

# Registering with a GP

## *What identification is required to register with a practice in Southampton?*

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### **Background**

During a number of Healthwatch outreach sessions in 2015, individuals and groups raised with us the issue of not being able to register at GP practices due to not having the required photo ID and/or proof of address. People affected included homeless and former homeless people, young people, refugees and asylum seekers, people from Europe, women, older people – ultimately anyone without the required ID.

We worked tirelessly to establish the extent of the problem, who it affected and researched the reasons behind asking for ID. Working with health professionals, in particular the Wessex Local Medical Committee we highlighted the issue and sought change (Wessex Local Medical Committees (LMCs) is the only local statutory representative body for GPs and their Practices operating across the counties of Dorset, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Somerset, and Wiltshire). This included reaching an agreement with local GP surgeries not to turn people away who didn't have ID.

As this was a national issue, we took the matter to NHS England and other organisations including the Equalities and Human Rights Commission. With this effort new national guidance was put in place which now says:

*“...If a patient cannot produce any supportive documentation but states that they reside within the practice boundary then practices should accept the registration... [and that] a practice should not expect routinely expect a patient to present a photograph as this could be discriminatory.”* - [Patient Registration Standard Operating Principles for Primary Medical Care \(General Practice\) 27.11.15](#)

This updated guidance ensures that although GP practices are still able to request proof of identification and/or proof of address, they unable to deny registration to a patient who lacks any.

Following on from this work, Healthwatch Southampton is working with the other Healthwatches within the Wessex region (Healthwatch Portsmouth, Healthwatch Dorset, Healthwatch Hampshire and Healthwatch Isle of Wight) to co-produce a report that compiles each Local Healthwatch report into one report. This will be published through Wessex Voices.

### **What we did in brief**

Following on from this work, Healthwatch Southampton conducted a 'mystery shopper' exercise contacting GP practices (including branches and the Homeless Healthcare Team) in Southampton to ask what they required, if anything, from patients when registering. Our intention was to discover what practices had amended their registration policy to reflect the amended national guidance. Throughout November and December 2016 our Community Development Worker called each practice within SO14 - SO19 (including branches and the Homeless Healthcare Team) to enquire about registering with the practice. He first asked whether they required any proof of identification or address. If a practice confirmed that proof was required, he would state that he didn't have the required ID and ask whether he could still register with the practice.

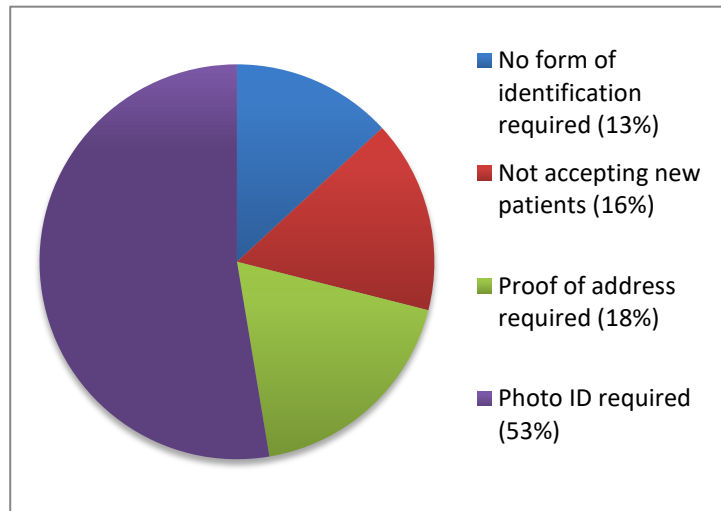
We also checked practice websites to see whether they asked for any proof of identification or address when registering.

## Findings

### Telephone

We phoned all 38 practices (which included branches and the Homeless Healthcare Team) within SO14-SO18 and asked whether any form of identification or proof of address was required to register. We found:

- 5 practices (13%) required no form of identification at all.
- 6 practices (16%) were not accepting new patients.
- 7 practices (18%) asked for proof of address.
- 20 practices (53%) asked for photo ID.



When prompted for photo ID and/or proof of address the mystery shopper said he didn't have any and asked what he should do. All 27 of these practices required some sort of identification or proof of address before a patient could be registered.

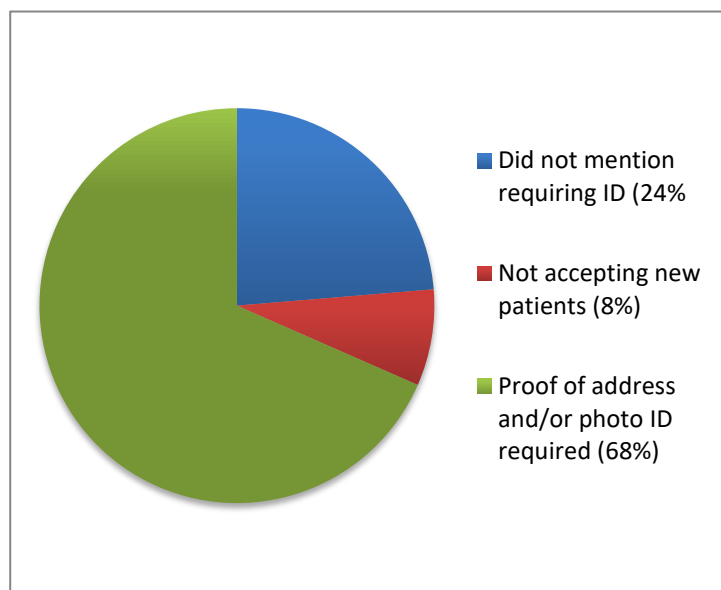
- 24 practices said an alternative (eg: birth certificate or utility bill) would suffice.
- 3 practices said you had to have photo ID

**In total 27 practices (71%) required some sort of identification (photo or proof of address) before a patient could be registered with them.**

### Website

We checked the literature on how to register on all 38 practices (which included branches and the Homeless Healthcare Team) within S014-S018 and found:

- 9 (24%) practice websites did not mention requiring any form of identification
- 3 (8%) practice websites stated that they were not taking on new patients
- 26 (68%) practice websites contained literature that specifically mentioned requiring photo ID and/or proof of address when registering with them. Only 1 of these practices (Chessell Practice) specifically mentioned contacting the Practice Manager if there was an issue providing identification when registering.



## Recommendations

Although Healthwatch Southampton was successful in advocating for a change in national guidance, it's evident that the majority of practices in Southampton are either not aware of the amendment in policy or have not implemented it.

When telephoning, 71% of practices required some sort of proof of identification or address before a patient could be registered. 68% of practice websites contain outdated content that mentions requiring proof of identification or address before a patient could be registered. Although practices are allowed to request proof of address and/or photo ID, all staff must be made aware that they should not refuse registration if a patient cannot or will not provide ID.

Healthwatch Southampton recommends that all practice staff including doctors and front-of-house staff need to receive training to reflect the amended national guidance that came into effect in November 2015 which states that:

*"...If a patient cannot produce any supportive documentation but states that they reside within the practice boundary then practices should accept the registration... [and that] a practice should not expect routinely expect a patient to present a photograph as this could be discriminatory."* - [Patient Registration Standard Operating Principles for Primary Medical Care \(General Practice\) 27.11.15](#)

We are concerned that by asking for identification some patients may be incorrectly assuming that it is compulsory to provide identification when it is not. This could result in vulnerable individuals being excluded from receiving the care that they are entitled to.

For this reason, we would recommend practices either adopt a policy of not asking for any identification at all or ensure all staff are adequately trained to explain to newly registering patients that identification is preferred but not essential. We would also recommend updating practice websites and print to reflect that although proof of identification and address may be preferred, it is not essential to registering.