



Thornaby & Barwick Medical Group



# Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group

Enter and View Report

**Date of Enter and View:**

Monday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2016 and Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

**Practice Manager:**

Vanessa Counter

**Current Number of Patients Registered:**

21,798

**Practice Contact Details:**

Thornaby site

Address: Trenchard Avenue, Thornaby, TS17 0EE.

Contact number: 01642 762921

Ingleby Barwick site

Address: Lowfields Avenue, Ingleby Barwick, TS17 0RJ.

Contact number: 01642 766505

<b>Number of GPs</b>	10
<b>Number of Nurses</b>	4
<b>Number of Healthcare Assistants</b>	2
<b>Number of Receptionists</b>	12

<b>Opening Hours</b>	
<b>Thornaby site</b>	<b>Ingleby Barwick site</b>
Weekdays: 8:00am - 6:00pm	Weekdays: 8:00am - 12:30pm 1:30pm - 6:00pm
Tuesday: Closed between 12:30pm - 1:30pm	Closed between 12:30 - 1:30pm
The practice is closed on a Saturday and Sunday.	The practice is closed on a Saturday and Sunday

## Services Provided / Specialised Clinics:

General medical services  
Maternity services ante-natal and post-natal care  
Child health surveillance  
Childhood Immunisations  
Heart disease management and healthy heart checks  
Diabetes management  
Health/well person checks  
Travel vaccinations and advice  
Rheumatology management  
Contraception and sexual health, including IUD and implant procedures  
Minor Surgery (Thornaby clinic only)  
Asthma management  
Stopping smoking advice  
Weight management  
Support and information for carers

## Introduction

### Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees



Local Healthwatches have been set up across England to create a strong, independent consumer champion with the aim to:

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

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees works with local people, patients, service users, carers, community groups, organisations, service providers and commissioners to get the best out of local health and social care services. This doesn't just mean improving services today but influencing and shaping services to meet the needs of the local communities tomorrow.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees is steered by a Board of volunteers, commissioned by the Local Authority and accountable to the public. Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees are the only non-statutory body whose sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak-out on their behalf.

Healthwatch has:

- The statutory right to be listened to; Providers and commissioners must respond to Healthwatch within 20 days of submission of requests for information or reports.
- The statutory power to Enter & View publicly funded health and social care services.
- A statutory seat on the Health and Wellbeing Board.

What is Enter & View?

Part of the local Healthwatch programme is to carry out Enter & View visits. Enter & View visits are conducted by a small team of trained volunteers, who are prepared as 'Authorised Representatives' to conduct visits to health and social care premises to find out how they are being run and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement or capture best practice which can be shared.

Enter & View is the opportunity for Local Healthwatch's to:

- Enter publicly funded health and social care premises to see and hear first-hand experiences about the service.
- Observe how the service is delivered, often by using a themed approach.
- Collect the views of service users (patients and residents) at the point of service delivery.
- Collect the views of carers and relatives.
- Observe the nature and quality of services.
- Collect evidence-based feedback.
- Report to providers, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Local Authorities, Commissioners, Healthwatch England and other relevant partners.

Enter & View visits are carried out as 'announced visits' where arrangements are made between the Healthwatch team and the service provider, or if certain circumstances dictate, an 'unannounced' visit can take place.

Enter & View visits are carried out if people tell us there is a problem with a service but, equally, they can occur when services have a good reputation - so we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first hand.

## Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group

Thornaby & Barwick Medical Group is currently an eight Partner (five male and three female) PMS (Personal Medical Services) practice based on two sites. The practice also has one male and two female salaried GPs working at the practice.

The main surgery in the centre of Thornaby is a purpose built development which opened in November 2003 and was a joint venture with a neighbouring practice. The second surgery also occupies purpose built premises in Ingleby Barwick, a greenfield development near to Thornaby.

The practice serves Thornaby, Ingleby Barwick and Maltby and has a long tradition of providing healthcare in the area for over 60 years. The list size is currently in excess of 21,400 patients, with almost 10,000 of these in Ingleby Barwick.



## Rationale and Purpose of the Visit \*Text in pink are actual quotes from patients and staff.

Following recent public engagement, Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees have gathered information from members of the public and have been made aware of several issues regarding patient experience of the GP Practice, Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group.

Some of the information which was received by Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees included complaints about 'waiting times to get an appointment'. There was also a dissatisfied patient who explained to Healthwatch that they had been referred to hospital following an appointment with the nurse however, 3 months after this appointment the patient had 'not heard anything' and hadn't felt supported.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees also received a comment from a patient at the surgery explaining that they had been issued with the incorrect medication. The patient explained that this was not the first occasion that this has happened. Another patient also received poor service from the surgery after a failure in diagnosis of a certain condition resulted in it being too late to offer treatment once eventually diagnosed.

Further complaints received included another patient who regularly attends Thornaby Medical Group who was frustrated about 'the length of waiting times to be seen by the nurse - which can be up to one hour'. This particular patient also explained that they have often walked out of the surgery without attending his appointment due to this reason. Further dissatisfaction was brought to Healthwatch's attention regarding waiting times with more feedback received explaining 'waiting times are 2 or 3 weeks when I try to get an appointment' and 'people have to wait far too long for an appointment'. One patient rang the surgery to make an appointment but they 'could not offer an appointment [for] 3 weeks for her preferred GP and 2 weeks for another GP' when the patient was hoping for one within 48 hours. When he was then advised to ring 'very early' each morning to get an emergency appointment. In addition to this, one member of the public also explained how 'you always see a different GP when you visit - there is no continual of care with the same GP'.

Following a survey distributed through the Citizens Advice Bureau collecting patient views and experiences of local health and social care services in the area. 5 members of the public filled in this questionnaire who are registered with Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group and stated that they were either 'unsatisfied' or 'very unsatisfied' with the service provided by the GP practice.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees gathered this information via community drop-in sessions, the information and signposting service and Stockton Citizens Advice Bureau Questionnaire.

### Aim:

- To carry out an Enter and View to gather further patient and staff feedback regarding access to services at Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group to determine if any recommendations can be made to improve patient experience.

### Objectives:

- Arrange a meeting with the Practice Manager to gather background information about Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group.
- Carry out an Enter and View at both sites; Thornaby and Ingleby Barwick
- Analyse results to determine issues arising and common themes.
- Feedback information gathered to Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group with suggested recommendations to help improve patient experience.

### Methodology

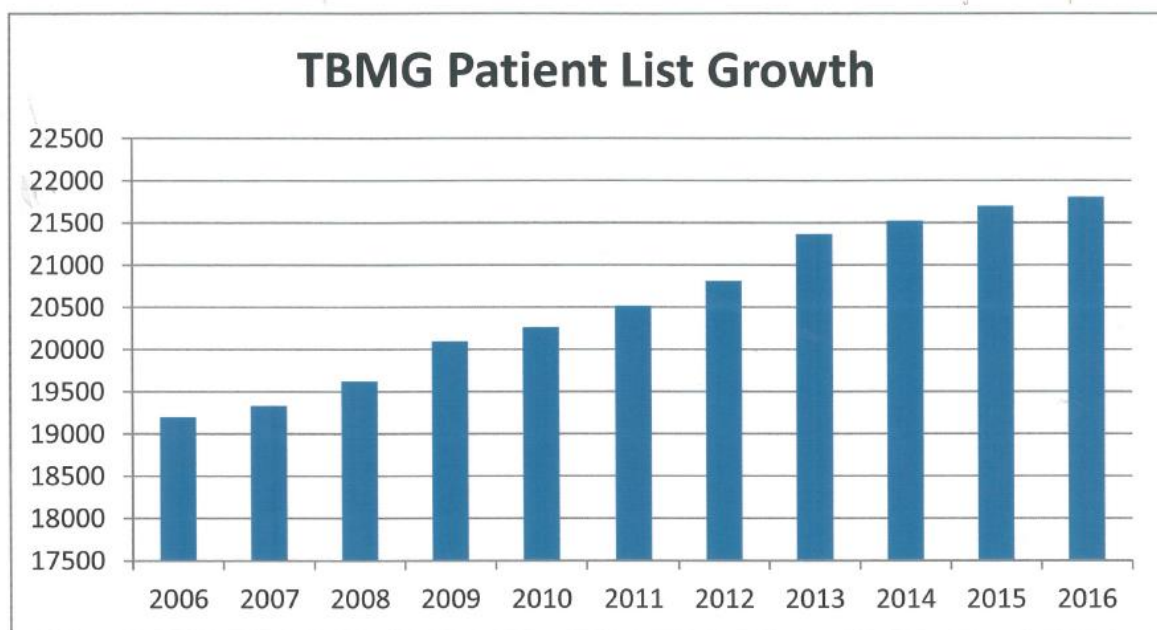
Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees planned an 'announced visit' at Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group. Before the visit was carried out, Healthwatch contacted the Practice Manager informing them of the date and time of the planned visit. Healthwatch also arranged a meeting with the Practice Manager to discuss reasons why an Enter and View had been planned which gave them the opportunity to provide background information about patient access to appointments and recent changes to the practice which could have impacted on service provision.

In preparation for the visit, Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees designed a structure for the visit and a questionnaire to complete with staff and patients at the practice. A copy of these questionnaires can be found in the Appendix.

## Results

### Feedback from Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees' meeting with Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group Practice Manager

The meeting with the Practice Manager made Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees aware of issues which the Medical Practice are currently experiencing. Thornaby and Barwick Medical Practice currently has a General Medical Services (GMS) contract which is the contract between general practices and NHS England for delivering primary care services to local communities (GMS Employers, 2016). The funding provided to the practice is for an average of 19,500 patients when the practice currently has 21,807 patients registered, which is rapidly increasing due to new housing developments in Thornaby and Ingleby Barwick. Please see Graph 1 below for the practice's list growth.



Graph 1: A Graph to show Thornaby and Barwick Patient List Growth since 2006 to present (2016).

The practice has also had five of its senior GP's retire over the last two years, along with two salaried GP's who have relocated out of the area. This, along with difficulties in recruiting replacement doctors has put the practice in a position where a Humanitarian GP has been recruited. This GP has been allocated to the practice for a period of 18 months as a means to assist the practice in service provision. The GP's working at Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group also swap between the two sites as a matter of preference.

The practice has a high number of patients who do not attend (DNA) their appointments. In the month of November (2015), a total of 499 appointments were booked but not attended. This issue is a regular occurrence, wasting appointments and time. In 2015, 5,605 appointments were booked but the patients DNA highlighting this to be a major issue for the practice.

Thornaby and Barwick Medical Practice also have a higher than average number of children registered. In addition to this, the schools in Ingleby Barwick request that all children who have been off school ill must visit their GP before they can return back to school.

To help to try to accommodate for the high volume of calls which the practice receives, extra phone lines were installed approximately one year ago. Thornaby site now has 6 lines (previously had 3) and Ingleby Barwick site also now has 6 lines (previously had 2). The practice also has an online booking system which only 2000-3000 out of the 21,500 patients registered currently use.

### Patient Questionnaire

A total of 169 patient questionnaires were completed, 95 of which were from the Ingleby Barwick site and 74 from the Thornaby site. When asked, 121 patients were attending for a non-urgent appointment, 46 had an emergency appointment and 2 did not disclose.

When the patients were asked how easy they found it to make an appointment at the practice, the feedback ranged from 'very easy' to 'very difficult'. The results of this can be found in Graph 2 below.

Table 1 below shows the feedback gathered from the questionnaire when patients were asked how long they had to wait for their appointment when it was booked.

Length of wait	Number of Responses
Booked today	23
1-2 days	38
3-7 days	19
7-10 days	19
10 days - 2 weeks	30
3 weeks	21
4 weeks +	5

Table 1 - Feedback from questionnaire when patients were asked how long they had to wait for their appointment.

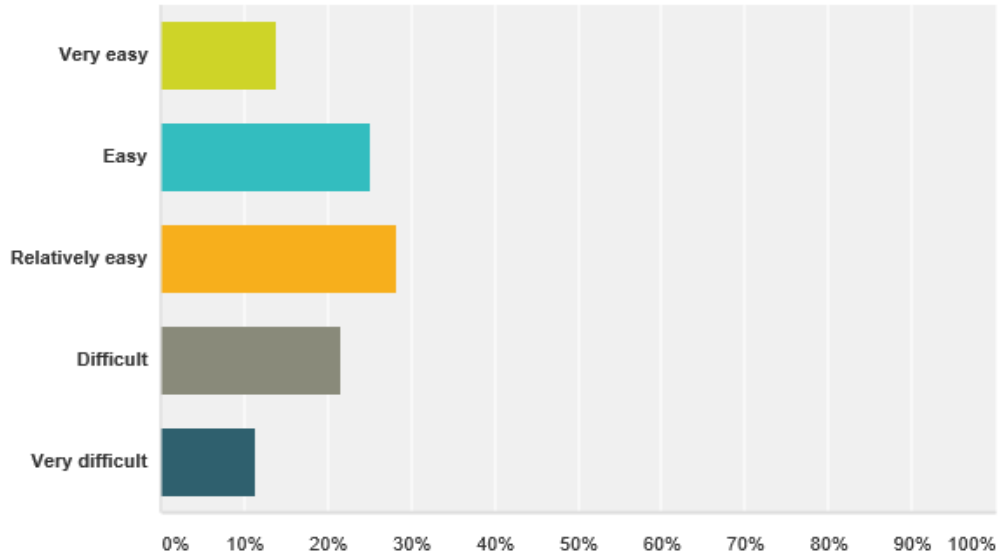
The questionnaire also asked if the patients had asked to see a preferred doctor, either the doctor they are registered to or a male / female doctor. Feedback from this found that 48 patients said 'yes' and 113 responded 'no' and were happy to see any doctor which was available.

The patients were also asked if they felt their preferences were met, 109 of which said 'yes' and 39 said 'no'.



**How easy was it to make an appointment at the practice?**

Answered: 167 Skipped: 2



Answer Choices	Responses
Very easy	13.77% 23
Easy	25.15% 42
Relatively easy	28.14% 47
Difficult	21.56% 36
Very difficult	11.38% 19
Total	167

**Graph 2: Patient responses when asked how easy they found it to make an appointment at the practice.**

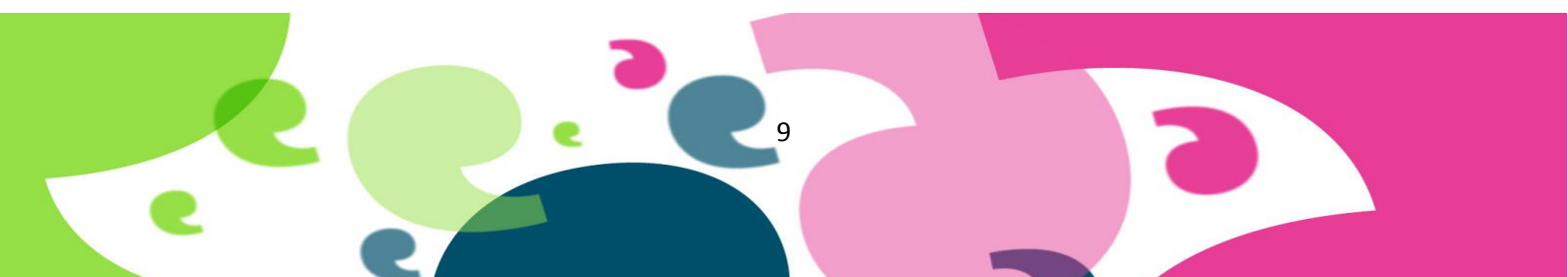
Patients were also asked if their GP preferences were met, and if not did this increase the waiting times to get an appointment. 75 patients responded ‘yes’ and 34 said ‘no’. Various additional comments were made with regards to this questions, some of which included;

‘Phoning same day is a nightmare can’t get through and no appointments once through’

‘very hard to make an appointment and the wait is sometimes quite long and you can’t get through on phone most of the time

‘Sit and wait for emergency app - easy to just come up - no chance of getting through on the phone’

‘My mother works full-time so struggles to get appointments out of work hours’



‘had to wait just over 3 weeks to speak to my preferred doctor’

‘Very poor with booking appointments. Can never get through on the phone line. Always have to come into practice’

‘Getting appropriate appt is impossible. I’ve had to lose pay to attend in the past. Use NHS 111 and Walk-in centres and A&E’

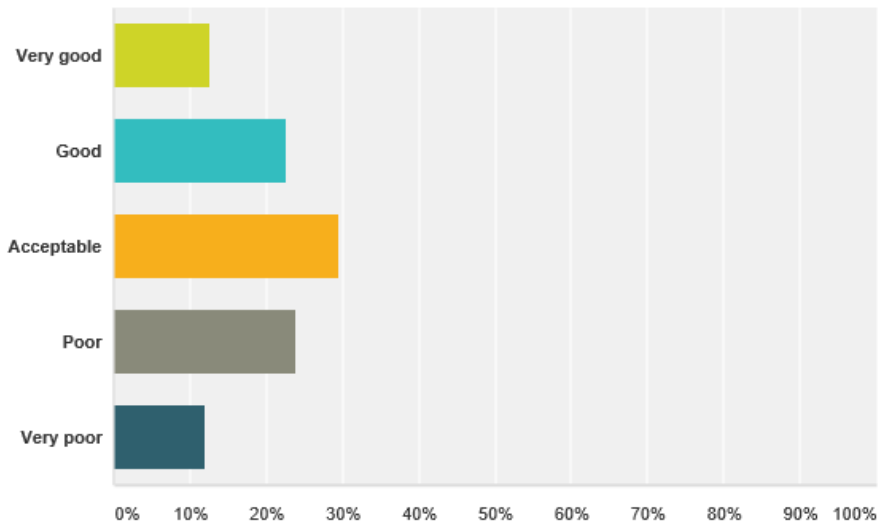
‘Very difficult to contact practice 1st thing on a morning and afternoon. Very often engaged, then all appointments gone for that day very often a longer wait’

Another question asked to patients included; Would you use the Accident and Emergency department or walk-in clinic if you couldn't get an appointment quickly enough? 129 patients said ‘yes’ they would and only 34 patients said ‘no’. Comments received from this question found that many patients had seen no other alternative other than to visit the walk-in centres or hospital when they have been unable to get an appointment at the practice.

The patients were asked to rate the practices system for booking appointments. Graph 3 shows the feedback received with responses varying from ‘very good’ to ‘very poor’.

### How would you rate the system for booking appointments?

Answered: 160 Skipped: 9



Answer Choices	Responses	
Very good	12.50%	20
Good	22.50%	36
Acceptable	29.38%	47
Poor	23.75%	38
Very poor	11.88%	19
Total		160

**Graph 3: Feedback from questionnaire when patients were asked to rate the booking system for appointments.**

The questionnaire also asked ‘When you attended for your appointment, how long did you wait to be seen by the GP?’ The results of this can be found below in table 2.

Waiting Times	Number of Responses
Within 5 minutes	23
Up to 15 minutes	50
15-30 minutes	16
30-45 minutes	3
45 minutes +	1

Table 2: Feedback from questionnaire when patients were asked how long the patients had to wait before being seen by the GP.

Table 3 below shows the responses received when asked the same question about waiting times to be seen from patients who were attending an appointment with the nurse, rather than the GP.

Waiting Times	Number of Responses
Within 5 minutes	21
Up to 15 minutes	25
15-30 minutes	2
30-45 minutes	0
45 minutes +	0

Table 3: Feedback from questionnaire when asked how long the patients had to wait before being seen by the nurse.

The questionnaire asked ‘Is there anything the practice could do to improve the appointment booking service or any additional information you would like to share with us about the practice?’ A number of comments were received in response to this question, just some of which included;

‘Need to be able to make appointments for children online not just myself’

‘Sometimes wait 4 weeks. Phoned yesterday to get an appointment for daughter and is in 4 weeks time. Cut the waiting time down. Children should be seen straight away’

‘query what actually is an emergency appointment instead of just giving them out’

‘Open extra reception window to reduce big queues Doctors/reception should inform clients if running late’

‘I do find it frustrating at time that the "emergency booking" on a daily basis is being utilised as a queue jumping system’

‘What do the elderly or disabled do if they can't get through?’

‘More appointments available. The wait can be too long if you really ill.’

‘More telephone receptionists as it can take some time to get through to make an appointment.’

‘More people answering telephone appointments’

‘Improve appointment slots available for on-line booking. First appointments I could get was 5 days later and it was cancelled when on the way to surgery and it took another 4 days for another acceptable slot.’

‘Allow calls to be taken via an assisted call centre/allow voicemail facility to return calls - difficult trying to make an appointment in surgery opening hours as I start work at 8:30’

‘Answer phones!’

‘Answer telephone quicker on a morning’

‘Booking systems needs to improve’

‘The online prescription ordering can be a bit hit and miss. There should be a line for ordering repeat prescriptions order the phone it is annoying to have to come in to do it.’

‘Offer appointments Saturday out of working times i.e. late nights for those who work’

‘Usually very good with baby and emergency apt’

‘They do the best they can with the tools they have got’

‘Always perfect, thank you for your awesome service’

‘I am fine with service never had a problem’

‘I am happy’

‘I’ve only been with the practice for 2 years but have found them to be efficient for most of the time.’

‘Friendly receptionists and the doctors are brilliant’

Patients also commented on Dr Yathan; ‘Dr Yathan - is lovely, 1st time I've had a decent doctor’

‘Junior Dr Yatham Elizabeth Rayner (not supervised) Best ever seen/marvellous/really good’

## TBMG Staff Questionnaire

### Feedback from the Receptionists

A questionnaire was given to all the receptionists who work at both sites (Please see Appendix 3). The questionnaire aimed to gather information with regards to the process for booking appointments, the phone lines and answer phone, requests for GPs and waiting times for appointments.

The information gathered found that patients can book a routine appointment with a GP or nurse up to three weeks in advance. Same day routine appointments are released Monday to Friday at 8:30am and 1:30pm. Emergency appointments are also released each day when all the routine appointments have been taken. Patients can either phone, call in to the surgery or book an appointment via the online booking system. In the case of an emergency, if no appointments are available that day then the patient can go to the surgery within the next 30 minutes following the phone call to sit and wait for the next available appointment.

The answer machine has a number of pre-recorded messages which are used throughout the day depending on the time of day and needs of the surgery. This consists of a daytime message, dinner or short of staff message and a night/weekend message.

When asked if certain GP's get more requests for appointments, the feedback from the receptionists explained that quite often patients will request to see a particular GP but the receptionists will try to manage this by offering telephone appointments if all the routine and emergency appointments for the GP have all been booked. Patients are also encouraged to book appointments in advance when possible if they would like to request a particular GP.

Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group have nurses with specified job roles e.g. blood pressure checks / smears etc. and there tends to be better availability for nurse appointments than GPs.

However, if a patient needs to obtain a prescription then this would need to be done by a GP as there are no nurses who can prescribe medication.

Healthwatch staff asked the receptionists how they make the appointment booking system accessible for people with additional needs. The response received included the option for patients to book online, over the phone or face to face by coming into the practice. Alternatively there is the option to give consent for the practice to speak to relatives/carers. Interpreters can also be provided to those with difficulty hearing and there is also a text messaging service available.

Raising the question regarding how waiting times for appointments can be reduced, responses received from the receptionists included;

- Recruiting more GPs to cope with expanding patient list,
- Using a triaging system when patients ask for an appointment (particularly for those requesting emergency appointments),
- Educating patients about under which circumstances an emergency appointment can be requested and the need to cancel appointments which are no longer needed to free them up for others who need them,
- Open appointments at different times of the day e.g. 3 times a day for those who are unable to ring at 8:30am or 1:30pm due to work or other commitments,
- For the practice to be more strict on patients who do not attend their appointments,
- Not holding back as many 'same day' appointments,
- Improving the online booking system.

### Feedback from the GPs

A total of 5 GP's filled in Healthwatch's questionnaire (Please see Appendix 2), all of which were aware of the various ways in which patients can make a routine or emergency appointment at the practice. Only one suggestion was made by the GP's on how waiting times for appointments could be reduced which was to encourage patients to attend booked appointments or cancel if they are unable to attend.

The questionnaire also asked if the GP's had experienced a more efficient appointment booking system whilst working in another practice. Responses included; similar trends for booking appointments can be found locally and one particular GP said that they are yet to see or hear of a surgery (like TBMG) which is used like a walk-in where patients can come in, sit and wait to be seen.

### Healthwatch Observations

During the Enter and View visit, Healthwatch made numerous observations at both Ingelby Barwick (IB) and Thornaby (T) Site.

Observation	Yes	No	Comments
Wheelchair / Pushchair accessible?	x		A push button for easy access to the waiting areas is not available.
Electronic self check-in in waiting room?	x		
Is there confidentiality / privacy at reception?	X (IB)	X (T)	The set-out of the seating area at the Thornaby site does not provide appropriate confidentiality and privacy due to the close proximity of the seats and reception desk.
Are reception staff approachable and friendly	x		
Is there a call system for appointments?	x		
Is online booking advertised?	x		
Is the waiting room child friendly?	x		
Are there clear notice boards with up to date information?	x		Health promotions and patient information is displayed on a TV screen at both practice sites.
Are translation services available? Are they advertised?	x	x	Translation services are not advertised but are available.
Is there a comments / complaints box?	X (IB)	X (T)	A box is located on reception at the Ingleby site and a visible notice is positioned at the entrance to the waiting room. Thornaby do not have a visible box, a notice advertising the complaints procedure is not visible to waiting patients due to the location of the notice board.
Is there a Patient Participation Group? Is this advertised?	x		Thornaby advertise this on a notice board which isn't visible to waiting patients due to the location of the board. Ingleby advertise this on the information TV screen.

Are the names and photographs of the GP / Nurses / Reception staff displayed?		x	The names of the GP's are displayed at both sites.
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### Ingelby Barwick Site- 25/01/2016

Healthwatch staff arrived on the Ingelby Barwick site and walked in to a clean, bright waiting area. There were four receptionists working that day, all of whom had started at 8am. The TV in the waiting room was turned on with a message board showing a slide show of information including; community news, a Public Health notice, information about alcohol consumption and help to quit smoking.

Initial observations found that the information displayed regarding opening times of the practice were incorrect as it stated that the practice is open 9am-1pm on a Saturday when the practice is actually closed and does not have weekend opening hours. It is only during the winter months when booked appointments for a flu clinic can be made on a Saturday (for approximately 6 Saturdays of the year).

Healthwatch staff were informed that the practice uses System 1 for booking appointments, where by embargo appointment slots are released at 8:30am and then there is a staggered opening of these which is a template on the system which is inputted by one member of administration staff at the Thornaby site. Additional appointments are released at 1:30pm which in theory should be only offered to patients who state they require an emergency appointment. The GPs decide on how their appointments are arranged and times when their diary needs to be blocked out to allow them to catch up with appointments that have ran over, home visits or paper work e.g. signing prescriptions. The appointment booking system is run on a 4 week advanced rota, which is released every Friday. Each GP in the practice has a certain responsibility including organising the rota or managing child protection.

One GP phoned in sick that morning meaning the receptionist had to rearrange their clinic for the day and block the rest of the week as a precaution. Healthwatch staff were informed that there were 18 face to face appointments and 4 telephone appointments per GP that day. The phone lines opened to release 29 appointments at 8:30am that day and by 8:38am, all the appointments released had been booked and there was still 6 people waiting in a queue on the phone. When the appointments were released at 1:30pm, all had been booked by 1:39pm after which the phone continued to ring and one patient was offered an appointment at the Thornaby site. On one occasion the phone was ringing, there was a patient waiting at the front desk and there was no staff on reception to deal with this.

Staff observed that when a patient phones the practice to make an appointment, the receptionist staff do not triage the patient by asking their reason for booking an appointment that day, a member of staff explained that as the receptionist staff are not clinically trained therefore are unable to assess for priority of patients.

If all the appointments have been booked and a patient calls and states that they need to be seen as an emergency then the practice allows for the patients to come into the surgery to sit and wait to be seen. This is on the condition that they can arrive within 30 minutes of the call and before 11:15am in the morning or 5:15pm at night depending on what time they have phoned the practice. Patients are told that if they wish to do this, they will be seen by a GP within 45 minutes.

The morning and afternoon surgery is then extended to allow for those who have come to the surgery to sit and wait to be seen as the practice does not encourage patients to go to a walk-in centre or Accident and Emergency.

Healthwatch observed that a high percentage of patients walking into the surgery were for prescription services, taking up a lot of the receptionists time and quite often resulting in a queue at the front desk.

On the particular day that Healthwatch carried out the Enter and View, one GP had 4 patients by 9:47am who had booked appointments but did not attend the surgery, one of which had an interpreter booked who was sat waiting for the patient to arrive.

The phone system allows for patients to be put in a queue which can be costly for those who use their mobile phone to ring the practice and there is no option for a patient to leave a message e.g. to cancel an appointment. One observation made by Healthwatch staff found that the phone was ringing for a long period of time even when there is nobody waiting to be seen at the reception desk. This happened on more than one occasion and there appeared to be no matter of urgency to answer the phone. In addition to this, during busy times of the day e.g. 8:30am and 1:30pm when appointments are released there was only 1 receptionist on the front desk which resulted in a queue of 6/7 people waiting to be dealt with. It was also observed that while the receptionist staff were sat at the computers, the phone would ring and would be left unanswered.

The practice also has a self check-in service which didn't appear to be very well used on the day of the visit. Another observation made was that there was no clock in the waiting room, although there was one on the TV, this was intermittent and patients often relied on their phone to check the time.

Healthwatch staff found that all patients were seen within 15 minutes which was stated in the TV aside from those who did not have an appointment and had come to the surgery to sit and wait to be seen. In addition to this, the practice were flexible to allow for a patient who was pregnant to be seen even though she had arrived after the cut off time of 11:15am highlighting that they are accommodating under certain circumstances.

The Healthwatch staff had a few discussions with patients and staff who were at the surgery that day. One patient stated 'I have complained 3 times to the Practice Manager and had no response'. Another patient had arrived at the surgery with their baby who was 16 weeks old to have their 12 week injections as they could not get an appointment any sooner.



Upon speaking to a member of staff, some feedback received was they felt that the system for booking appointments could be improved with suggestions of a triaging system. It was also felt that the system does not currently accommodate for patients who work.

### Thornaby Site - 28/01/16

Healthwatch staff arrived at the Thornaby site and walked into a bright, clean waiting area. Working at the practice that day was 7 x GPs, 2 x Nurses, 1 x Healthwatch Assistant and 8 x Receptionists. The Thornaby practice also has an 'on call' doctor who deals with emergency visits. Healthwatch staff found all the practice staff to be very approachable and happy to answer any questions for both Healthwatch staff and patients.

Healthwatch staff observed that the self check-in system was well used by patients attending the surgery on the morning but was used less frequently later on in the day. There were 2 receptionists on the front desk but there is also a shutter above the desks which can be pulled down to close one of the reception desks during quiet periods. When calls are received, they are usually answered in the office at the back of reception.

In the waiting area there does not appear to be any toys for children to play with which you would usually find in a surgery waiting area. However, when questioned this was due to lack of room and the need to consider health and safety requirements.

On the day of the Enter and View visit, there were 6 people waiting to be seen for their appointments at 8:27am, 3 of which were quickly called in within 5 minutes or arriving. By 10:00am that morning, 10 patients had not attended their booked appointments highlighting this to be a major issue at both sites.

When questioned about how the practice handle patients who do not attend (DNA) appointments, the procedure is as follows: If there have been 3 DNA's, the patient will receive a warning letter, after a 4<sup>th</sup> DNA another letter is sent and if the patient fails to attend for a 5<sup>th</sup> time then the patient will be taken off the practices list and will need to find another surgery to register with.

After lunchtime, there were 5 people sat in the waiting room for the next set of emergency appointments to be released at 1:30pm. By 1:25pm there were 7 people waiting in the surgery. Speaking to a member of staff, Healthwatch were informed that the appointments will all be booked in less than 5 minutes of them being released.

The Thornaby site also allows for patients to come into the surgery to sit and wait to be seen if all the appointments have been taken up that day, however the cut off for patients to come to the practice at Thornaby is 6pm. Healthwatch questioned staff about if 5 people came into the surgery at 5:55pm, would they all be seen? The response received was yes, all will be seen even if it means the GP working that night finished late.

## References

- TBMG website: <http://www.tbmg.nhs.uk/>
- GMS Contract: <http://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/primary-care-contacts/general-medical-services>

## Recommendations

Following the Enter and View visit, Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees have made the following recommendations for the practice to take into consideration.

1. Healthwatch would like to suggest that the practice considers trialling a triage system for the receptionists to use when booking appointments. This would ensure emergency appointments are booked appropriately and patients can be prioritised.
2. Healthwatch recommend patients are made aware of the process for booking appointments with a written leaflet which describes the process. This written information could also include advising patients to ring within a 2 hour window for repeat prescriptions. The online booking system also needs to be better advertised to encourage more patients to use this as an alternative to phoning the surgery.
3. The phone system would benefit from being changed so that when a patient phones the surgery they will be directed to the appropriate department e.g. press 1 to book an appointment, press 2 to order a prescription, press 3 to cancel your appointment. Installing an answer phone would allow patients to leave a message and wait for a member of staff to get back to them instead of trying to ring the surgery numerous times without getting through. This would also enable patients to cancel appointments who currently can't get through on the phone, reducing the number of DNA's and freeing up more appointment slots.
4. Encourage patients to use a pharmacy to order and collect their prescriptions rather than coming into the surgery or phoning to do this.
5. The practice is advised to set up a meeting with the local schools to discuss the need for parents to take their child to see their GP before returning to school if they have been off ill. Healthwatch recommend that the GP's challenge this request for a return to school note.
6. To consider a late night or Saturday morning opening to accommodate for patient who work and are unable to attend during the usual opening hours.

7. The surgery should advertise local pharmacy services in the practice and on the website to educate patients about the services and advice they can offer e.g. medicines advice / headlice treatment etc.
- 8 Healthwatch recommend a text service appointment reminder system is adopted, to reduce DNA's and encourage patients to cancel the appointment if it is not needed.
- 9 The practice is advised to consider reducing the number of DNA appointments a patient can have before they are removed from the practice register, Healthwatch suggest from 5 missed appointments to 3.
- 10 Healthwatch recommend the practice review the appointment of a Nurse Practitioner or the role of the Practice Nurses in order that the GP's have increased support.

### Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees would like to thank all staff at Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group who were extremely accommodating, professional and cooperative during our visits.

Healthwatch would also like to thank the patients, their family, friends or carers who gave their time to provide information about their experiences of Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group.

### Service providers response

*'We would like to thank our patients for discussing their views with the staff of HealthWatch Stockton, on their recent visit to the practice. We hope that the review of our patient services along with the views of the service users, assures patients that we do wish to hear their views and that our doctors and staff always do strive to provide the highest level of healthcare that we are able, within the funding limits as provided to us by NHS England. Given the recent and on-going significant pressures placed upon NHS services as a whole, and which have been widely reported in the media, we hope to be able to meet the healthcare needs of our patients both now and into the future. The partners and staff will consider the recommendations made in the Healthwatch report and where there is an opportunity and funding support to enhance the services provided to patients, we will undertake to make developments to these areas and any further areas that are identified by the practices ongoing reviews'*

**Vanessa Counter**  
**Practice Manager, TBMG**

## Appendix

### Appendix 1 - Questionnaire for Patients

#### Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group - Patient Survey

We welcome any additional information on the service provided by this practice so please fill in the boxes if you would like to make additional comments.

1. What type of appointment are you attending today?

Non-urgent                      Emergency

2. How easy was it to make an appointment at the practice?

Very easy              Easy              Relatively easy              Difficult              Very difficult

3. How long did you wait for your appointment to visit the surgery?

Booked today      1-2 days      3-7 days      7-10 days      10days -2 weeks      3 weeks  
4 weeks or more

4. Did you ask to see your preferred doctor, or male / female doctor for example?      Yes      No

5. Are your preferences for appointments met?      Yes      No

6. If your needs are not met does this increase your wait to get an appointment?      Yes      No

Please provide additional information in the box below.

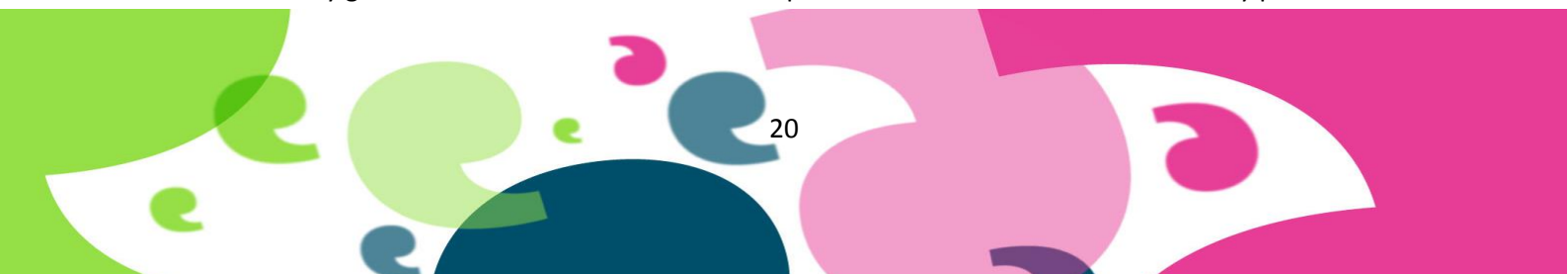
7. Would you use the Accident and Emergency department or the walk-in clinic if you couldn't get an appointment quickly enough?

Yes                              No

If you have answered yes, please indicate which service you would use .....

8. How would you rate the system for booking appointments?

Very good              Good              Acceptable              Poor              Very poor



9. When you attended for your appointment, how long did you wait to be seen by the GP?  
Please answer question 10 if you were seen by the Practice Nurse.

Within 5 minutes   Up to 15 minutes   15-30 minutes   30-45 minutes   45 + minutes

For on the day emergency appointments please state how long you have waited

10. When you attended for your appointment, how long did you have to wait to be seen by the Practice Nurse?

Within 5 minutes   Up to 15 minutes   15 – 30 minutes   30-45 minutes   45+ minutes

11. Is there anything the practice could do to improve the appointment booking service or any additional information you would like to share with us about the practice?

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees would like to thank you for taking the time to complete this survey, your feedback is very important to us and can help shape improvements in the services you use. If you wish to share more of your views and experiences of health and social care services in your area then please get in touch using the contact details below. If you would like to become a member of Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees and find out more about the work we do then please fill in a membership form. See a member of the team today or you can complete the form on our website

**Website:** [www.healthwatchstockton.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchstockton.co.uk)

**Email:** [healthwatchstockton@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchstockton@pcp.uk.net)

**General telephone:** 01642 688312

**Information & Signposting query:** 08081729559

**Post:** Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees, Catalyst House, 27 Yarm Road, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 3NJ

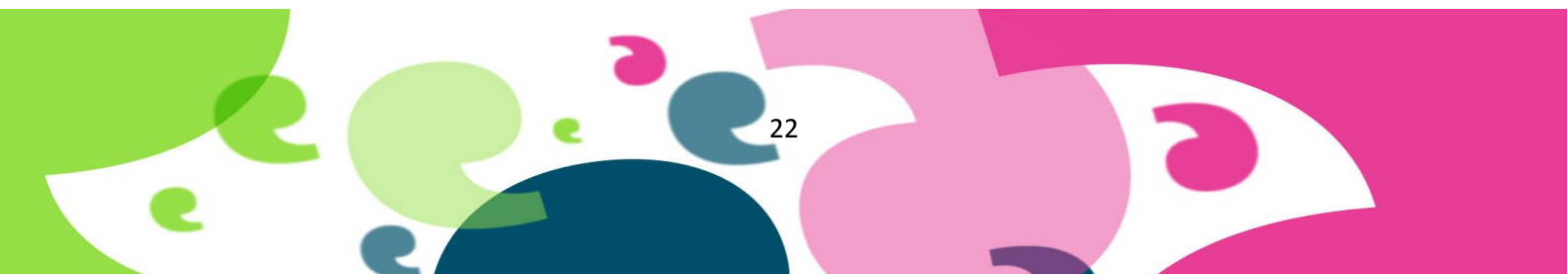
Appendix 2 - Questionnaire for Receptionist Staff

**Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group – Ingleby Barwick site - Receptionist Survey**

Please consider both non-urgent and emergency appointments when answering the questions.

1. What's the process for taking appointment bookings at the practice?

2. What happens if the lines are busy?



3. How is the answer machine managed?

4. Do any of the GP's get more requests for appointments and if so, how is this managed?

5. Is there a difference between the time a patient waits if they want to see a GP rather than a Practice Nurse? please give details.

6. How do you make the appointment system accessible for people with additional needs?

7. How do you think the waiting times can be reduced for patients making appointments to come to the surgery?

8. Once the patient is in the waiting room how long would they expect to wait before being called?

5 minutes    5 – 15 minutes    15 – 30 minutes    30 - 45 minutes    more than 45 minutes.

9. Is there anything the practice could do to improve the appointment booking service or any additional information you would like to share with us about the practice?

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees would like to thank you for taking the time to complete this survey, your feedback is very important to us and can help shape improvements in the services you receive.

If you wish to share more of your views and experiences of health and social care services in your area then please get in touch using the contact details below. If you would like to become a member of Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees and find out more about the work we do then please fill in a membership form. See a member of the team today or you can complete the form on our website.

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Appendix 3 - Questionnaire for GPs

**Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group**

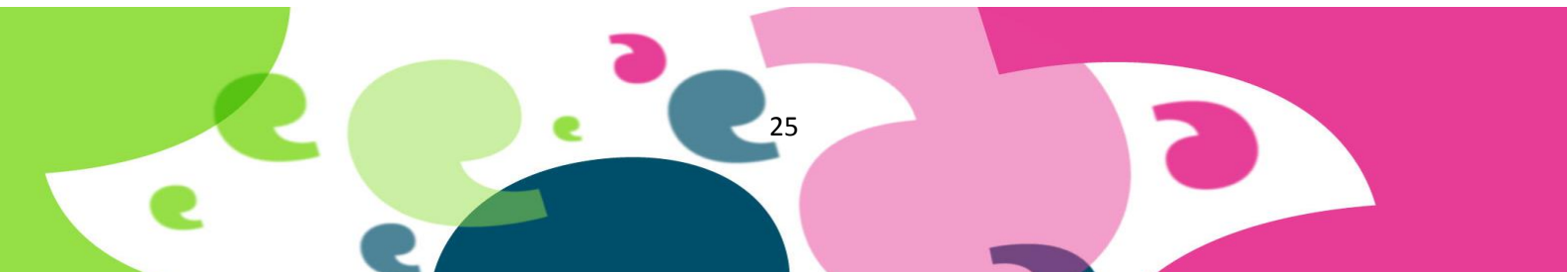
GP and Nurse Practitioner Survey

Please circle your current role at TBMG   GP   Nurse Practitioner   Other .....

1. Please explain the process for a patients making an appointment at the practice?

2. Do you have any suggestions for reducing waiting times for appointments?

3. Have you experienced a more efficient system for patients booking appointments while working in another practice? If yes, please provide details.



4. What is the process for dealing with emergency appointments?

5. When a patient is in the waiting room, how long would they expect to wait before being called for a non-urgent appointment?

5 minutes    5-15minutes    15 – 30 minutes    30 – 45 minutes    45 + minutes

6. Please add any additional information you would like to share about the practice below.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees would like to thank you for taking the time to complete this survey, your feedback is very important to us and can help shape improvements in the services you receive.

If you wish to share more of your views and experiences of health and social care services in your area then please get in touch using the contact details below. If you would like to become a member of Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees and find out more about the work we do then please fill in a membership form. See a member of the team today or you can complete the form on our website.

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