



Healthwatch Hartlepool GP Patient Experience Consultation

Final

March 2018

MISSION STATEMENT

“Healthwatch Hartlepool has been established in a way that is inclusive and enables involvement from all areas of the local community. We wish to involve those who are seldom heard.”

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1. Background and Methodology

- 1.1** The last twelve months has seen a noticeable increase in the frequency with which patients have contacted Healthwatch Hartlepool to raise concerns about the difficulties they experience when trying to book an appointment to see a GP at their local surgery.
- 1.2** The most common problems reported to Healthwatch Hartlepool are around appointment booking systems, and the difficulties patients often experience in getting through to the practice. In some cases, patients have reported phoning their surgery repeatedly for up to an hour (usually between 8am and 9am), only to be told when they finally succeed that all appointments have been taken and to try again the following day.
- 1.3** This problem is not unique to Hartlepool and the issue has received coverage from both the Kings Trust and Healthwatch England. Both organisations have highlighted difficulties patients are experiencing in the areas of booking appointments, frustration with appointment systems, lack of choice of GP's, short or rushed appointments, poor staff attitude and poor access to surgeries for people with disabilities.
- 1.4** Consequently, in November 2017, Healthwatch Hartlepool launched a patient consultation process which focussed primarily on patient experience of GP appointment processes across all practices in Hartlepool.
- 1.5** The survey was initially conducted via the Healthwatch Hartlepool website, but during January and February 2018 we also conducted visits to individual surgeries. During the visits patients were given the opportunity to complete the questionnaire while waiting for their appointment or could take it home and return it in the stamped addressed envelope provided.
- 1.6** All GP practices in Hartlepool were contacted and five surgeries allowed Healthwatch Hartlepool to visit the practice in to speak directly to patients about their experiences.
- 1.7** This report provides detailed summaries of the feedback received from patients at each GP practice as well as commenting in general on the overall findings.

2. Findings

2.1 Over the course of the consultation period 151 patients returned completed survey forms. The table below summarises numbers of returned forms by GP practice.

Surgery Name	Questionnaire Received
Bank House Surgery *	19
Chadwick House Practice	16
Dr Koh and Trory *	18
Gladstone House	13
Hart Medical Centre *	19
Hartfields Medical Practice	4
Havelock Grange *	21
Headland Medical Centre	5
McKenzie House	17
Seaton Surgery *	4
Throston Medical Centre	2
Victoria Road Medical Practice	4
West View Millennium Surgery	4
Wynyard Road Practice	5
Total	151

2.2 Those surgeries marked with a star responded positively to a letter sent to all practices requesting that they invite the Healthwatch Hartlepool Public and Patient Engagement Officer to visit the surgery to speak to patients directly and complete questionnaires.

2.3 Generally, patients were fairly positive about their experience of making appointments and overall the following responses were recorded –

How Would You Describe Your Experience of Making Appointments?	
Very Good	42 (28%)
Fairly Good	49 (32%)
Neither Good Nor Poor	17 (11%)
Fairly Poor	24 (16%)
Very Poor	19 (13%)
Total	151

2.4 However, the overall figures do hide some significant variations between practices. For example, 18 patients from Dr Koh’s practice completed the questionnaire and all 18 (100%) rated their experience of making appointments as either very good or fairly good. At McKenzie House 17 patients returned the questionnaire and 11 (64%) rated their experience as either fairly poor or very poor. A full summary of the responses from all surgeries is shown in the table below.

How Would You Describe Your Experience of Making Appointments?					
Practice	Very Good	Fairly Good	OK	Fairly Poor	Very Poor
Bankhouse	3	8	1	4	3
Chadwick	2	9	3	1	1
Dr Koh	13	5	0	0	0
Gladstone	6	2	4	0	1
Hart	3	8	1	4	3
Hartfields	0	0	2	1	1
Havelock	3	9	1	4	4
Headland	4	1	0	0	0
McKenzie	0	3	3	7	4
Millennium	3	1	0	0	0
Seaton	4	0	0	0	0
Throston	0	0	0	2	0
Victoria	1	3	0	0	0
Wynyard	0	0	2	1	2
Total	42	49	17	24	19

2.5 Patients across most practices reported having problems contacting their surgery by phone in the morning.

“If you don’t get through before 8.45am there are none left” (appointments) - Havelock Grange patient

“Early mornings are difficult, but especially Monday’s” – Hart patient

“First thing in the morning, particularly Monday” – McKenzie House patient

2.6 The main method of booking appointments was by telephone although some patients said that they went to the surgery in person and queued from 8am to secure an appointment. A few patients reported using the internet but overall, usage/awareness of internet and 111 as a means of booking appointments appeared to be low.

2.7 When asked about the availability of same day appointments, again a very mixed picture emerged. The table below details the overall response from patients across all practices.

How Often Can You Book a Same Day Appointment at Your Surgery?	
Always	14 (10%)
Mostly	47 (32%)
Rarely	44 (30%)
Never	16 (11%)
Never Tried	18 (13%)
Walk in and wait	6 (4%)
Total Responses	145

The breakdown for individual surgeries is shown in Appendix (1)

2.8 When asked how long it took from initially contacting the surgery for the patient to see a GP or nurse, a mixed picture emerged. Fifty percent of patient who responded said that they saw some either the same working day or following day. However, twelve percent of patients said they had waited over a week before being able to see a GP or nurse. A summary of responses from all practices is shown in the table below.

How long after initially contacting the surgery did you actually see or speak to someone?	
Same day	52 (42%)
Next working Day	9 (7%)
A few days later	38 (31%)
A week or more later	13 (10%)
Two months	1 (1%)
Still trying	1 (1%)
Can't remember	10 (8%)
Total responses	124

The breakdown for individual surgeries is shown in Appendix (2)

2.9 Patients gave a very positive response when asked if when they had an appointment, were they seen within ten minutes of the given time, with seventy two percent responding that this was always or mostly the case. A full breakdown is given in the table below.

When you have an appointment booked, how often are you seen within 10 minutes of the time given?	
Always	8 (6%)
Most of the time	87 (66%)
Rarely	27 (20%)
Never	10 (8%)
Total responses	132

The breakdown for individual surgeries is shown in Appendix (3)

2.10 Overall, 22 patients reported that they had requested a home visit from a GP with fifty percent reporting that they had been visited in under 4 hours. A full breakdown is given in the table below.

How long did it take between initial phone call request and your home GP visit taking place?	
Less than 1 hour	3
Between 1 and 4 hours	8
Over 4 hours, but same day	8
GP didn't visit	3
Total responses	22

3. General Comments by Practice

This section summarises general comments received at each surgery.

3.1 Bankhouse Surgery

- Patients generally reported that the Bankhouse Surgery and the One Life Centre were accessible. However, car parking is a significant issue for many patients – “No problems with access but car parking is difficult as there are limited spaces”.
- Patients commented that access to the surgery was affected by telephone and appointment systems –
 “I didn't get an immediate appointment and always spend a long time waiting on the phone”
 “I think it is mostly ok, but if you need an emergency appointment and are trying on a morning to get through it's almost impossible”.

“It’s difficult to get an appointment”.

- Several patients reported having difficult experiences with some reception staff –
“Appointment systems and the attitude of certain receptionists are a problem”
- However, many patients were positive about their overall experience at Bankhouse
“I feel very fortunate with our GP surgery”.

3.2 Chadwick Practice

- Patients generally reported that the Chadwick Surgery and the One Life Centre were accessible -
“All on the flat, lifts to upstairs surgeries”
“Very accessible as it is in the town centre”
- However, some patients did raise some concerns about accessibility for patients in wheelchairs or those with young children –
“Great it is at one Life Centre, just the doors to doctor/nurse rooms need to pull open, so difficult for prams, wheelchairs and elderly”
- Patients reported long waiting times before telephones are answered, particularly at peak morning times –
“Sometimes have to wait more than thirty minutes for calls to be answered”
- Carparking problems were raised by several patients –
“Carpark, not enough ordinary spaces”.
“More parking bays needed”.
- Concerns were raised by working patients about the new same day appointment system –
“I hate the new same day appointments as I have to call at a time when I am at work”.
- Finally, many patients were positive about their overall experience at Chadwick House –
“It’s very good in comparison to other GP surgeries in the town”.

3.3 Dr Koh

- Feedback from patients at this practice was extremely positive. All eighteen patients who completed the questionnaire said that their experience of making appointments was either very good or fairly good.
“They are great!”
“I am very happy with my surgery”
“Can’t think of anything I would change. The staff always look after me”
“The receptionists are very willing when you call. The nursing staff are always very helpful when using their service”.
- However, some patients did report experiencing difficulties when trying to contact the surgery by telephone –

- “It is hard to get through between 8am and 10am, particularly on a Monday”.
- Some patients commented on the ongoing refurbishment, which has caused one or two access issues –

“at present construction modifications, bit inconvenient but all will be sorted”.

“Good, even considering the construction taking place”.
- Car parking was raised by several patients –

“Access is good, but I shouldn’t need to pay parking charges to see my nurse or GP”.

“Free car parking!”.

“Increase the number of disabled spaces and perhaps to access the car park from Victoria Road”.

3.4 Gladstone House

- Generally, feedback from patients at this practice was quite positive -

“A very good surgery, I am happy with the care I receive”.

“Dr Ray is first class with his treatment of my particular case”.

“Very helpful staff”
- Patients reported that the surgery had easy access, but some had experienced problems getting through to the surgery by telephone between 8.30am and 9.00am –

“Its all on the flat so easy to get around”.

“It is difficult to get through most mornings”.

“It’s always hard to get through on Monday mornings”
- However, examples of poor communication between the surgery and podiatry were given –

The receptionists require more attention to communication between surgery and podiatry. I have had two letters lost or misfiled”.

3.5 Hart Medical Centre

- Generally, feedback from patients at this practice was quite positive. However, several patients did comment that that it was difficult to get through to the surgery by telephone early morning. They also reported difficulties accessing same day appointments -

“Telephoning early in the morning is difficult, especially Monday”.

“Can’t ring until 8.30am and it is constantly engaged”.

“Appointment lines should be open all day rather than just first thing in the morning”.

“It is difficult getting a same day appointment with a GP, you are sent to a nurse instead”.
- Patients reported that the surgery is easily accessible and that carparking was adequate.

“Very good, no steps or obstructions”

- Patients were positive about the presence of specialist nursing staff, but comments were made about lack of communication between staff-
“On a positive note they have specialist nurses for diabetes and warfarin checks. Also have a doctor who specialises in diabetes”
“Lack of communication between staff, sometimes lack of respect with receptionist”.

3.6 Hartfields

- Feedback from Hartfields was limited with only four patients returning questionnaires. However, patients who did respond reported difficulties getting through to the surgery by
Telephone and getting appointments –
“Mornings permanently engaged and afternoons it rings and rings and then they cut off your call”.
“Online bookable slots would help”
“More online bookable appointments are needed.”
- Comments were also received suggesting that an appointment triage system should be introduced –
“Conditions should be sifted so that you don’t get a waiting room full of people with colds when others need to speak to a GP urgently”
- Comments were also received which indicated services had declined since becoming part of the McKenzie Group –
“Since McKenzie House took over it’s like running the gauntlet to get an appointment, this is both inefficient and unnecessary.
- Patients reported that the surgery was easily accessible with plenty of parking –
“No problems with access or parking”

3.7 Havelock Grange

- Patient feedback was quite mixed, ranging from very good to very poor. Difficulties were reported around both telephone and appointment systems -
“Early mornings the phone queue is awful”
“Most appointments are gone by the time you get through to reception staff”
“If you don’t get through before 8.45 there are no appointments left. People actually queue outside from 8am to get them”
“terrible appointment system, needs to be changed, seriously thinking of registering with another GP”
“As someone who works it is not always possible to ring at 8.30am”
- Patients reported difficulties with carparking and -
“No problem with access but parking is difficult at times”
“No problem on access but not enough carparking spaces”

- “It costs to park, I once forgot to bring my money and lost my appointment”
- Patients were however positive about the care services provided by the GP’s and nurses at the practice –
 - “Generally a good surgery, but appointment system need improving”
 - “A very good surgery, but getting an appointment is difficult.
- Some patients raised concerns about patient confidentiality –
 - “Why do receptionists ask patients what is the matter, surely this is a breach of patient confidentiality?”
 - “I have heard quite personal phone calls when sat in reception or at the window”
- A partially sighted patient commented on access issues –
 - “I am partially sighted so I can’t see the screen giving information and I can’t see room numbers.

3.8 Headland Surgery

- Patient feedback was limited with only five patients returning questionnaires. However, feedback received was very positive, ranging from very good to fairly good -
 - “I have always been able to see my GP when I need to”
 - “The walk-in service is great, you don’t need an appointment”
 - “Give an appointment time”
- A patient reported difficulties accessing the surgery using public transport –
 - “I need to get two buses from West View to get here”

3.9 McKenzie House

- Seventeen patients from McKenzie House returned questionnaires and all seventeen reported difficulties getting through to the surgery by telephone to book appointments. Eleven patients described their experience of making appointments as either fairly poor or very poor -
 - “I always have difficulties, there does not seem to be enough phone lines to cope with demand”
 - “The lines are always busy, you need to redial constantly. When you get through it’s on an automated queueing system so you have to wait for ages. After all that if you can get through to a person they tell you no appointments left, phone again tomorrow!”
 - “Getting an appointment, you have to ring at 8.30am. It’s impossible to get through and you can’t pre-book. When you do get through it’s for any of the surgeries across the team”
 - “More appointments needed at the beginning of the week and more in winter”.
- Patients reported that appointments generally run on-time, with fourteen patients reporting that they are usually seen within ten minutes of their given appointment time.

- Several patients also reported difficulties accessing the surgery-
 “Access could be better with automated doors as my partner has a wheelchair which makes it difficult to use the double doors.”
 “No problem for able bodied but difficult for disabled and prams.”
 “Difficult to get to if you don’t have transport”.
- Finally, several patients commented that they felt the surgery was better before it had grown and taken over other practices –
 “Preferred when smaller surgeries and knew the GP”.
 “access could be improved by having more doctors at the surgery instead of having to travel further afield for appointments”.

3.10 Millennium Surgery

- Patient feedback was limited with only four patients returning the questionnaire. However, feedback received regarding experience of making appointments was positive, ranging from very good to fairly good -
 “Best practice in Hartlepool, it’s a great surgery”.
 “Totally satisfied with access to my GP”.
 “Very helpful staff and GP”.
- However, some patients did report problems getting through to the surgery by telephone –
 “It is always difficult to get through first thing in the morning.”
- A patient commented that they preferred using the on-line booking system to going through reception staff –
- “I am registered for their on-line booking service which is better than via receptionists who can be difficult to deal with”.

3.11 Seaton Surgery

- Patient feedback was limited with only four patients returning the questionnaire. However, feedback received was positive, with all patients reporting a very good experience of making appointments.
- Patients commented that access to the surgery was generally good although one patient did comment on the doors leading into the practice –
 “A better entry system is needed as the two doors are too close together”
- Patients were very complimentary about staff at the surgery –
 “I find both staff on reception and Doctor Patel (Senior) and his daughter to be excellent in their respective fields”.

3.12 Throston Medical Centre

- The response from this surgery was disappointing with only two questionnaires returned. Both patients who returned forms rated their experience of making

appointments as fairly poor and reported difficulties getting through to the surgery between 8am and 10am every day. –

“It is frustrating to have to travel to other surgeries for an appointment when I live just over the road from my own practice”.

- Access to the surgery was reported as good but both patients commented on a lack of GP presence at the practice –
“Every time I have been to the surgery there only seems to be one GP available”.

3.13 Victoria Road Medical Practice

- Patient feedback was limited with only four patients completing the questionnaire. However, feedback received was quite positive, with all patients reporting a very good or fairly good experience of making appointments. However, three patients did report that there were times when it was difficult contacting the surgery by telephone –

“8.30am – 10am, Monday to Friday, you have to ring at 8.30am but have trouble getting through and often all appointments are gone”.

8.30 to 10am on Monday, because of this we are asked to go to McKenzie House and this is not fair!”

- Patients reported that appointments usually happen within ten minutes of the given time, but one patient reported difficulties booking a double appointment –
“I had trouble getting a double appointment (smear and pill) and it took weeks to co-ordinate. I really don’t have time to make appointments on different days/times, surely it is not cost effective?”
- No problems were reported regarding accessibility of the surgery, but one patient said –
“A convenience in the reception area would be helpful”.

3.14 Wynyard Road Surgery

- Patient feedback was limited with only five patients completing the questionnaire. Feedback received was mixed with none of the patients reporting a good or fairly good experience of making appointments.

“Making an appointment is difficult every morning”.

- Several patients said that appointment systems had been better in the past –
“Used to be really good, but not as good now. If you need to see a doctor you need to see them there and then and not a week later when you are recovering”.
“Poor, the old style of pre-bookable appointments or walk in surgeries was much better for patients”.
- Two patients commented that service could be improved if there were more appointment slots available during the day –
“Change the ring on the day appointment system or actually have enough appointments available each day for patients with enough staff covering phones

so patients don't get frustrated by having to call thirty plus times in order to get through".

- One patient commented on the use of nurse practitioners –
"Patients are directed to nurse practitioners too often, people want to be seen by a doctor regarding their health"

4. Conclusions

- 4.1** Patient feedback concerning their experiences of appointment systems and the ease with which appointments can be booked varies greatly from practice to practice. However, some patients are experiencing unacceptable difficulties when attempting to book an appointment.
- 4.2** The most consistently positive feedback was from patients at Doctor Koh's practice where all eighteen patients who completed the questionnaire rated their experience of making appointments as very good or fairly good.
- 4.3** Conversely, the poorest feedback came from patients of the McKenzie House group of practices. Eleven out of seventeen of the patients who completed the questionnaire rated their experience of making appointments as fairly poor or very poor.
- 4.4** It is unacceptable for patients to be on hold for up to an hour before being able to speak to a member of staff about booking an appointment.
- 4.5** Patients who work, or who have caring responsibilities which make it difficult to phone between 8am and 9am can experience difficulties in accessing appointments.
- 4.6** Awareness/uptake of on-line booking services and the 111 service was low and in most practices with the majority of patients relying on the telephone in order to make appointments.
- 4.7** Patient feedback on their experience during consultations with either their GP or Nurse practitioner was very good. Appointments generally happen reasonably close to the given time and advice and treatment were generally considered to be of high quality.
- 4.8** Accessibility problems were highlighted at some practices by wheelchair users, patients with poor mobility and parents with young children in prams or pushchairs.

4.9 Patients at the practices in the One Life centre and at Victoria Road raised concerns regarding carparking, and in the case of the One Life Centre some problems in gaining access to the building because of the need to cross a busy road.

5. Recommendations

5.1 All practices should regularly review their appointment systems with a view to ensuring that current practices are fit for purpose and patients are able to access appointments in a timely and convenient manner.

5.2 Those practices at which patient feedback indicates significant levels of dissatisfaction with current systems for booking appointments should undertake immediate reviews of their current processes which include rigorous and thorough analysis of patient experience.

5.3 The potential for more use of on-line booking services should be further explored as part of an overall practice appointments strategy which embrace a variety of booking methods.

5.4 All practices should do more to raise awareness amongst patients of the availability of on-line booking options and that appointments can be booked via the 111 Emergency service.

5.5 Current performance in the areas of patient appointment procedures and process should be a key consideration in assessing the suitability of a practice to take over surgeries and increase their patient base.

5.6 All practices should ensure that premises and facilities are fully accessible to all patients including those with physical and learning disabilities and parents with children in pushchairs and prams.

6. Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Hartlepool would like to thank everyone who completed and returned questionnaires during the investigation and the practices who allowed us to come to speak to patients at their surgery. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Appendix 1

How Often Can You Book a Same Day Appointment at Your Surgery?							
Practice	Always	Mostly	Rarely	Never	Never tried	Walk in	Total Responses
Bankhouse		7	7	2	1	1	18
Chadwick		4	3	4	4		15
Dr Koh	1	8	2	1	2	3	17
Gladstone	4	5	2	1	1		13
Hart	2	7	3	4	3		19
Hartfields			2				2
Havelock	2	5	13				20
Headland	2	1			1	1	5
McKenzie	1	5	10	1			17
Millennium		1	1		1	1	4
Seaton				1	2		3
Throston		1		1			2
Victoria	2	2	1				5
Wynyard		1		1	3		5
Total Responses	14	47	44	16	18	6	145

Appendix 2

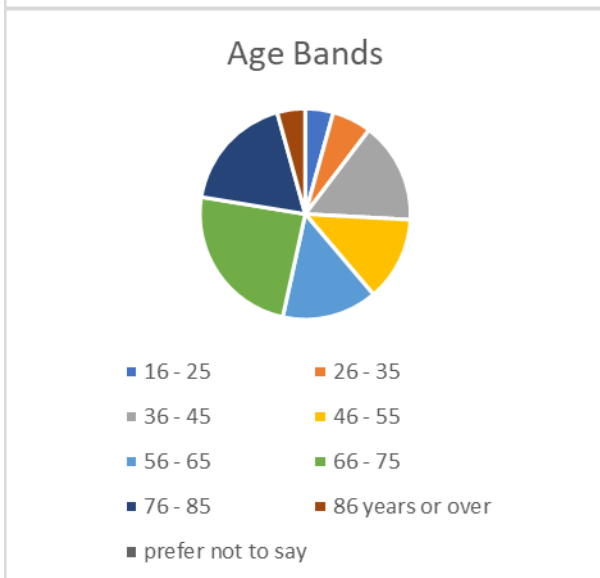
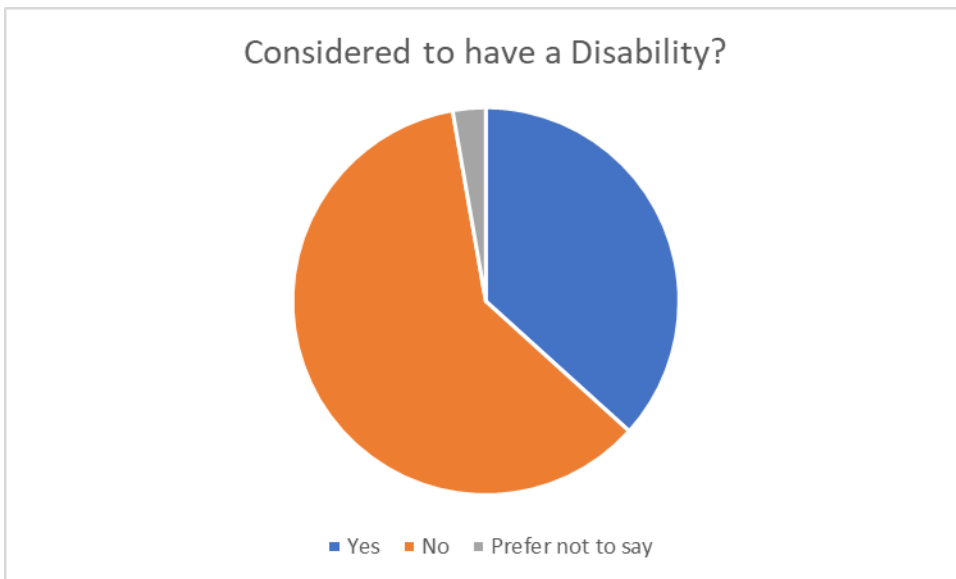
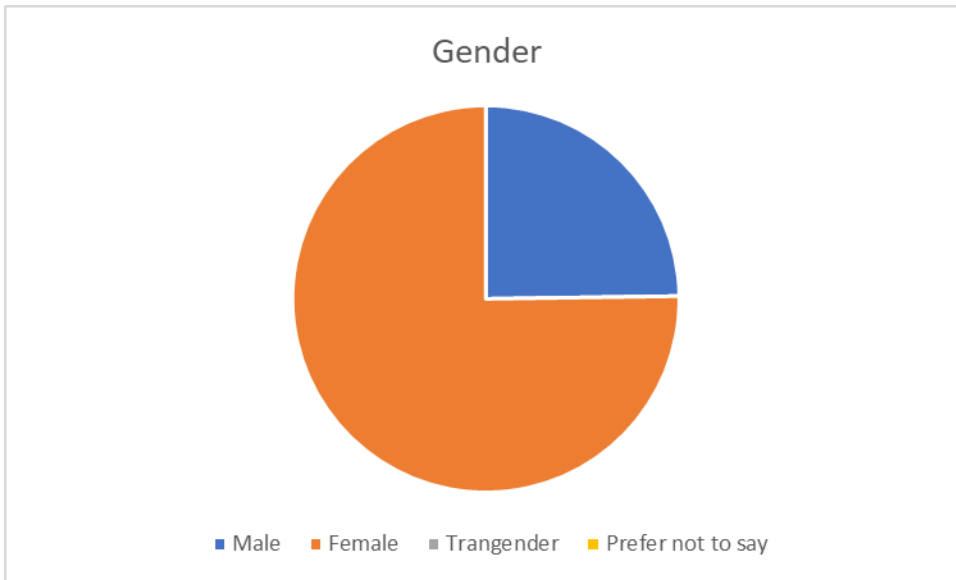
How Long After Initially Contacting the Surgery Did You Actually See or Speak to Someone?

Practice	Same Day	Next Working Day	Few Days Later	Week or More Later	Two Months Later	Still Trying	Can't Remember	Total Responses
Bankhouse	4		7	2			5	18
Chadwick	3	2	5	4				14
Dr Koh	8		6				2	14
Gladstone	6		6					12
Hart	7	2	4	2				15
Hartfields		2						2
Havelock	9		4	1				14
Headland	2							2
McKenzie	7	3	2		1	1	1	15
Millennium	1		2					3
Seaton	2	1						3
Throston			1	1				2
Victoria	3		1	1				5
Wynyard		1		2			2	5
Total responses	52	9	38	13	1	1	10	124

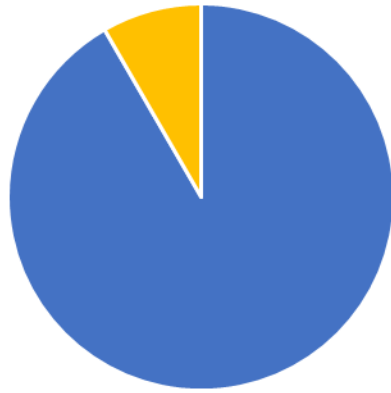
Appendix 3

When You Have An Appointment booked, How Often Are You Seen Within Ten Minutes Of The Given Time?					
Practice	Always	Mostly	Rarely	Never	Total Responses
Bankhouse		5	7	3	13
Chadwick		12	2	1	15
Dr Koh	1	10	4	1	16
Gladstone	2	9	1		12
Hart	1	8	7	1	17
Hartfields		2		1	3
Havelock		15	3	1	18
Headland	1	1			2
McKenzie		15	2		17
Millennium		3	1		4
Seaton	1	2			3
Throston		1		1	2
Victoria	2	3			5
Wynyard		3		1	5
Total Responses	8	87	27	10	132

Appendix 4

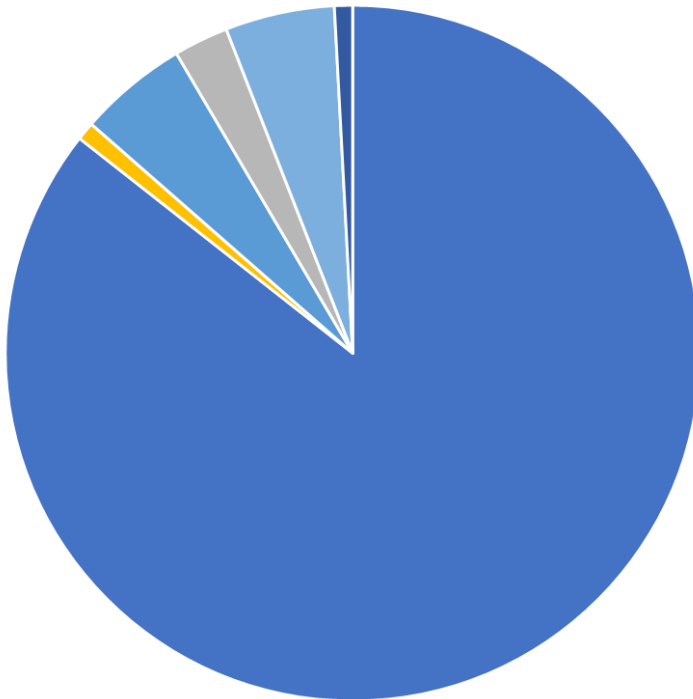


Sexual Orientation



■ Hetrosexual/Straight ■ Gay/Lesbian ■ Bisexual ■ Prefer not say

Ethnic Group



■ British ■ Irish ■ Gypsy or traveller ■ other white background ■ prefer not to say
 ■ Mixed ■ White & Black Caribbean ■ White & Black African ■ White & Asian ■ Other mixed background
 ■ Asan/Asian British ■ Indian ■ Pakistani ■ Bangladeshi ■ Other Asian background
 ■ Black/Black british ■ African ■ Caribbean ■ Other Black background ■ Other
 ■ Chinese ■ Any other ethnic group