

Are members of the public aware of the most appropriate service for their health needs?

-

A community research project

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PUBLISHED JUNE 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Having been retired for a few years I decided to complete the Community Research Training provided by Healthwatch Portsmouth. I felt this would complement my role on the committee of another community group where I had specific responsibility for gathering demographic information. Following completion of the training I met with the team and we agreed on my area of research.

BACKGROUND TO THIS RESEARCH

Healthwatch Portsmouth is an independent statutory body which gathers the views and experiences of local residents, enabling them to have an opportunity to provide input as to the health and social care services in their area.

Healthwatch engages with the local community and collects information through a variety of ways to ensure that those responsible for the planning, commissioning and provision all levels of service are made aware of the views and concerns that end users might voice.

Major changes are taking place for care services across the country as the Better Care Fund provides a new opportunity to integrate health and social care provision. This is happening in conjunction with many communities experiencing the reduction or closure of some local services.

Much press coverage had been made of various problems with long waiting times and overcrowding at the A&E department at Queen Alexandra Hospital which serves the population of the city of Portsmouth and surrounding areas. A variety of reasons had been put forward and these included:

- increased population;
- lack of beds due to bed-blocking;
- staff shortages;
- the closure of the Guildhall Walk-In Centre, based in the city centre;
- people deciding to travel to A&E rather than considering other providers.

Under the Care Act 2014, councils must have different services to meet different needs that focus on wellbeing and keeping people as healthy as possible. This includes -

- (a) Preventative measures to deal with problems before they start;
- (b) Providing access to information and advice so that people can choose the appropriate care and support for their needs;
- (c) Councils are also required to make sure that people have access to all the Services they need and ensuring that such services provided meet people's needs.

NHS Portsmouth Clinical Commissioning Group(CCG) in conjunction with SE Hants CCG and Fareham and Fareham and Gosport CCG carried out an intensive research programme during 2014-5 to compile a large amount of data which provided a

baseline of what people knew then about where to access NHS outlets depending on their medical needs.

Several outcomes came from this data collected. One result was the publication of a guide to everyday health services which has been widely circulated across the areas. This guide - [What to know and where to go](#) - provided excellent information in a professional and easy to read brochure. It explained the appropriate service to contact when medical help is required.

In September 2015 the document “A blueprint for Health & Care in Portsmouth” was published. One of the stated outcomes was that by 2020 Portsmouth people will:

- Have access to the right information and support about services available;
- Have access to simple, effective services when they have an urgent health, care or welfare need.

The current research project which Healthwatch Portsmouth has carried out is in part a follow-on study following on from the CCG project to see how successful areas of the initial research and publicity has been.

When devising the questionnaire, the topics covered were all drawn from information specified within the brochure.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

With so many changes being introduced, it was necessary to concentrate on one area only. In discussion with Patrick Fowler and Alison Nicholson at Healthwatch Portsmouth, it was decided to carry out a research project concentrating on how knowledgeable residents were regarding the appropriate agencies to use when suffering from a variety of illnesses.

There did not seem to be any previous data recorded and so it was hoped that a locally focused community research project would produce results which could be analysed and allow service providers to ensure that their services were tailored to the needs of communities and the city. This research also aimed to see if members of the public were aware of the most appropriate service for their health needs.

It was hoped that this project might test the knowledge and awareness of the most appropriate areas in which to obtain medical assistance to residents. This might then lead to fewer people using A&E and GPs as their first port of call for non-serious ailment or make a case for improving signposting to alternatives.

METHODOLOGY

With these major changes being introduced to health and social services across the country and ongoing challenges for local people to access *timely* GP and A&E/Hospital services, Healthwatch Portsmouth decided to set up a research project

in the city to understand at first hand where residents thought they should go for medical care or advice in certain circumstances.

A questionnaire was devised - see Appendix 1. This method was chosen as a relatively easy way to collect information from people which could then be used as quantitative data which could be analysed. Results could then be passed to the appropriate agencies.

METHOD USED - 20 health issues were chosen from the Portsmouth CCG urgent care guide.

<http://www.portsmouthccg.nhs.uk/Downloads/Urgent%20Care%20Guide%202016.pdf>

The respondents were then asked to tick against the option(s) they would choose from a list of five options as to where they would attend to get advice or medical care.

The health concerns chosen were:

Allergies	Cough lasting more than 3 weeks	Mental health worries	Skin conditions
Bites and Stings	Coughs and colds	Mild headache	Sore throat (under 2 wks)
Breathing difficulties	Cuts and grazes	Minor eye injury	Sprains, strains & muscle injuries
Broken Leg	Ear ache (lasting a few days)	Ongoing conditions	Tummy trouble
Chest Pains	Low back pain (under 12 wks)	Severe burn	Vaccinations & prescriptions.

The five locations to choose from were:

- 1 ACCIDENT & EMERGENCY
- 2 WALK-IN TREATMENT CENTRE
- 3 PHARMACY
- 4 GP
- 5 SELF-CARE

The 111 service was not included as this was felt to be an information and signposting service and therefore not directly providing care or treatment.

The forms were anonymous - the only information requested from responders was the age bracket into which they fell. This was included to see whether there was any correlation between age and replies.

The age categories were:

- A. Up to age 18
- B. Between 19 -25
- C. Between 26 - 40
- D. Between 41 - 64
- E. 65+

It was decided to find venues where there would be numbers of people receptive to completing the questionnaires. Permission was obtained from the organisers of each event. Alison Nicholson together with volunteers from Healthwatch gave valuable assistance at several of the venues.

The venues used were:

- Focus Groups through Learning Links
- Fratton Road Festival
- Milton Minor Injury Unit
- Carers Event at the Guildhall
- Queen Alexandra Hospital Open Day
- Milton Neighbourhood Forum
- Sunnyside Practice (two visits)
- Lake Road Practice (two visits)
- Devonshire Practice (two visits)
- Portsmouth College, Tangier Road

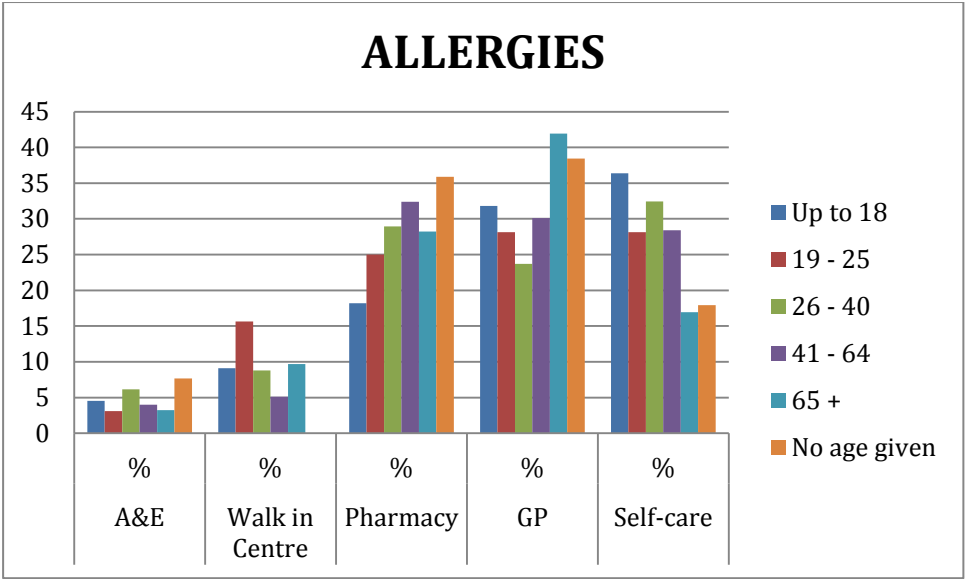
A total of 372 Questionnaires were completed.

The following should be considered when interpreting the results:

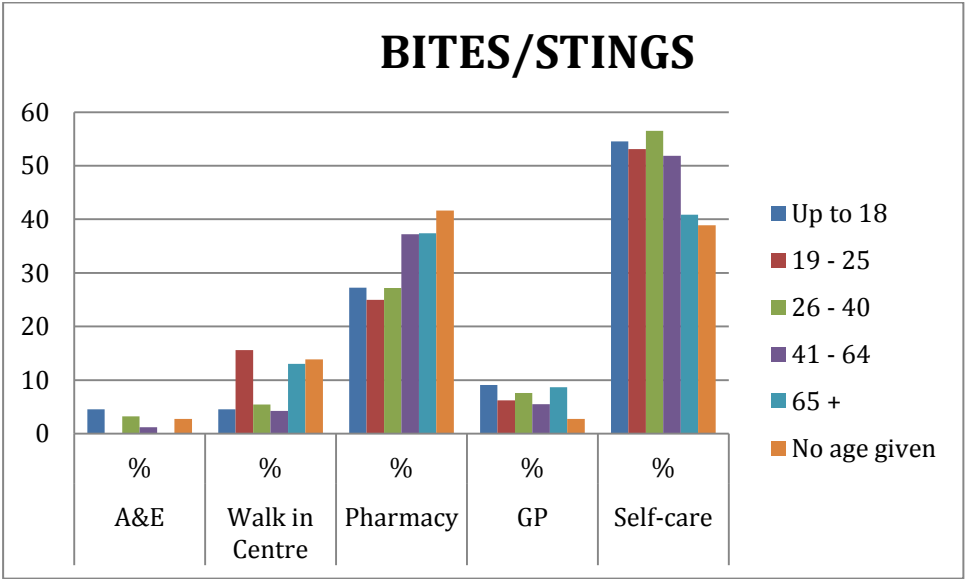
- 1 Some respondents ticked more than one answer.
- 2 Some did not complete the questionnaire.
- 3 A few people at health centres were called in for their appointments.
- 4 Some college students who were approached during their lunch breaks had to head off to lectures.
- 5 Some people would be registered at a surgery where emergency appointments can be made on the same day. Other surgeries do not have this facility so those respondents would have selected the Walk In Centre or other agencies.
- 6 Records were not kept of where each questionnaire was completed.

RESULTS

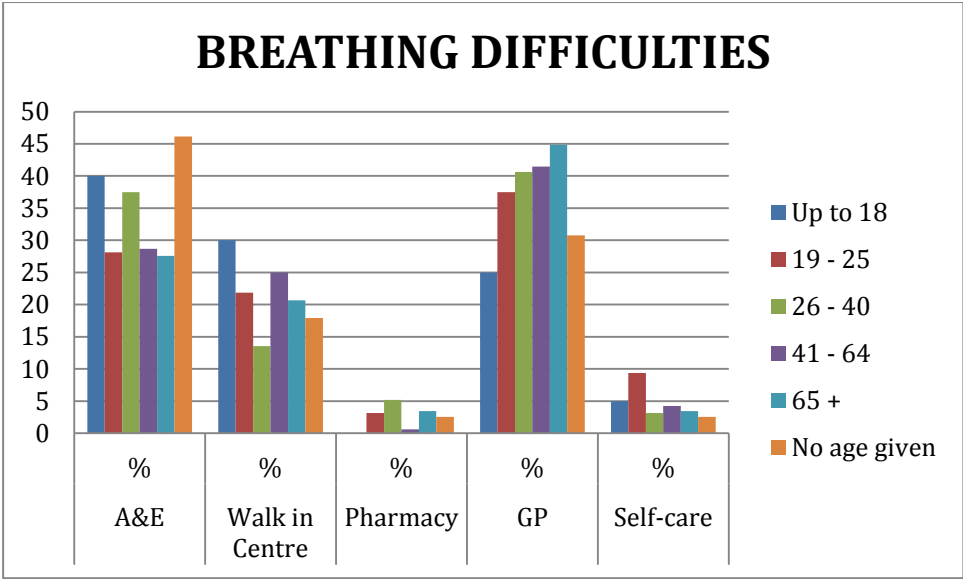
The following charts show the responses broken down by the respondents' age groups:



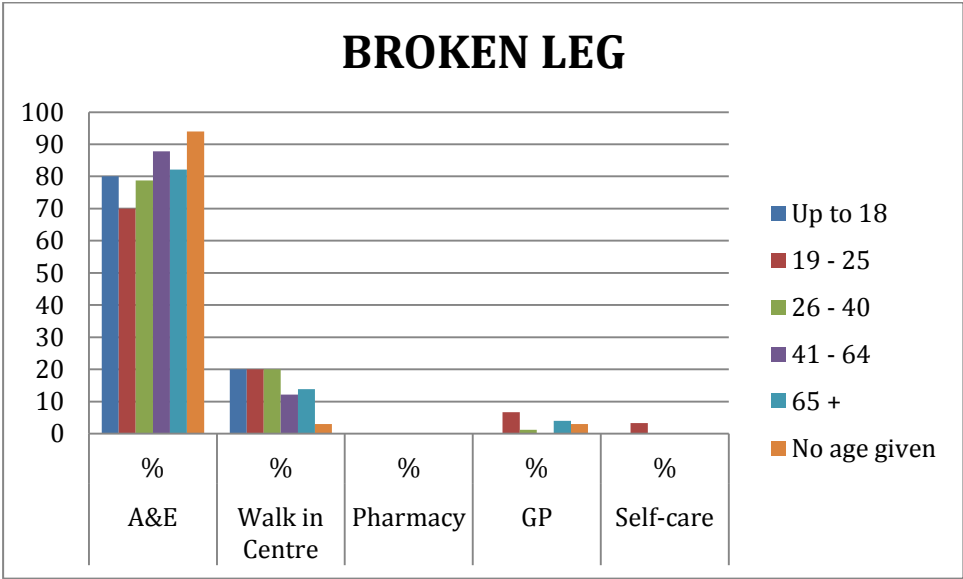
- 42% of over 65's would access GP services for advice with allergies compared to 24% of the 26-40 age group.



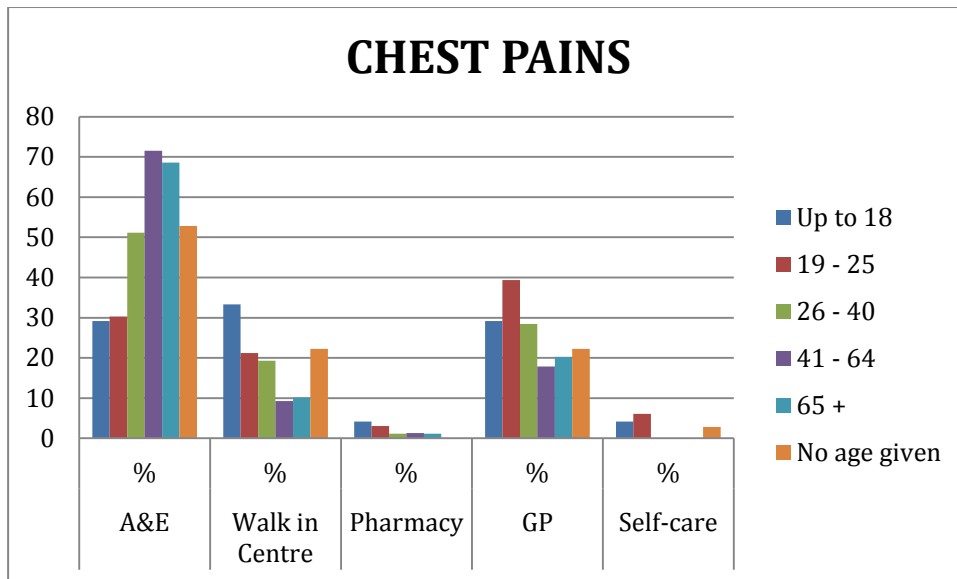
- Most people would use self-care or the pharmacy rather than the recommended walk in centre.



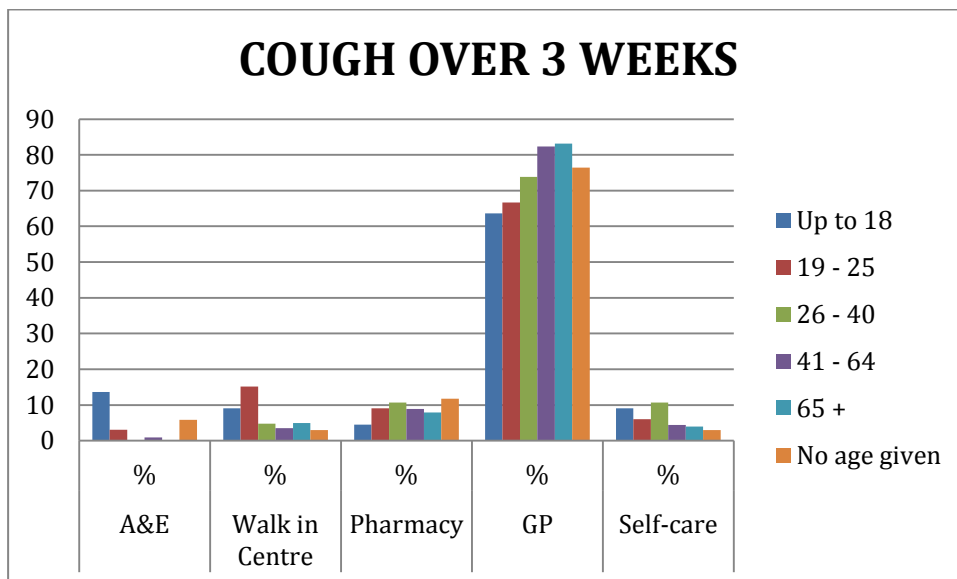
- The guidance states A&E is the recommended service for breathing difficulties however the findings show a high proportion would attend their GP or the walk-in centre.



- The majority of people would attend A&E for a broken leg rather than the recommend service which is the walk-in centre.

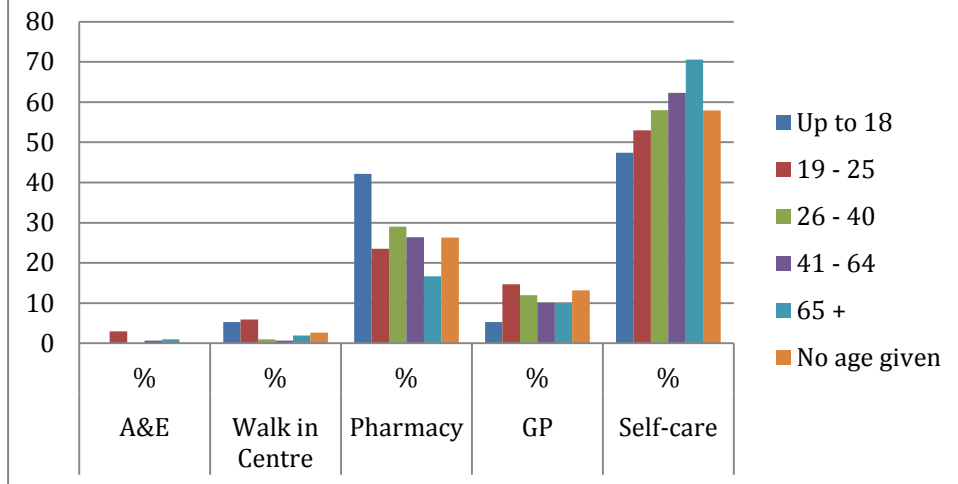


- A low number of 19-25 year olds would access A&E.



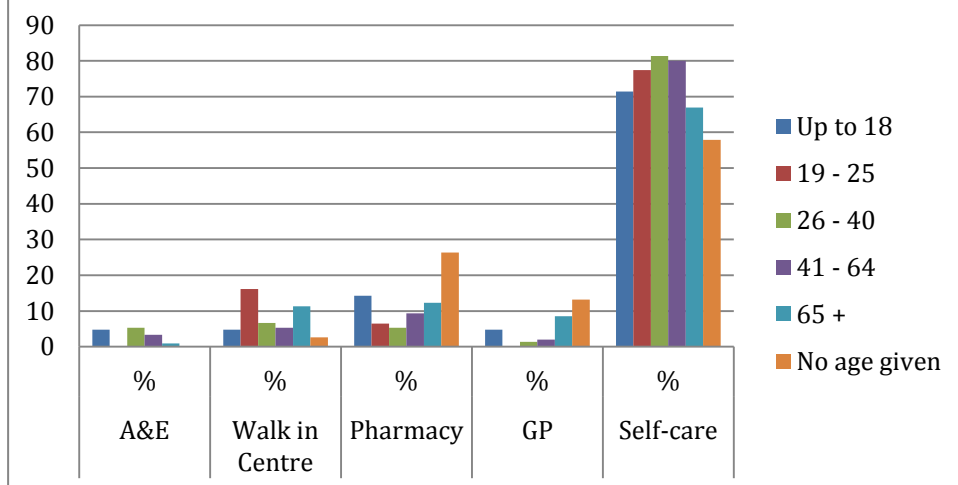
- The majority of respondents would access their GP as recommended.

COUGHS AND COLDS

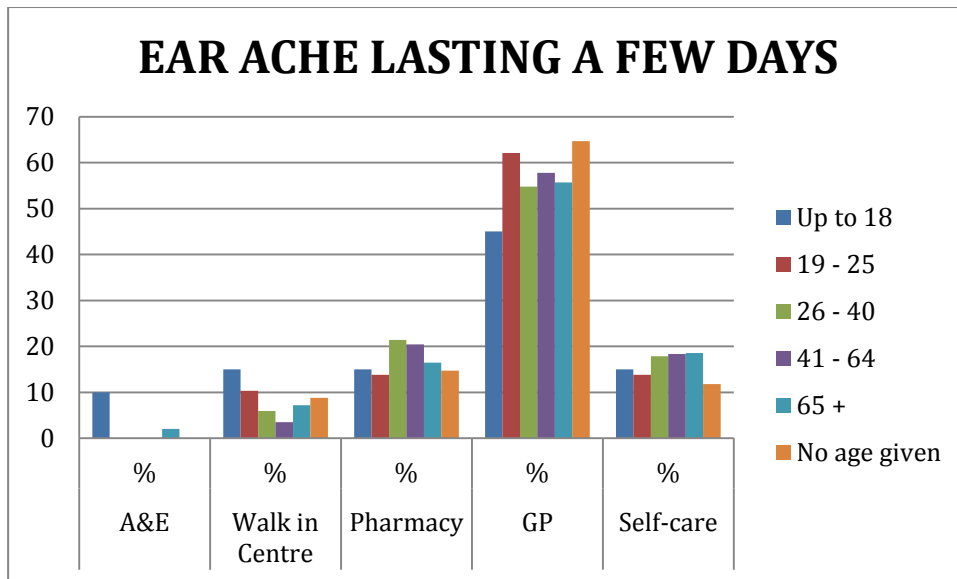


- These results are consistent with the guidance.

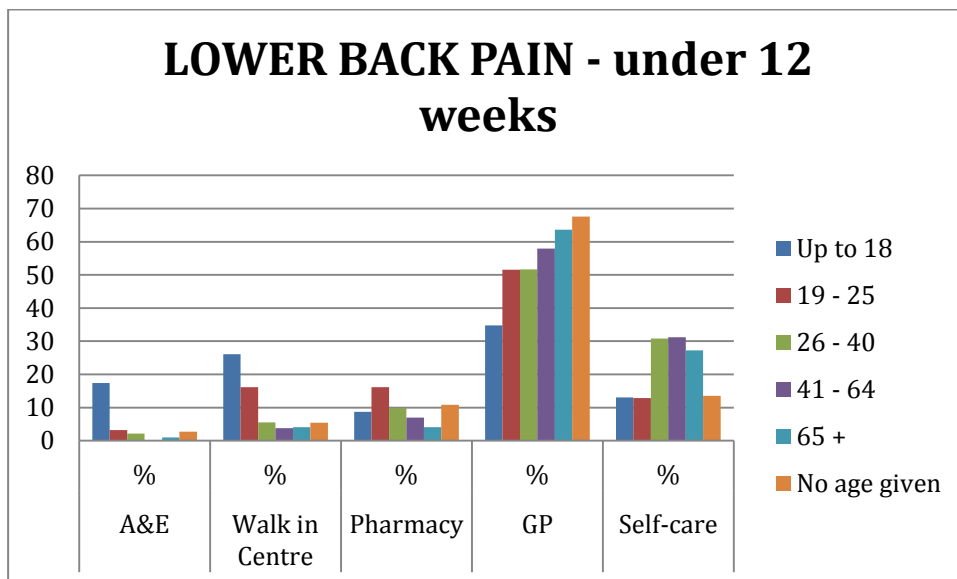
CUTS AND GRAZES



- These results are consistent with the guidance.

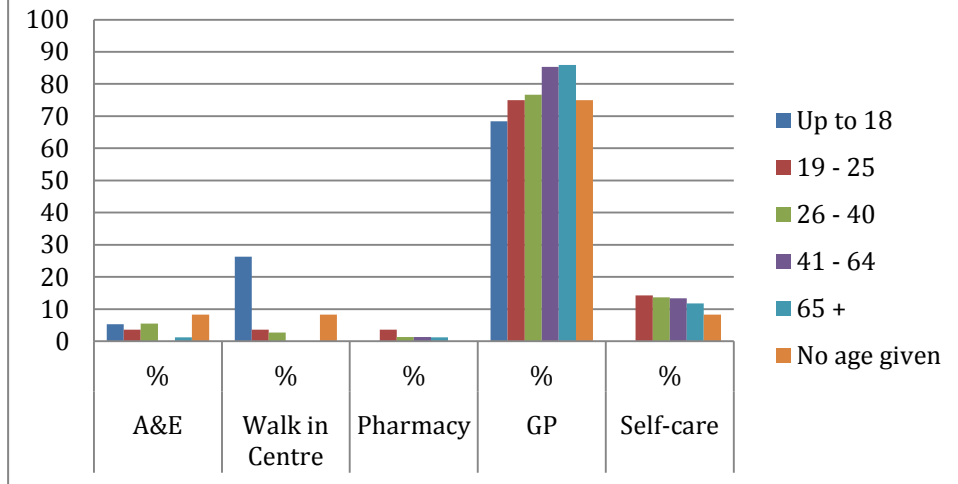


- This shows a large number are not aware that this does not need a GP appointment.



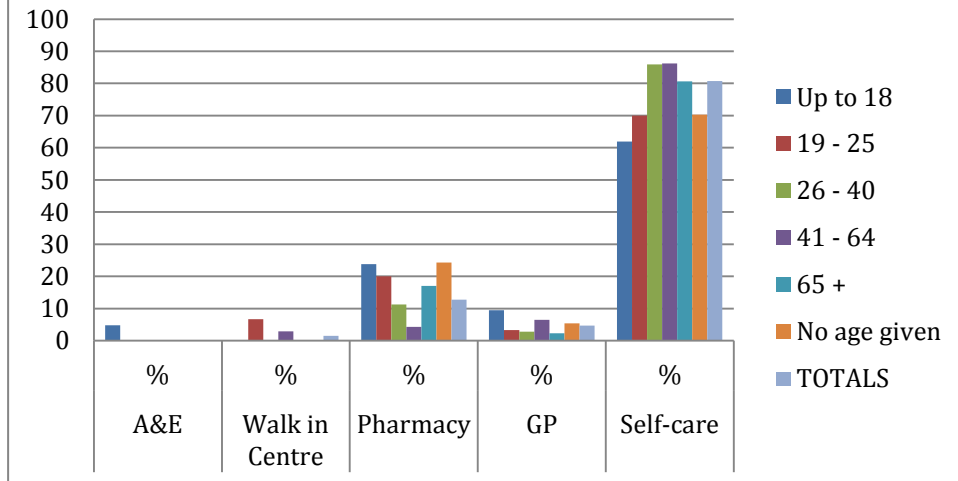
- The majority of people would attend their GP for this condition. The guidance is unclear on the correct service to access.

MENTAL HEALTH WORRIES

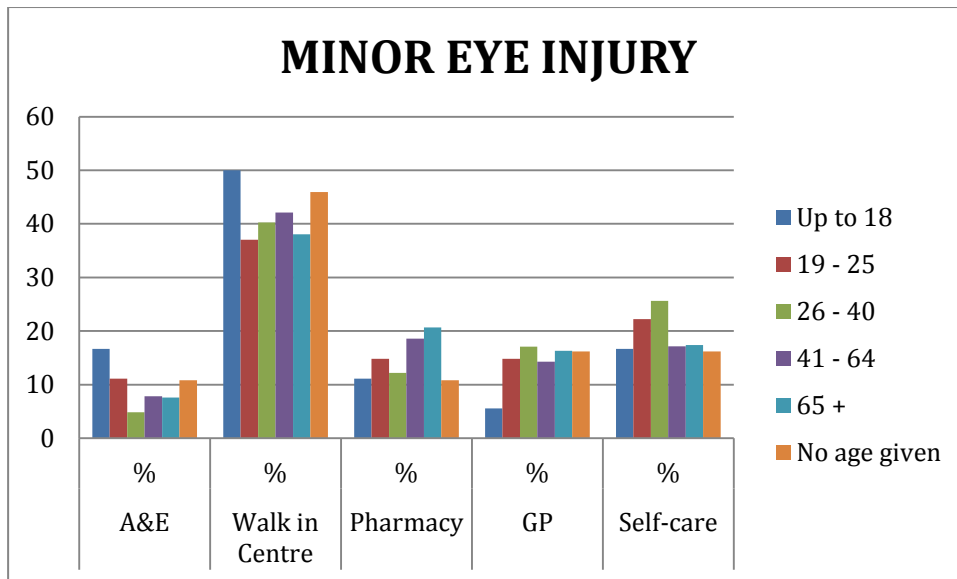


- These results are consistent with the guidance.

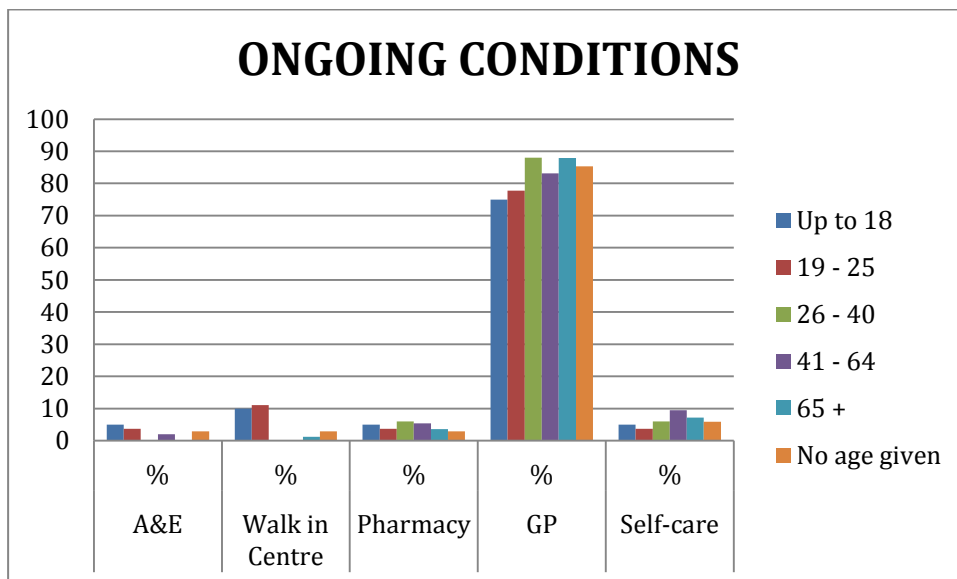
MILD HEADACHE



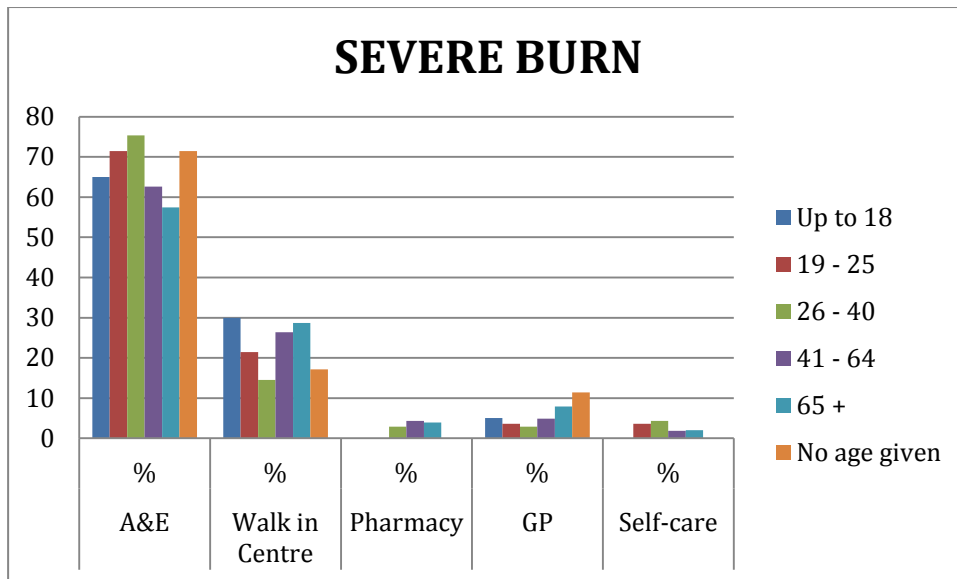
- These results show people are aware of the most appropriate way to treat a mild headache.



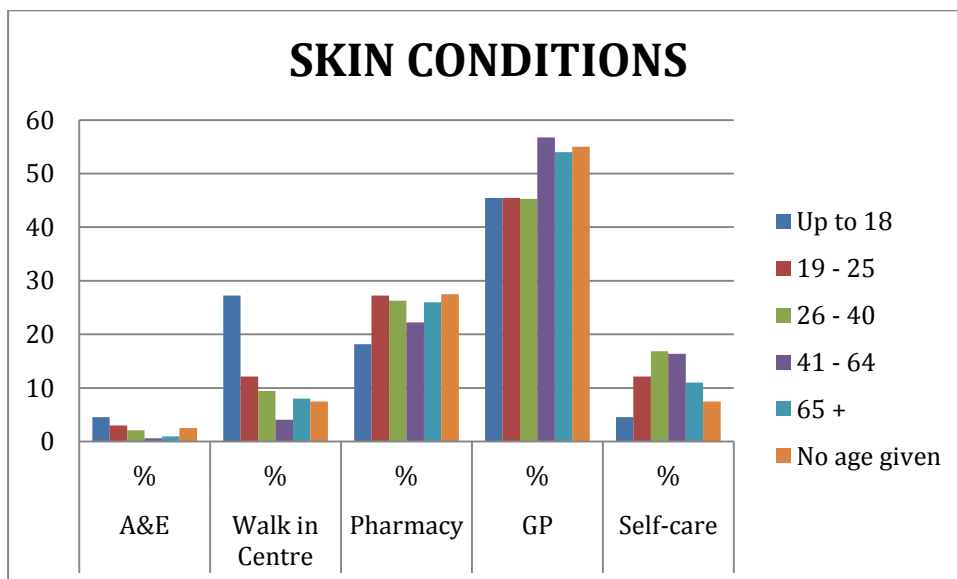
- These overall results are consistent with the guidance however it also shows other access points are being used.



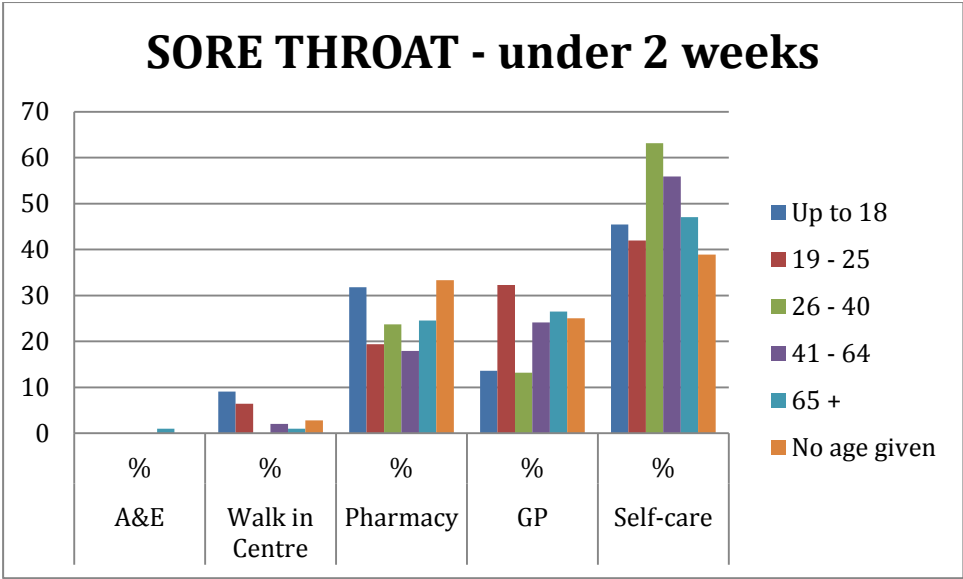
- These results are consistent with the guidance.



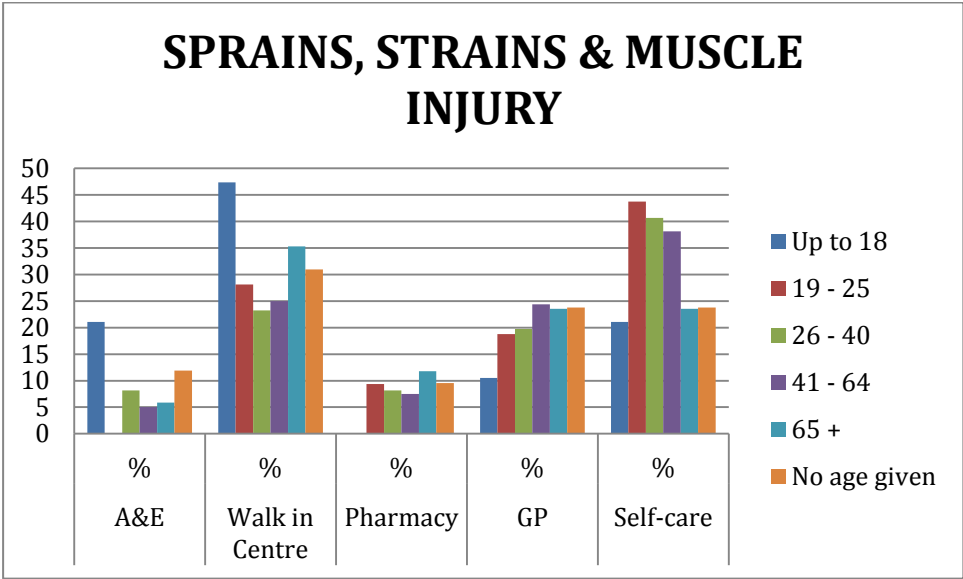
- These results are consistent with the guidance.



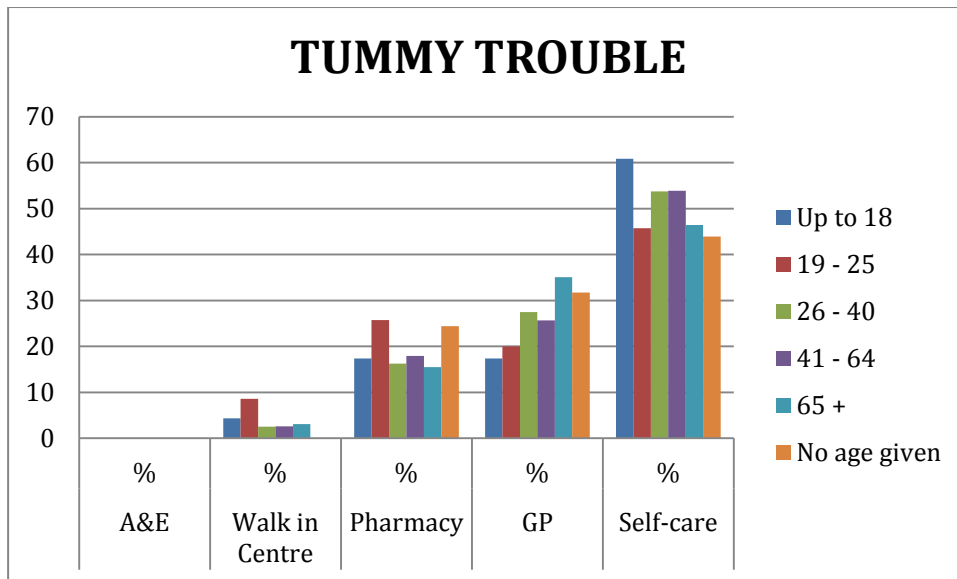
- This shows that too many people are accessing their GP rather than the pharmacy as per the guidance.



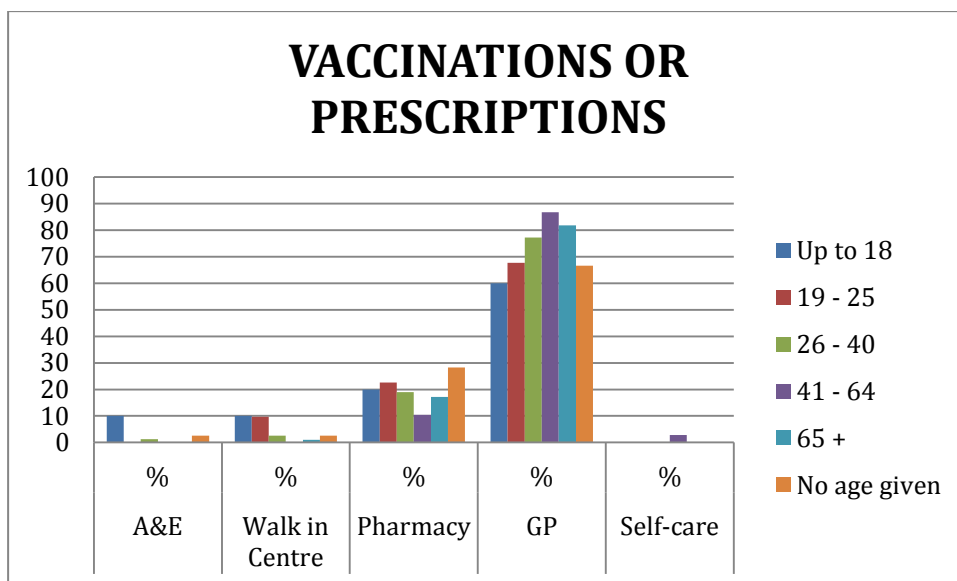
- The majority are using the preferred choice of self-care but a significant number are also accessing their GP.



- A large number of people are using the preferred choice of the walk in centre but a significant number are also choosing to access their GP.



- A low number are following the guidance which is to attend the pharmacy.



- These results are consistent with the guidance.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The majority of respondents did select the NHS recommended agency.

Overall, age made very little difference to the selections given.

The results survey showed that overall when asked, members of the public are aware of where to access the appropriate care.

The older age groups tended to use their GP rather than the alternatives.

It does appear that respondents are not always aware of the services offered by the Pharmacist. I would conclude that current advertising is not as effective as it could be.

A&E is often chosen when the respondent could have considered using an alternative provider.

There is a need for more information to be given regarding the ailments which could be covered by a visit to a Walk-in Centre to reduce the level of A&E usage.

NEXT STEPS:

- 1 Carry out some focus groups to inform them of the options available and ask what problems are encountered.
- 2 Increase public awareness through adverts; local talks and newspaper articles.
- 3 Healthwatch could conduct qualitative research to look at the reasons people choose a service. Questions to ask could include:
 - a. Do people see A&E as providing all the services they might need to access under one roof?
 - b. Could it be the unavailability of 24 hour access to GPs?
 - c. Could it be that the 111 helpline often refers the caller to go to hospital?

For more information about Healthwatch Portsmouth, please contact the team at:




- Email - info@healthwatchportsmouth.co.uk
- Tel - 02393 977097
- Web - www.healthwatchportsmouth.co.uk
- Post - c/o Learning Links, Unit 3, St Georges' Business Centre, St Georges' Square, Portsmouth PO1 3EY.










Please circle the letter which refers to your age bracket:






A: Up to 18 years old **B:** Between 19-25 years old

C: Between 26-40 years old **D:** Between 41-64 years old **E:** Over 65 years old

Where would you go for medical care or advice in these circumstances? (Please tick)	A&E	Walk-in Treatment Centre	Pharmacy	GP	Self-care
 ALLERGIES					
 BITES & STINGS					
 BREATHING DIFFICULTIES					
 BROKEN LEG					
 CHEST PAINS					
 COUGH LASTING LONGER THAN 3 WEEKS					
 COUGHS & COLDS					
 CUTS & GRAZES					

	EAR ACHE Lasting a few days					
	LOW BACK PAIN lasting under 12 weeks					
Where would you go for medical care or advice in these circumstances? (Please tick)		A&E	Walk-in Treatment Centre	Pharmacy	GP	Self-care
	MENTAL HEALTH WORRIES					
	MILD HEADACHE					
	MINOR EYE INJURY					
	ONGOING CONDITIONS					
	SEVERE BURN					
	SKIN CONDITIONS					
	SORE THROAT lasting under 2 weeks					

	<p>SPRAINS, STRAINS & MUSCLE INJURIES</p>					
	<p>TUMMY TROUBLE</p>					
	<p>VACCINATIONS & PRESCRIPTIONS</p>					