

'Just Ask' 2014 Venues

The 'Just Ask' programme visited the following towns in Central Bedfordshire during 2014:

- Biggleswade 19th March 2014
- Houghton Regis 25th April 2014
- Shefford 10th May 2014
- Flitwick 14th June 2014
- Stotfold 8th August 2014
- Leighton Buzzard 19th August 2014
- Dunstable 26th September 2014
- Sandy 17th October 2014

The graph below (HWCB/4/2014) shows responses from residents living across Central Bedfordshire. In the towns where 'Just Ask' visited we clearly received a larger number of responses as local residents were spoken to personally and encouraged to complete the survey.



Graph No: HWCB/4/2014

To ensure Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire reached its target audience i.e. members of the public who lived in Central Bedfordshire, this was established before completing the survey. A very small number of participants spoken to, who lived outside of Central Bedfordshire, confirmed that they accessed a GP surgery in Central Bedfordshire.

The age range of people who completed the survey varied between 10 – 95 years and all participants came from various localities across Central Bedfordshire. In addition to the quantitative data collected we also received extensive comments regarding local resident's experience of health and social care and additional comments regarding several GP Practices.

Surveys

All Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire staff and volunteers were advised of the appropriate methods for completing the survey which included ensuring the respondents lived in Central Bedfordshire and most importantly, to accurately record the comments given by local residents on their experience of health and social care services in their area.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire staff and volunteers who worked on this project were advised that if they were concerned, at any time, about information received, for example, if the information related to a serious complaint or safeguarding issue, the details should be referred directly to the Chief Executive Officer of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire. HWCB staff would subsequently contact the individual and seek permission to log the case as an incident and/or signpost to the relevant agencies in accordance with HWCB complaints procedure. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and POhWER (NHS complaints advocacy service) leaflets were also made available to local residents.

Reporting

All surveys were reviewed and analysed to identify key themes and trends in each of the three service categories: GP, Hospital and Social Care Services. The analysis also aimed to capture the volume of similar comments regarding the same provider or service. Quotes have been used to provide evidence and bring life to the findings.

The report is divided into the following sections:

Section 1: GP Services

Section 2: Hospital Services

Section 3: Social Care Services

Section 1: GP Surgeries

Access to GP Services – Key issues / findings:

In general, the majority of local residents spoken to throughout the length of this research project were satisfied with the service they receive from their GP Practice; however there is room for improvement in many areas, particularly when accessing the service. Research into access to GP services was divided into three groups, as detailed below.

1. Booking an appointment:

The majority of people (65%) book an appointment to see their GP via the phone; this is slightly lower than the 88% reported in the NHS England GP Patient Survey 2015⁸. The majority of respondents who completed the survey cited frustration with the current booking system at their GP surgery, particularly when calling in the early morning to be advised that all appointments had been allocated when eventually getting through.

At the time of the study, 27 of the 29 surgeries based in Central Bedfordshire use an online booking system. However our research shows that only 14% of people utilise this system which is a similar figure (13%) as reported in the NHS England GP Patient Survey 2015. Further investigation would be needed to identify the reason why there is a lack of 'on line' booking which could be due to lack of awareness. The NHS England GP Patient Survey 2015 also states that, of the people accessing services in Bedfordshire, only 7% were *prepared* to book an appointment online, with most people preferring to book in person (43%) or by phone (40%).

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's research also indicates that 67% of people stated they felt it was easy or acceptable to get an appointment to see their GP, which is reflected in the Bedfordshire data from the NHS England GP Patient Survey 2015 which states that 78% of people reported it was 'very good' or 'fairly good' to get an appointment.

2. GP listens to concerns:

The majority of participants (73%) stated they felt that their GP listens to their concerns although 8% felt they were rarely listened to. This closely matches figures as reported in the NHS England GP Patient Survey 2015, where 87% felt the GP was very good or good at listening and 11% feeling it was neither good, poor, nor very poor.

Most participants from our research who reported dissatisfaction with their GP identified the reason as *'the GP not having enough time'* which instigated the feeling of rarely being listened to. Other concerns included rarely being able to see the same GP which created an inability to build up a trusting relationship.

3. Sufficient information to make an informed decision:

Participants in our survey were also asked if their GP gave them enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment. 59% reported they felt they were given enough information whilst 12% felt they were rarely given enough information to make an

⁸ NHS England GP Patient Survey January 2015 <http://results.gp-patient.co.uk/report/13/Topline.aspx>

informed decision about treatment. Indications are that possible reasons for this include time constraints (GP time) or lack of explanation e.g. side effects of medication etc.

Correlation of Data:

The research data with regard to access to GP Services was divided into three different groups. This was designed to show how those who find it easy, acceptable or difficult to make an appointment offered an opinion as to whether their GP listened to them. Results were as follows:

- Of those who found it **easy** to make an appointment, 89% felt the GP mostly listened to their concerns;
- Of those who found it **difficult** to make an appointment, this figure fell to 50% who felt the GP mostly listened to their concerns.

Of those who found it *easy* to make an appointment, only 2% reported that the GP rarely listened to their concerns. This figure was compared to those finding it *difficult* to make an appointment; in this instance the figure rises to 18% when reporting that the GP rarely listens to their concerns.

A similar trend emerged from the data relating to the question whether people felt they received enough information regarding treatment. Results were as follows:

- 78% of people who found making an appointment **easy** felt they received *enough* information regarding treatment.
- 44% of people who found making an appointment **difficult** felt they received *sufficient* information regarding treatment.

Of those who found it *easy* to get an appointment, only 4% felt they rarely received enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment. This figure was compared to those who found it *difficult* to make an appointment; in this instance the figure rises to 24% who felt they rarely received enough information to make an informed decision.

This research would therefore indicate that local resident's experience of making an appointment with their GP appears to have an influence on their opinion of the service received. Specifically whether they feel their GP listens to them and provides enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment.

Additional comments regarding access to GP services are detailed, by locality area and GP Surgery, are detailed below.

IVEL VALLEY LOCALITY

Sandy Health Centre

11 respondents said they found making an appointment difficult. We received an additional 12 comments regarding booking an appointment at this surgery. Summary of comments received:

*'Cannot get an appointment for the day'
Time and no appointments available'
'Having to phone at 8am, but if you walk in you usually get an appointment immediately'
'Can't get through then fully booked'
'Do not even try and book on the phone as never get through'
'Only available on the day'
'Have to ring at 8am, difficult to get through, then no appointments- all gone'
'Time you have to call is hard and no availability of appointments'
'You can only book each'
'Do not do blood tests at Sandy – have to travel to Bedford'
'Never any appointments'
'They are always busy. Can never get through then always fully booked'*

Visiting the surgery directly was the most popular way of making an appointment. The vast majority of respondents using this surgery felt that the GP's at this practice listened to them and gave them enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment, however there were a few negative comments, as follows:

*'I only get more information if I ask'
'He does not seem to care and just wants to get rid of you'
'They haven't always got the time'
'I would like the results from blood tests and letters from hospital appointments – these aren't always acted upon'
'The GP does not listen'
'The nurse listens more than the GP'*

King's Road Surgery

Nine respondents reported they found it difficult to make an appointment. We received an additional five comments regarding booking an appointment at this surgery, as follows:

'Long wait, 2-3 weeks'
'It is difficult but the Health Centre in Sandy is worse'
'Cannot get through via email, I cannot use the phone because I am blind. I waited quite a while to see a GP'
'Not as easy as it used to be'
'Had to wait 2 weeks'

A small minority of respondents using this surgery expressed concerns about the GP not listening to them and/or not giving them enough information to make an informed decision about treatment. The following comments were received:

'Depends which GP you see'
'Need to push for information'
'No information they do not have the time – feel like a revolving door'

Biggleswade Health Centre

Three of the 11 respondents, who completed the survey, having using this surgery, said they found it difficult to make an appointment, with the following comments:

'Very difficult trying to get a specific GP'
'Because I work I can't fit the appointments in. I have to tell the receptionist who will then try and fit it in.'
'The problem with appointments is not the Doctors it is the receptionists'

All patients responding from this surgery, who made additional comments, confirmed that the GP listened to them and that they were well informed to make choices regarding treatments.

Ivel Medical Centre

Fifteen respondents from this surgery stated it was difficult to make an appointment. We received the following comments regarding making an appointment:

- 'Over a four week wait to get a blood test'*
- 'I can get an appointment but only because I stand outside and wait for 8am to see the emergency doctor'*
- 'Had to call 24 times to get the phone answered for an emergency appointment for a child'*
- 'I find it harder to see the nurse – I can wait up to a month'*
- 'Cannot always see your own doctor; also do not inform you what specialities each GP has'*

The majority of respondents stated the GP's at this practise listen to their patients however there were some people who felt they were not given enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment. They made the following comments:

- 'I was referred to the urinary incontinence service but no one explained what this would entail or what would be offered – I still had questions'*
- 'They do not explain the side effects of medications'*

Arlesey Medical Centre

All respondents from this surgery, who completed the survey, stated that making an appointment was easy or acceptable. They also felt the GP listened to them and gave them enough information regarding treatments. No further comments were made.

Shefford Health Centre

Several respondents reported they found it difficult to make an appointment at this surgery. The following comments were received:

'Booking ahead for non-emergency appointments – have to wait a long time. Very frustrating booking emergency appointments; have to be quick or all gone'

'You can never get through on the phone'

'Difficult to book on the phone so I use the internet'

'Never an appointment when you want it – have to book two weeks ahead. Phone always engaged when trying to call at 8am'

13% of respondents stated that they felt the GP's at this surgery did not listen to them or give them enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment. They made the following comments:

'The GP rarely listens to me - always checking the time. I feel some of them are quite sexist. They do not give me enough information; it is easier to get it online. They do not discuss long term effects of medications'

'Came back from abroad with Pneumonia - diagnosed abroad. GP dismissed it saying as I had had no tests they couldn't prove I had it. Need more information about side effects.'

'I have COPD and am a recovering alcoholic. GP just focused on saying I needed to give up smoking but did not consider that being a recovering alcoholic this may be a coping method'

'If you ask for more information they will give it to you - but you have to ask.'

Larksfield Surgery

Twelve respondents using this surgery, who completed the survey, reported that they found making an appointment difficult. Comments include the following:

'Difficult to get an appointment – takes 3 weeks if not considered an emergency. I am made to feel impatient'

'They do not have enough appointments on the day; you have to wait 2hrs'

The majority of respondents were satisfied that the GP listened to their concerns and provided enough information to make an informed choice regarding treatment. However a few respondents felt more information could be given. Additional comments as follows:

'Only listens to concerns when involving routine things. Not for new issues.'
'I rarely get to see the same GP twice but most GP's seem to provide the appropriate information'

Greensands Medical Practise

Twelve respondents using this surgery completed the survey, two of whom found it difficult to make an appointment. Comments as follows:

'Easy for appointments as long as willing to wait about a month for it'

'Difficult when requested my actual GP as he only works once a week. But to see any GP is easy'

All respondents felt the GP listened to their concerns and supplied adequate information to make informed decisions regarding treatment.

Lower Stondon

A minority of respondents stated they felt making an appointment at this surgery was difficult. The following comments were received regarding booking appointments:

'Have to wait 3 weeks for specified doctors. Surgery can't cope with expansion of homes'

'Have to call at 8am for emergency; if routine can wait up to 2 weeks.'

'Have to call at 8am to get an appointment'

However, respondents felt that the GP's at this practice listened to their concerns and gave enough information for them to make informed decisions regarding treatments.

WEST MID BEDS LOCALITY

Asplands Medical Centre and Woburn Surgery

A minority of respondents, who completed the survey, were registered at this surgery. All respondents indicated that they felt making an appointment was acceptable and that the GP listened to their concerns and gave enough information to make informed decisions regarding treatments.

Greensand Surgery

Several respondents, who completed the survey, reported they found it difficult to make an appointment at this surgery, the following comment was made:

'Very hard, surgery is very popular. Have to wait a week'

However, the respondents stated they felt that the GP's mostly listened to their concerns and sometimes gave them enough information to make informed decisions.

'Some GP's do, others don't'

Flitwick Surgery

The majority of respondents using this surgery, who completed the survey, stated they felt making an appointment is easy or acceptable. The following comments were received regarding appointments:

'Found easy but getting a specific GP takes 6 weeks'

'Too far to travel for emergency appointment and have no transport of my own'

Respondents reported that the GP's at this practice mostly listened to their concerns and provided enough information for them to make informed decisions regarding treatments.

Barton Surgery

Over half of respondents from this surgery, who completed the survey, reported they found it difficult to make an appointment. The following comments were received:

'A specific doctor takes 4 weeks'

'Wait at least 3 weeks'

'It is not easy to get through and there is a waiting list of calls. I cannot book online because I am blind'

The majority of respondents stated they felt the GP's at this surgery listened to their concerns and gave enough information to make informed decisions. One comments as follows:

'I cannot read the leaflets so I have problems taking my medication'

Houghton Close

The majority of respondents using this surgery, who completed the survey, reported that they felt it was easy or acceptable to make an appointment. They also felt the GP's listened to their concerns and gave them enough information to make informed decisions regarding treatments.

Oliver Street Practise

A minority of respondents, who completed the survey, was a patient at this practise. All respondents stated they felt it was easy to make an appointment and that the GP listened to their concerns and provided sufficient information for them to make an informed decision regarding treatments.

LEIGHTON BUZZARD LOCALITY

Bassett Road Surgery

Over half the respondents using this surgery, who completed the survey, reported that they found it difficult to make an appointment. Comments as follows:

'Can never get hold of them'
'Not enough available appointments; not always able to see own doctor'
'No appointments'
'Cannot get appointments'
'The receptionists blocks the appointments'
'Unable to see a doctor for less than 10 days'
'Can't get to see your own doctor'
'The receptionist is rude and abrupt'
'Have to wait a few weeks to get an appointment'
'Lack of appointments'
'You can only get a doctor if you are an emergency'
'The receptionist is rude'

The majority of respondents felt that the GP's at this practice did listen to their concerns and provide enough information to make informed decisions regarding treatment however a small minority stated they felt that the GP's rarely provided sufficient information. Comments included:

'They do not - because the GP does not listen and does not have enough time'

Grovebury Road

The majority of respondents from this surgery reported they felt it was difficult to get an appointment. The following comments were received:

'Not enough appointments'
'Have had to wait a month for a routine appointment'
'No appointments, phone and they hang up on you'
'No appointments; keep you waiting for ages on the phone'
'They have an automated service'
'The surgery tries their best but we have to wait up to 2 weeks. I have to push to get an appointment. They try to be flexible if it is an emergency'

The majority of respondents reported they felt the GP's at this practice mostly or sometimes listened to their concerns and provide enough information regarding treatments. However, several respondents stated they felt this rarely happened and made the following comments:

'The problem is you do not see the same person'
'The doctor could not fit us in for an emergency appointment for 10 days even through an ambulance call'
'Does depend on GP, I feel some follow / track the situation others couldn't care so I don't trust them.'
'There is only a five minute appointment so advised to read up on conditions'

Leighton Road Surgery

The majority of survey respondents from this surgery felt booking an appointment was difficult. The following comments were made:

'Not enough appointments available'
'Lack of available appointments'
'Need to book 2-3 weeks in advance'
'You have to wait so long'
'You have to wait up to 3 weeks for an appointment'
'Even though I request an appointment with the GP I have to wait 3 weeks.'
'I do not get consistency; I am shipped around to different doctors'

However the majority of respondents did feel the GP's at the practice listened to their concerns and gave enough information for them to make an informed choice regarding treatments, although a minority disagreed; comments included:

'I have to ask for further information and sometimes this is a problem'
'I want to be told the truth'

Salisbury House Surgery

The majority of respondents from this practise felt it was easy to make an appointment, however six people reported they felt it was difficult. The following comments were received:

'Not enough appointments'
'Due to my illness I do not wake early enough to get an appointment, it has been a five week wait'
'Can never get an appointment'

A high percentage of respondents felt the GP's did listen to their concerns and gave them enough information for them to make informed decisions. However a few comments were received from patients who felt the GP's at the practice rarely did these things. Comments include:

'Need to explain what medication is being prescribed'
'Because I do not see the same GP and they do not seem to update each other'

CHILTERN VALE LOCALITY

Caddington Surgery

A minority of respondents, who completed the survey, was a patient at this practise. All respondents stated they felt it was easy to make an appointment and that the GP listened to their concerns and provided sufficient information for them to make an informed decision regarding treatments.

Chiltern Hills Medical Practise

The majority of respondents from this surgery reported that they felt appointments were easy or acceptable to make. One patient commented:

'It is a small practise and they have had problems with receptionists. She is agency and queried my medication'

All respondents felt the GP's at the practice listened to their concerns. Some people felt more information could be given for them to make an informed choice regarding treatment while one person felt they received too much information, comments as follows:

'They just give you the tablets or medication but do not explain why or how they will help you'

'They give too much information and I do not understand why they are treating me'

Eastgate Surgery

The majority of respondents from this surgery, who completed the survey, reported they found it easy to make appointments. They also stated they felt that they were listened to and given enough information to make informed decisions regarding treatment.

Houghton Regis Medical Centre

The majority of respondents using this surgery felt making an appointment was easy or acceptable. However a minority of people felt it was more difficult, commenting as follows:

'Hard to get through on the phone'
'Just don't have appointments available. Have to wait weeks.'
'Line always busy'

Most respondents reported they felt listened to. However a few people felt they could be given more information to enable them to make informed decisions regarding treatments. Comments as follows:

'There are no options and they give no information'
'Don't give enough as a matter of course - only if requested'
'Only give me information because I insist on it'

Kingsbury Court Surgery

There was a mixed opinion from respondents using this surgery, regarding how easy it was to make an appointment. Several respondents stated they felt it was easy while others reported they found it difficult. Comments included:

'When you call they put you off. Especially when you try to get a repeat prescription'
'The receptionist is very rude'

The majority of people felt the GP's at the surgery listened to them and people were generally happy with the information they received to make informed decisions regarding treatments. However, a few people disagreed and made the following comments:

'The GP ignored what I was asking him'
'I don't feel the GP listens - they just look at their computer'
'Problem is you cannot always see the same GP so you do not get the same information'

Kirby Road Surgery

The majority of people responding who used this surgery felt it was easy or acceptable to make an appointment. However one respondent reported they found it difficult and made the following comment:

'But very often have to take time off work for the appointment'

All respondents, who completed the survey, stated they felt that the GP's at the practice mostly listen to them and they often get enough information to make informed decisions regarding treatments. Comments include:

*'Depends which doctor you see'
'Does not help that you cannot see the same GP'*

Priory Gardens Surgery

The majority of respondents using this surgery, who completed the survey, found making an appointment was easy and the GP's at the surgery both listened to them and gave them enough information to make informed decisions regarding treatments. However, there was one negative comment, as follows:

'No instant appointments, and I was disappointed the surgery was closed for a whole day for training'

Toddington Medical Centre

The majority of respondents who completed the survey gave positive feedback about this surgery. The majority found it easy to make an appointment stating they ; felt listened to and sufficiently well informed to make a decision regarding treatments. However, one respondent gave us the following feedback:

'There is one difficult receptionist'

West Street Surgery

Over 20 surveys were completed by patients registered at this surgery. The majority of people found it acceptable to make an appointment however seven respondents found it difficult and made the following comments:

'They do not have enough appointments'

'The GP would not see my son when he was really ill; I had to take him to the walk in clinic in Luton'

'Phone line busy and availability limited'

Respondents reported that they felt listened to and the majority stated they were given enough information to make informed decisions regarding treatments. However a minority of respondents felt they were not listened to and wanted more information to make an informed decision regarding treatments. Comments include:

'The doctors are very rushed and do not have time to explain'

Wheatfield Road Surgery

The majority of respondents, who completed the survey, stated they felt that making an appointment was difficult. The following comments were received:

'I have to go to the surgery to push for an appointment'

'Placed on hold, cut off and then have to drive down in person'

'They never seem to have appointments on the day unless it is an emergency'

'Never get an appointment they make you wait weeks'

'Always engaged - need to wait 2 weeks'

'Have to go in first thing in the morning at 8am, if you go in later at 9am they do not have any slots.'

Feedback varied as to whether people felt listened to and were given enough information to make informed choices regarding treatment. Comments included the following:

'Can't always get the same doctor, many have left'

'Could be better - side effects etc. Had medication prescribed then read information sheet and didn't take it'

Other Surgeries

Surveys which were completed on-line or received through the post included 11 surveys from Central Bedfordshire residents that were registered at surgeries outside of Central Bedfordshire.

The majority of respondents spoke positively about their experience stating that they felt it was easy to get an appointment and that the GP's in their respective surgeries listened to them and gave them the information they needed to make a decision regarding treatments. However, not everyone agreed and we also received the following comments:

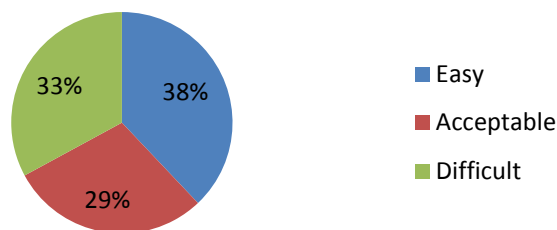
*'It is difficult to see your own doctor'
'Known GP left - I have looked new GP's up online and I have no confidence in them'*

Access to GP Services - Summary of questions and comments

Question One: How easy have you found making an appointment to see your GP?

A third of respondents reported they found it *difficult* to make an appointment to see their GP with just over a third who found it *easy* and the remainder who found it *acceptable*.

How easy have you found making an appointment to see your GP?



Graph No: HWCB/5/2014

The main reasons given by respondents for stating that making an appointment was 'difficult' were as follows:

No appointments available:

- 'Cannot get an appointment for the day'
- 'Time and no appointments available'
- 'Only available on the day'
- 'Never any appointments'
- 'Long wait, 2-3 weeks'
- 'Had to wait 2 weeks'
- 'Over a 4 week wait to get a blood test'
- 'Booking ahead for non-emergency appointments – have to wait a long time. Very frustrating booking emergency appointments have to be quick or all gone'
- 'Never an appointment when you want it – have to book two weeks ahead.'
- 'Difficult to get an appointment – takes 3 weeks if not considered an emergency. I am made to feel impatient'
- 'They do not have enough appointments on the day, you have to wait 2hrs'
- 'Easy for appointments as long as willing to wait about a month for it'
- 'Very hard, surgery is very popular. Have to wait a week'
- 'Wait at least 3 weeks'
- 'Not enough available appointment not always able to see own doctor'
- 'No appointments'
- 'Cannot get appointments'
- 'Unable to see a doctor for less than 10 days'
- 'Have to wait a few weeks to get an appointment'
- 'Lack of appointments'
- 'You can only get a doctor if you are an emergency'

'Not enough appointments'
'Have had to wait a month for a routine appointment'
'No appointments, phone and they hang up on you'
'No appointments. Keep you waiting for ages on the phone'
'The surgery tries their best but we have to wait up to 2 weeks. I have to push to get an appointment. They try to be flexible if it is an emergency'
'Not enough appointments available'
'Lack of available appointments'
'Need to book 2-3 weeks in advance'
'You have to wait so long'
'You have to wait up to 3 weeks for an appointment'
'Even though I request an appointment with the GP I have to wait 3 weeks.'
'not enough appointments'
'Can never get an appointment'
'Just don't have appointments available. Have to wait weeks.'
'But very often have to take time off work for the appointment'
'No instant appointments, and I was disappointed the surgery was closed for a whole day for training'
'They do not have enough appointments'
'The GP would not see my son when he was really ill , I had to take him to the walk in clinic in Luton'
'I have to go to the surgery to push for an appointment'
'They never seem to have appointments on the day unless it is an emergency'
'Never get an appointment they make you wait weeks'
'Have to go in first thing in the morning at 8am, if you go in later at 9am they do not have any slots.'

Receptionist perceived as rude:

'The problem with appointments is not the Doctors it is the receptionists'
'The receptionists blocks the appointments'
'The receptionist is rude and abrupt'
'The receptionist is rude'
'it is a small practise and the have had problems with receptionists. She is agency and queried my medication'
'The receptionist is very rude'
'There is one difficult receptionist'

Cannot get through on the phone:

'Having to phone at 8am, but if you walk in you usually get an appointment immediately'
'Can't get through then fully booked'
'Do not even try and book on the phone as never get through'
'Have to ring at 8am, difficult to get through, then no appointments- all gone'
'Time you have to call is hard and no availability of appointments'
'They are always busy. Can never get through then always fully booked'
'Had to call 24 times to get the phone answered for an emergency appointment for a child'
'You can never get through on the phone'
'Difficult to book on the phone so I use the internet'
'Phone always engaged when trying to call at 8am''
'Have to call at 8am for emergency; if routine can wait up to 2 weeks.'

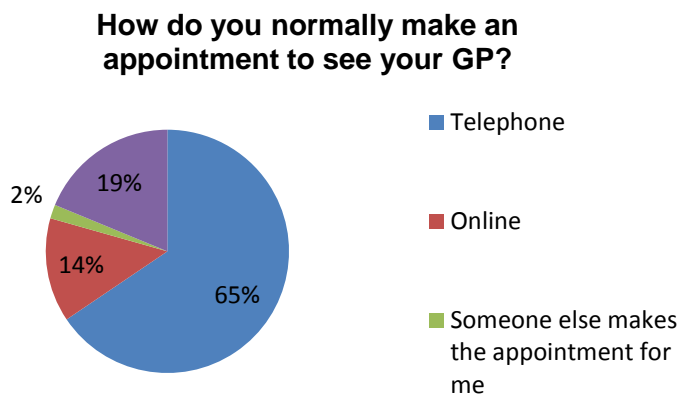
'Have to call at 8am to get an appointment'
'Can never get hold of them'
'They have an automated service'
'Due to my illness I do not wake early enough to get an appointment, it has been a five week wait'
'Line always busy'
'Hard to get through on the phone'
'Phone line busy and availability limited'
'Placed on hold, cut off and then have to drive down in person'
'Always engaged - need to wait 2 weeks'

People want to see a specific GP:

'Very difficult trying to get a specific GP'
'Cannot always see your own doctor; also do not inform you what specialities each GP has'
'Difficult when requested my actual GP as he only work once a week. But to see any GP is easy'
'Have to wait 3 weeks for specified doctors. Surgery can't cope with expansion of homes'
'Found easy but getting a specific GP takes 6 weeks'
'A specific doctor takes 4 weeks'
'Can't get to see your own doctor'
'I do not get consistency; I am shipped around to different doctors'

Question two: How do you normally make an appointment to see your GP?

Respondents were asked how they normally book an appointment to see their GP. From the responses received, a general theme emerged which indicated that most people found it difficult to get through to the surgery using the phone, which appeared to be the most common method of booking appointments. In Central Bedfordshire the majority of GP practises operate an online booking system however, only a relatively small number of respondents stated that they used this method to book an appointment.

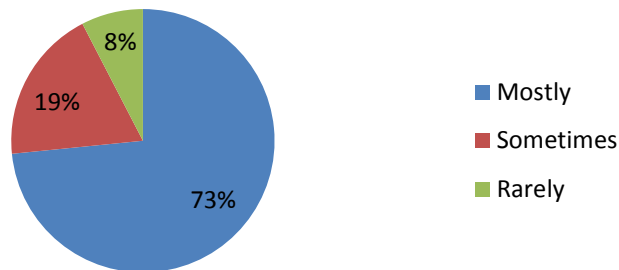


Graph No: HWCB/6/2014

Question 3: Do you feel the GP listens to your concerns?

Many people, when visiting their GP, appreciate being listened to and to be reassured that their GP has understood the reasons for their visit. This question therefore aimed to discover if people felt their GP listened to their concerns.

Do you feel the GP listens to your concerns?



Graph No: HWCB/7/2014

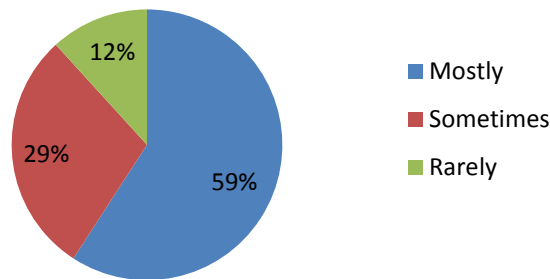
Over 70% of respondents stated that they felt their GP did listen to their concerns. A small minority felt they listened sometimes and only 8% felt their GP rarely listened to their concerns. Comments from the latter respondents are as follows:

- 'He does not seem to care and just wants to get rid of you'*
- 'The GP does not listen'*
- 'The nurse listens more than the GP'*
- 'The GP rarely listens to me - always checking the time. I feel some of them are quite sexist.*
- 'I have COPD and am a recovering alcoholic. GP just focused on saying I needed to give up smoking but did not consider that being a recovering alcoholic this may be a coping method'*
- 'Only listens to concerns when involving routine things; not for new issues.'*
- The GP does not listen and not have enough time'*
- Because I do not see the same GP and they do not seem to update each other'*
- 'The GP ignored what I was asking him'*
- 'I don't feel the GP listens- they just look at their computer'*

Question 4: Do you feel the GP gives you enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment?

Respondents were asked if they felt that their GP gave them sufficient information with regard to treatment plans etc which enabled them to make decisions based on the information given. This could include possible benefits and side-effects of the treatment or alternative treatments.

Do you feel the GP gives you enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment?



Graph No: HWCB/8/2014

The majority of respondents (88%) reported that they sometimes or mostly felt they were given enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment. However 12% felt their GP rarely gave them enough information. Comments from the latter group are as follows:

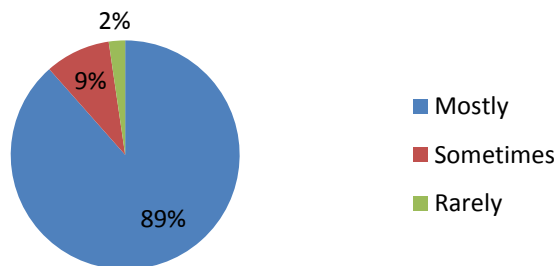
- 'I only get more information if I ask'*
- 'They haven't always got the time'*
- 'I would like the results from blood tests and letters from hospital appointments – these aren't always acted upon'*
- 'Depends which GP you see'*
- 'Need to push for information'*
- 'No information they do not have the time – feel like a revolving door'*
- 'I was referred to the urinary incontinence service but no one explained what this would entail or what would be offered – I still had questions'*
- 'They do not explain the side effects of medications'*
- 'They do not give me enough information; it is easier to get it online. They do not discuss long term effects of medications'*
- 'Came back from abroad with Pneumonia - diagnosed abroad. GP dismissed it saying as I had had no tests they couldn't prove I had it. Need more information about side effects.'*
- 'If you ask for more information they will give it to you - but you have to ask.'*
- 'I rarely get to see the same GP twice but most GP's seem to provide the appropriate information'*
- 'Some GP's do, others don't'*
- 'The problem is you do not see the same person'*

'Does depend on GP, I feel some follow / track the situation others couldn't care I don't trust.'
'There is only a 5 minute appointment so advised to read up on conditions'
'I have to ask for further information and sometimes this is a problem'
'Need to explain what medication is being prescribed'
"They just give you the tablets or medication but do not explain why or how they will help you"
'They give too much information and I do not understand why they are treating me'
'There are no options and they give no information'
'Don't give enough as a matter of course- only if requested'
'Only give me information because I insist on it'
'Problem is you cannot always see the same GP so they get don't information'
'Depends which doctor you see'
'Does not help that you cannot see the same GP'
'The doctors are very rushed and do not have time to explain'
'Could be better - side effects etc. Had medication prescribed then read information sheet and didn't take it'

Data correlation:

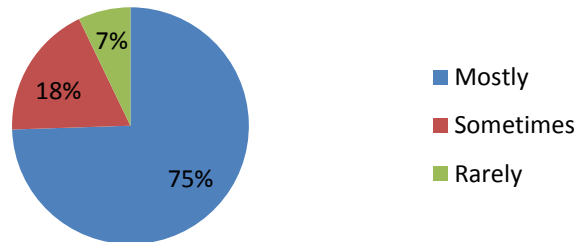
Four independent questions were asked in the survey relating to GP services, as highlighted above. From the data received there appeared to be a correlation between how easy or difficult an individual found making an appointment as to whether they felt the GP listened to their concerns and if they were given enough information to make informed decisions regarding treatment. This data is presented below:

Do you feel the GP listens to your concerns?
(Those finding it **easy** to make an appointment)



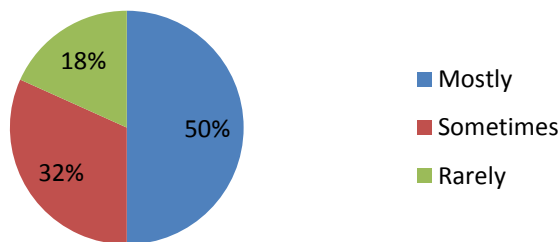
Graph No: HWCB/9/2014

**Do you feel the GP listens to your concerns?
(Those finding it **acceptable** to make an
appointment)**



Graph No: HWCB/10/2014

**Do you feel the GP listens to your concerns?
(Those finding it **difficult** to make an
appointment)**

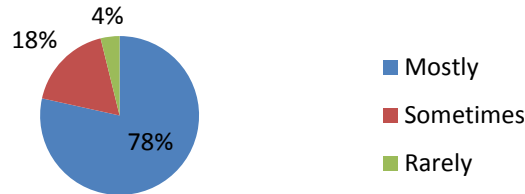


Graph No: HWCB/11/2014

A high percentage (89%) of people who felt it was easy to make an appointment, felt their GP listened to their concerns. Interestingly this figure can be compared to only 50% of people who felt their GP listened to their concerns who reported they found it difficult to make an appointment.

A similar trend was presented when studying the data recorded for question 4 on whether people felt their GP gives them sufficient information to make an informed decision.

Do you feel the GP gives you enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment? (Those finding it **easy to make an appointment)**



Graph No: HWCB/10/2014

Do you feel the GP gives you enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment? (Those finding it **acceptable to make an appointment)**



Graph No: HWCB/11/2014

Do you feel the GP gives you enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment? (Those finding it **difficult to make an appointment)**



Graph No: HWCB/12/2014

78% of people who found it easy to make an appointment reported they received sufficient information from their GP to make an informed decision. This was compared to 44% of people who received enough information but who had found it difficult to make an appointment.

From our research the findings would indicate that when people found it difficult to make an appointment with their GP, their confidence levels in the provision of a good service is reduced, which can lead to dissatisfaction with service provision. Patient opinion can therefore be distorted due to their dissatisfaction with the appointments system.

Section 2: Hospital Services

Hospital Services – key issues / findings:

160 respondents, out of the 334 who completed the survey, gave feedback with regard to their experience of hospital services. The majority of respondents commented on services received at Bedford Hospital, Lister Hospital and the Luton and Dunstable Hospital. Various anonymous comments were also received concerning other hospitals; Milton Keynes, Addenbrookes and Stoke Mandeville.

Overall, people who had experience of hospital services were satisfied with the service received, although there are clearly areas for improvement.

The results relating to experience of hospital services, from the respondents who completed the survey, showed that 58% of people were 'very satisfied' with the care they received and 24% 'satisfied'. However, 18% of those who completed the survey, expressed disappointment relating to their hospital experience; main reasons given were 'waiting times'.

The majority of waiting times were within current targets e.g. within the 18 week waiting target and within 4 hours at Accident and Emergency. However those who fell outside of these times expressed dissatisfaction with the service. In addition, the majority of these patients advised Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire that anxiety levels over waiting times could have been reduced had they been given sufficient and regular information. HWCB also received comments from patients where the care they received fell below the level expected.

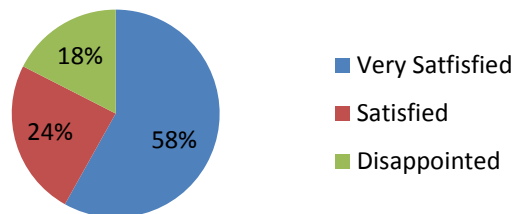
Positive comments regarding specific hospital services were also received and some of these are detailed below.

Access to Hospital Services – Summary of questions and comments

Question 5: How satisfied are you with the hospital service?

Satisfaction levels across all hospitals indicate that 82% of people were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received. A relatively low percentage (18%) was disappointed with the service received.

How satisfied are you with the Hospital Service? (All hospitals)



Graph No: HWCB/13/2014

Satisfaction levels across named hospitals as follows:

- 93% at Bedford hospital
- 79% at Lister Hospital
- 78% at Luton and Dunstable.

The majority of waiting times were within current targets e.g. within the 18 week waiting target and within 4 hours at Accident and Emergency. However the following comments were received from respondents with regard to treatment, who fell outside of these times, as follows:

Lister (services and care received):

Carpel Tunnel Surgery: *'29 week wait; made a verbal complaint regarding the extremely long waiting time'*

Inpatient admission: *'4 month wait; 4 months and then had been sent to wrong person'. 'Had to go back to GP to be referred again; waited another 3 months, but then problem sorted within weeks'.*

ENT: *'11 weeks and counting: Told it would be 2 weeks but it has been 11 weeks and still waiting. My symptoms are getting worse and still no appointment - referred firstly to wrong department - had already waited for 16 weeks'.*

- Assessment Ward: *'No food for 3 days then when could eat transport came to collect in the middle of a meal. Went home without mediations due to miscommunication'*
- Inpatient Ward: *'Had to have a tube put up my nose - did it with very little explanation other than showing me how big the tube was! I felt very scared'*
- Inpatient Ward: *'Had some blood tests and before results came back was given a long list of possible diagnosis including cancer which was frightening'*

Bedford (services and care received):

- Hip surgery: *'10 weeks and counting; referred 30th June. On 5th Sept still no appointment date. Communication far from acceptable business standard'. 'After 1 month for an appointment in 5 weeks - I think this is poor.'*
- Outpatients: *'Not booking interpreters - cancelling appointments and sending me home even when I am in the hospital'*
- Physiotherapy: *'Very difficult having to get to Bedford Gilbert Hitchcock House from Biggleswade. Went for an assessment but it was not completed in the 1hr appointment so I had to return. Later found out you can request a referral on the NHS to a private Physiotherapist in Biggleswade'*
- Gynaecology: *'Wanted to see a consultant and I did but this was only because I flagged up my concerns'*

Luton and Dunstable Hospital (services and care received):

- A and E: *'A long wait; waited ages in A&E, only when symptoms became worse did she get seen'*
- A and E: *'I was moved in the middle of the night to a ward for patients with Cancer when I didn't know what was wrong with me yet. It really scared me - I didn't have cancer. There was no communication'*
- Maternity: *'The aftercare was awful'*
- Oncology: *'Father - at appointment to get results of biopsy consultant didn't just say it was clear. And offered no help / advice just said he was overweight'*
- Stroke Unit: *'Mum (63yrs) admitted on Christmas Eve, 7 hr wait in A&E to be admitted. Staff dismissed convulsions. Discharged on Christmas day at 11am readmitted by 3pm with another stroke; had a 5 weeks stay'. 'Has diabetes and always has high blood sugar (5) and anything lower leaves her nearly in a coma but staff would not listen and were trying to keep it at 4'*

Unknown

- Pain Clinic: *'6 months and counting'*
- Carpal Tunnel *'18 months waiting for surgery; time to operation was too long'*

Positive Comments:

Respondents also shared positive comments of their hospital experience:

Moorfields: *'service - out of this world'*

Counselling: *'excellent service'*
(Shefford)

Cardiology: *'Excellent - stent fitted within one hour of calling out of hours GP; only stayed in for 2 days.'*
(Lister)

Mammogram: *'Dealt with very quickly'*
(Bedford)

Knee replacement: *'Very good service'*
(Bedford)

Renal Service: *'Bedford Hospital was good'*
(Bedford)

Section 3: Social Care Services

Social Care Services – Key issues / findings:

In total, 64 respondents who completed the survey, provided feedback on social care services in their local area. As various different services were commented on the data was amalgamated and shown for all organisations and services. This is due to the sample size being too small for validity and also to ensure people remain anonymous.

The main purpose of the research was to highlight trends or patterns of experience rather than isolate particular services. This was due to the nature of the survey and the large number of different services and providers within each social care service.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's research shows that 79% of people, who completed the survey, found it either 'easy' or 'acceptable' to access the care and support they needed, although 29% stated they found it 'difficult'. The comments received from respondents relating to difficulties, would indicate that local residents were unaware, initially, where to go to access the support needed or that services took a while to be implemented.

Following receipt of social care services, respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the level of care and support received. The majority of respondents (73%) were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the care received. However, research also showed that 27% were 'disappointed' with the level of care received. Additional comments relating to disappointment concerned the absence of care at home following a hospital stay (despite arrangements in place), issues with domiciliary care agency workers and the absence of a known single point of contact for social workers.

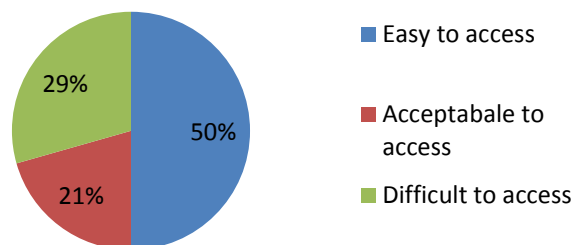
Additional comments received with regard to social care services are detailed below.

Access to Social Care Services - Summary of questions and comments

Question 6: How easy did you find it to access support needed?

The majority of people who completed the survey found social care services easy or acceptable to access. However, nearly a third of respondents (21%), who completed the survey, found difficulties accessing care and support.

How easy did you find it to access the support you needed?



Graph No: HWCB/14/2014

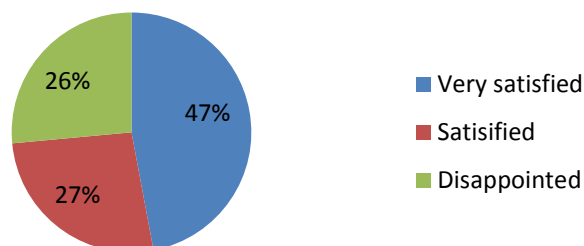
The following comments were received on access to care and support:

'Took a little while to put social care in place but now good'
'Very hard to find out where to go for help but once found out who to talk to the service was good'

Question 7: How satisfied with the level of care are you?

Slightly less than half the respondents (47%), who completed the survey, were very satisfied with the level of care provided, however 26% felt disappointed with the level of care they had received.

How satisfied with the level of care are you?



Graph No: HWCB/15/2014

The respondents who were disappointed with the level of service received made these comments:

'I can never speak to anyone – the phones are always engaged'

'I do not have a named person so have to ring a lot of different people to get to the right person'

'3 months recovery at home - social worker at hospital good but care did not materialise at home; had no care / reablement'

'Not good at first; problems with two staff members. One of whom was hanging around in the house when off shift and doing her personal washing at the property, asking for lifts etc.'

'Not happy with social workers. Can book an appointment easily but find it hard to get interpreters'

'The care coordinator does not attend appointments'

Conclusions:

From our analysis of the data collected and feedback received from local residents of Central Bedfordshire we can see that there are a number of issues relating to access to GP, Hospital and Social Care Services that require review and/or improvement.

In particular, issues were raised concerning how to access GP services by telephone or through an on-line booking system. The latter system is woefully under used and further investigation is needed to identify why this is. Clearly if more people were to use the on-line booking system this would free up the telephone line for those people who need to use this method to book an appointment or for emergency appointments.

Our analysis also shows a correlation between those who found it easy or difficult to make an appointment with their GP and their overall impression of the service received. It is clear from the research collected that those people who found it easy to make an appointment to see their GP, satisfaction levels with the treatment received was high whereas those who find it difficult to make an appointment, satisfaction levels were quite low. It is therefore within the interest of each practice to review their appointments system to improve the overall patient experience.

Similarly, it is no surprise that our research has shown that local residents are dissatisfied with waiting times in relation to their hospital experience although their overall satisfaction with the care received is very high. Hospital Trusts will need to make adjustments to their waiting times, or to the provision of information about alternate venues for treatment, to essentially improve the patient experience.

There is enormous value in listening and recording people's direct experience and although less people contributed to the questions in the survey relating to social care services, it remains just as important and essential a service. From the information collected, a high percentage of local residents were satisfied with care and support services received from the Local Authority although issues were raised concerning initial difficulties in accessing the care and support needed and further comments relating to care at home and how to contact a social worker. Clearly there are barriers to accessing social care services which may be improved by the provision of information, advice and guidance.

Finally, whilst the evidence collected by Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, spanning an eight month period, is by no means a comprehensive study of GP, Hospital and Social Care Services, this report does highlight areas of concern. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire would therefore like to see that our recommendations have been listened to and acted upon leading to an improvement in local resident's access to health and social care services.

Recommendations

Following the conclusion of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's research project to explore local resident's experience of access to health and social care services in their local area, we have made the following recommendations to help improve local resident's experience of GP, Hospital and Social Care Services provided across Central Bedfordshire, as follows:.

- 9) GP practices conduct research to identify use of their online booking system and the possible barriers to use.
- 10) GP practices to promote their online booking system and consider its future use for booking emergency appointments.
- 11) Practice Managers apply Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's research which indicates – 'Improving the patient's experience of how they make an appointment with their GP will potentially help to increase their overall satisfaction level of care provided'.
- 12) Hospital Trusts consider informing patients of the length of wait for treatment at the earliest opportunity and to advise if this is likely to fall outside the 18 week target, with clear options for treatment at another facility made available to the patient.
- 13) Hospital Trusts advise patients how to escalate their complaints if they are not satisfied with the response received and a response system instigated where hospitals inform their patients of the changes they have made (in response to complaints) in order to improve the level and quality of care.
- 14) Hospital services signpost patients to Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's website to comment and review the service received, which will help to inform local residents when deciding where to receive treatment, (Choose and Book).
- 15) The Local Authority improves access to information, advice and guidance concerning social care services and how they can be accessed.
- 16) Local resident's, accessing and known to social care services, be allocated one point of contact to discuss any issues or concerns relating to their social care needs.

Finally, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire recommend that additional research is carried out to determine why it is that the majority of people do not use the online booking system. HWCB would also recommend that all surgeries promote their online booking system and consider its future use for booking emergency appointments. Each surgery would benefit from more people booking online as this would ease pressure on telephone bookings.

Next Steps

This report and its recommendations are issued using the powers given to local Healthwatch and should be a useful tool for the following organisations in particular:

- Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG)
- NHS England
- Healthwatch England
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Bedford Hospital NHS Trust
- Luton and Dunstable University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

We will be asking each of them for feedback on the recommendations that affect them and what actions they plan to take. They must have regard to Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's report and recommendations and are required to respond to us explaining what action they will take, or why they are not taking action⁹.

Contact Details:

For further information about the content of this report or Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire please contact:

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Email: info@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk

Website: www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk

⁹ Department of Health April 2013 The arrangements to be made by Relevant Bodies in respect of Local Healthwatch Organisations Directions 2013 www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-healthwatch-organisations-directions-2013

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

For the majority of the questions you will be asked to put a tick ✓ in the box that best represents the answer you want to give. Some questions may require a longer answer. Please be aware that all your answers will be treated in the strictest of confidence and all data will be anonymised.

SECTION A – GP APPOINTMENTS

Question 1:

How easy have you found making an appointment to see your GP?



Easy



Acceptable



Difficult

If you have found it difficult please tell us why?

Question 2:

How do you normally make an appointment to see your GP?



Telephone



Online



Someone else makes the
appointment for me

Question 3:

Which GP surgery do you use:

Question 4:

Do you feel the GP listens to your concerns?



Mostly



Sometimes



Rarely

Question 5:

Do you feel the GP gives you enough information to make an informed decision regarding treatment?



Mostly



Sometimes



Rarely

If you have answered rarely what information would you like?

SECTION B HOSPITAL VISITS

Question 6:

Please give tell us what hospital service(s) you have accessed

Question 7:

How long did you wait for an appointment?

Question 8:

How satisfied with the service are you?



Very



Satisfied



Disappointed

If you are disappointed please tell us why:

SECTION C – SOCIAL CARE

Question 9:

Please give details of social care service accessed?

Question 10:

How easy did you find it to access the support you needed?

 **Easy**  **Acceptable**  **Difficult**

If you found it difficult to access support please tell us why:

Question 11:

How satisfied with the level of care are you?

 **Very**  **Satisfied**  **Disappointed**



If you feel disappointed please tell us why:

Question 12:






Please use this space to share with us your positive or negative experiences of health and social care in Central Bedfordshire

Lastly some information about you

What is your gender?

 **Male**  **Female**

What age are you?

 **18-25**  **26-39**  **40-59**  **60-75**  **76 +**

Which area of Bedfordshire do you live in, e.g., Biggleswade, Shefford?

If you would like to receive regular information about the work of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire or share your views with us in future please give us your email address:

**Thank you very much for taking part in this questionnaire.
Please hand in your form to one of the facilitators,
or send to:
Barbara Moran, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire,
Capability House, Wrest Park, Silsoe, Bedfordshire, MK45 4HR**