

Public Experience of Community Pharmacies in Cheshire

December 2017



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Overview

What is Healthwatch Cheshire?

Healthwatch Cheshire (trading as Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West) is an independent consumer champion for health and social care across Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester local authority areas, forming part of the national network of local Healthwatch across England. Our role is to make sure that those who run local health and social care services understand and act on what really matters to local people.

Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West undertake continuous engagement activities with the public to hear about concerns and compliments regarding health and social care services. The information we gather is then analysed so that we can identify and act upon trends and common themes by presenting our findings to decision makers in order to improve the services people use.

Community Pharmacies

News reports and anecdotal evidence tells us that GP services are stretched with many patients finding difficulty in obtaining appointments. To bridge this gap community pharmacies are making an increasingly important contribution to promoting the health and wellbeing of the population as they offer easy access to services. Pharmacists are uniquely positioned to provide advice and information regarding minor ailments.

In response to this increased demand on GP services, both Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils, as well as the four Cheshire area Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), have promoted the 'Live Well' and 'Self Care' message, as well as the Minor Ailments Scheme. The Minor Ailments Scheme involves local pharmacies providing people with advice, treatment and prescriptions for certain minor conditions without having to book an appointment or visit a GP. It is known as Pharmacy First in West Cheshire CCG, and Think Pharmacy in East Cheshire, Vale Royal and South Cheshire CCG areas.

Healthwatch Cheshire East previously completed a report in November 2016 regarding the relationship people in Cheshire East have with their community pharmacies which showed that there were concerns regarding quality of service and consistency in some areas. Furthermore, the awareness of alternative services that are offered by community pharmacies was described as 'patchy'. Until now there has not been a survey regarding Community Pharmacies in the Cheshire West area by Healthwatch.

Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils are both currently carrying out individual Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) consultations to determine the present and anticipated pharmaceutical needs of the community. This is an NHS regulatory statutory responsibility of the Health and Wellbeing Boards of both authorities. With this in mind, in November and December 2017 Healthwatch Cheshire undertook a survey to establish the current use and understanding of

community pharmacy services within Cheshire. This project attempts to determine how the population of Cheshire use their pharmacies and their knowledge of the services the pharmacy provides.

Summary of Findings

The survey that informs this report received 41 responses in Cheshire East and 62 in Cheshire West. The main findings from these are:

- People in Cheshire have some knowledge of the Minor Ailments Scheme. For example, 56% of 41 respondents in Cheshire East were aware that pharmacists could prescribe medicines like GPs. This number was 74% of 61 respondents in Cheshire West and Chester.
- The main reason people use pharmacies is for their prescriptions; 98% of people in Cheshire East and 93% of people in Cheshire West and Chester.
- Pharmacies are widely used for minor ailments; 59% of people who responded in Cheshire East and 70% in Cheshire West and Chester.
- There is though some confusion regarding what conditions and problems are covered.
- Community pharmacies are a valued resource to the communities.
- Concerns raised at the thought of losing some community pharmacies.
- Whilst people have stated they like the integrated services within larger health centres, there are some locations where this has caused large queues at the pharmacy and those using the pharmacy are excluded from using the car parking facilities.
- Rural pharmacies do not appear to open on a Saturday morning - prompting a number of comments regarding Saturday morning opening.

Methodology

Throughout November and December 2017 Healthwatch Cheshire undertook a project to determine:

- How the population of Cheshire use their pharmacies
- Public knowledge of the services pharmacies provide.

In order to achieve this Healthwatch engaged with a cross section of people at engagement events throughout Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester using a survey mixed with quantifiable and qualitative questions to enable measurable and illustrative responses.

It was important that we spoke to a wide range of people of all ages and circumstances, including targeting those who are classed as primary users of the pharmacy, such as families with children and those with long term health conditions.

The survey results are split between Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester local authority areas in order to help make a contribution to each authority's individual Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment.

There was a total 103 of respondents to the survey. These responses were split between:

Local Authority Area	Number of responses
Cheshire East	41
Cheshire West and Chester	62

Survey Questions

Whilst respondents were given an opportunity to tell us what they thought of the quality of the service received, we were keen to ascertain the level of understanding and uptake of all the services that a community pharmacy can provide particularly in respect of the Think Pharmacy and Pharmacy First schemes. A copy of the survey used is included below:



Pharmacy Services in Cheshire Survey

Healthwatch Cheshire want to gain a better understanding of the pharmacy provision in Cheshire. We would really appreciate if you could please take a few minutes to answer this brief survey.

Please can we have the first part of your postcode:

Are you aware that a pharmacist can prescribe certain medicines like your GP?

Are you aware what services your pharmacy offers?

Do you access any of these services at your pharmacy?

- Prescriptions
- Over the counter medicines
- Minor ailments advice/treatment
- Flu jabs
- Blood pressure monitoring
- Smoking cessation

What do you think of the quality of the service?

Any other comments?

Share your views:

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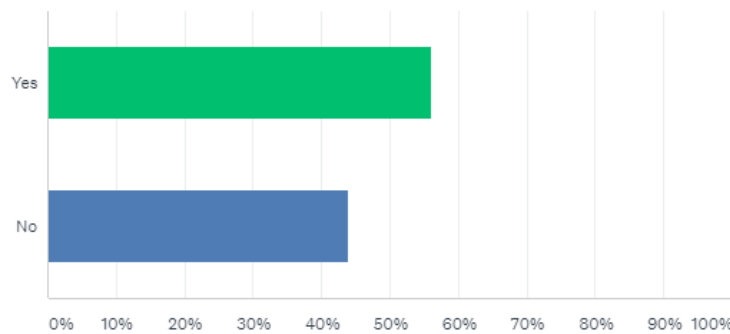


Survey Results - Cheshire East

East Cheshire CCG and South Cheshire CCG have commissioned the Think Pharmacy scheme to deliver support for the treatment of minor ailments. The following questions and findings were received from 41 members of the public answering the survey who use pharmacy services within the Cheshire East local authority area.

Are you aware that a pharmacist can prescribe certain medicines like your GP?

The responses to this question determine the level of awareness and knowledge of the Minor Ailments Scheme, which at its most basic level enables pharmacists to treat and prescribe medicines to treat particular minor ailments for patients like a GP.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	56.10% 23
No	43.90% 18
TOTAL	41

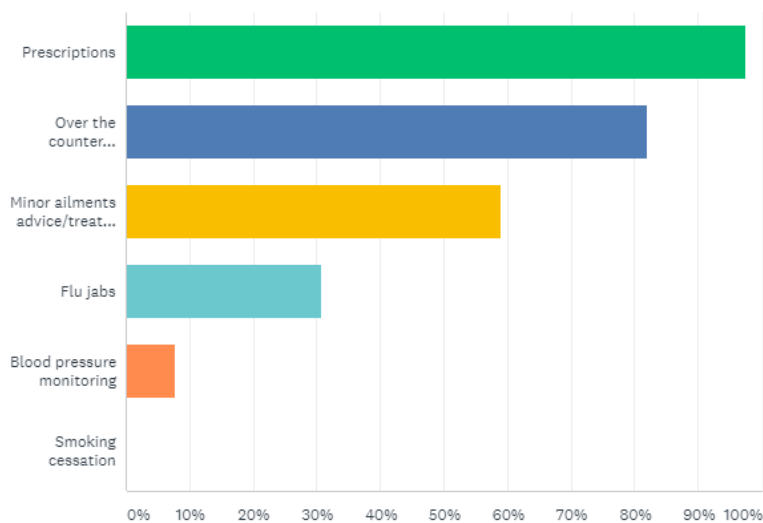
The question found that 56% of respondents were aware that pharmacists can prescribe medicines for certain conditions within the Think Pharmacy Minor Ailments Scheme, whereas 44% were not aware.

However, anecdotally and qualitatively it was apparent that respondents were unsure as to which conditions this covered. This suggests that although a small majority of people are aware that a pharmacist can prescribe them medicine there is confusion and perhaps a lack of awareness as to what somebody would visit their pharmacist for instead of making an appointment with their GP. This would indicate that more needs to be done to raise awareness of the Think Pharmacy scheme and what it entails.

Do you access any of these services at your pharmacy?

- Prescriptions
- Over the counter medicines
- Minor ailments advice/treatment
- Flu jabs
- Blood pressure monitoring
- Smoking cessation

The responses to this question indicate the services offered by pharmacies most used by people in the Cheshire East area and in turn the pharmacy services of which they are most aware.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Prescriptions	97.44% 38
Over the counter medicines	82.05% 32
Minor ailments advice/treatment	58.97% 23

The question found that 59% of respondents had received minor ailments advice/treatment from their pharmacist. This was the same 23 people who answered ‘Yes’ to the first question regarding being aware that a pharmacist can prescribe certain medicines like a GP (the percentage is higher as there were less respondents to this question than the first).

However, there were comments such as “I didn’t know minor ailments was a specific service” which suggests that there would be a benefit of some targeted education around this service.

31% of respondents stated they had received the seasonal flu vaccination at a pharmacy. Other respondents had stated that they had had the free flu vaccine at their GP surgery, this would give rise to the belief that the consistent message of the benefits of the flu jab is reaching its audience.

The findings show that a large majority of the people asked use their pharmacy for prescriptions and over the counter medicine, with 98% and 82% of respondents respectively using these services.

What do you think of the quality of the service?

Any other comments?

Below are a number of anonymous comments and anecdotes provided on survey forms by respondents to supplement and add flavour to the data collected above:



“I don’t use the pharmacy at the Water’s Green Medical Centre as you are not allowed to use the car park, but you can if you have a doctor’s appointment so you might as well see your GP.”

“Good services, helpful staff.”

“Not enough pharmacists on duty for the Minor Ailments Scheme - so usually see the GP.”

“Very good - used the same pharmacy for years. The GP sends the prescription through and it’s always ready when we pick it up.”

“Excellent service, very helpful.”

“Brilliant. They are very quick - I only left the doctor’s 15 minutes ago and it’s been done already.”

“Excellent, they deliver medicines, it’s always right because if there is a problem the pharmacist deals directly with the GP.”

“Have had some difficulties with repeat prescriptions that are sensitive, e.g. tramadol, sometimes have had to wait an extra day for authorisation.”

“I used Boots. They were very helpful when my wife had cancer and found sources of support for me.”

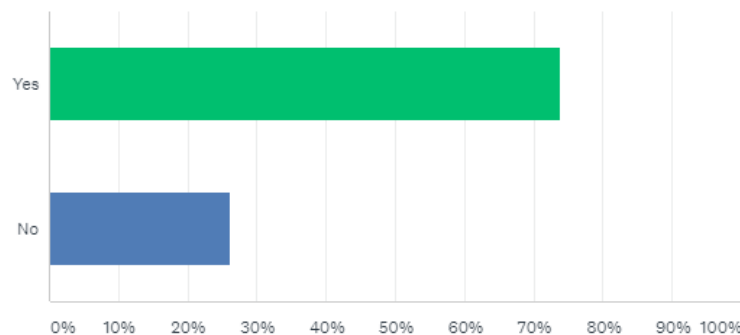
“I didn’t know minor ailments was a specific service.”

Survey Results - Cheshire West and Chester

West Cheshire CCG have commissioned Pharmacy First as the scheme to deliver minor ailments, while Vale Royal CCG have commissioned the Think Pharmacy scheme to deliver minor ailments. Therefore, it may be possible that people using pharmacy services in Cheshire West experience pharmacies differently. The following questions and findings were received from 62 members of the public answering the survey who use pharmacy services within the Cheshire West and Chester local authority area.

Are you aware that a pharmacist can prescribe certain medicines like your GP?

The responses to this question determine the level of awareness and knowledge of the Minor Ailments Scheme, which at its most basic level enables pharmacists to treat and prescribe medicines to treat particular minor ailments for patients like a GP.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	73.77%	45
No	26.23%	16
TOTAL		61

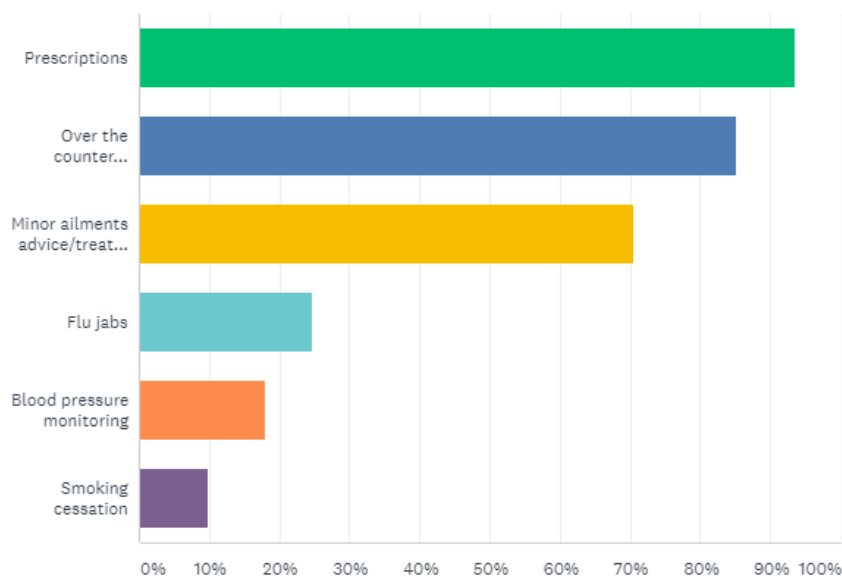
The question found that 74% of respondents were aware that pharmacists can prescribe medicines for certain conditions within the Minor Ailments Scheme, whereas 26% were not aware.

However, anecdotally and qualitatively it was apparent that respondents were unsure as to which conditions this covered. This suggests that although a small majority of people are aware that a pharmacist can prescribe them medicine there is confusion and perhaps a lack of awareness as to what somebody would visit their pharmacist for instead of making an appointment with their GP. This would indicate that more needs to be done to raise awareness of the Minor Ailments Scheme and what it entails.

Do you access any of these services at your pharmacy?

- Prescriptions
- Over the counter medicines
- Minor ailments advice/treatment
- Flu jabs
- Blood pressure monitoring
- Smoking cessation

The responses to this question indicate the services offered by pharmacies most used by people in the Cheshire West and Chester area and in turn the pharmacy services of which they are most aware.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Prescriptions	93.44% 57
Over the counter medicines	85.25% 52
Minor ailments advice/treatment	70.49% 43

The question found that 70% of respondents had received minor ailments advice/treatment from their pharmacist, showing a big uptake on the service. However, within the Vale Royal CCG area there were a number of comments to the effect of “I’ve never heard of the Minor Ailments Scheme before.” Pharmacy First is the Minor Ailments Scheme within the West Cheshire CCG, however within Vale Royal CCG, it is the Think Pharmacy Minor Ailments Scheme. The number of responses expressing uncertainty about the scheme in Vale Royal CCG indicates that there is perhaps a knowledge gap amongst people who are eligible to access the Think Pharmacy scheme. It was noted that those areas within the Pharmacy First scheme in the West Cheshire CCG area appeared to be more aware of minor ailments.

One in four (25%) of respondents stated they had had the seasonal flu vaccination at a pharmacy. Other respondents had stated that they had had the free flu vaccine at their GP surgery, this would give rise to the belief that the consistent message of the benefits of the flu vaccination is reaching its audience.

All respondents were given an opportunity to make any further comments. 34 people chose to make further comments, of which 29% referred to concerns regarding the reduction of local pharmacy provision. For example; *“Ensure local pharmacy remains in existence,”* *“Pharmacies are a vital part of the community. I have concerns about the closure of pharmacies locally,”* and *“Keep local pharmacies - vital part of local services.”*

What do you think of the quality of the service?

Any other comments?

Below are a number of anonymous comments and anecdotes provided on survey forms by respondents to supplement and add flavour to the data collected above:



“Local pharmacy is brilliant, made welcome, very friendly.”

“Excellent, very friendly and serious in local pharmacy.”

“Great. Where would we be without them? Westminster Park is very friendly.”

“Excellent. Unfailing and helpful.”

“Good, my pharmacy will tell you if you can get something cheaper over the counter as opposed to expensive prescription charges.”

“Pharmacies are a vital part of the community. I have concerns about the closure of pharmacies locally and nationally.”

“Would not want them to close. People need face to face advice for medical issues, easier to speak to pharmacies rather than a GP.”

“Very lucky to have a local pharmacy, though it would be good if they opened on a Saturday morning.”

“I like having a local pharmacy. They are a lynchpin of the local community.”

“To be honest if I wasn’t confident with the answer from the pharmacist I would probably go to my GP for a second opinion.”

“I didn’t know about other services they do like minor ailments and flu jabs.”

“I’ve not heard of Minor Ailments Scheme before.”

“I’ve used the Health Visitor for a prescription for my baby before - didn’t know the pharmacist could prescribe.”

“Could improve by opening on a Saturday morning.”

Conclusion



It is evident that the population of both Cheshire East and Cheshire West who responded to this survey have a very positive view of community pharmacies. They have described them as “*a lynchpin of the local community*” and a “*vital part of local services.*” Many were described as “*excellent*” and of the remainder almost all as “*good.*”

The survey showed that 59% of people in Cheshire East and 70% of people in Cheshire West and Chester who responded described themselves as having accessed some minor ailments advice or treatment from a pharmacy. The majority of people using pharmacies use them for prescriptions and over the counter medicines.

Pharmacy First is the Minor Ailments Scheme within the West Cheshire CCG, however within Vale Royal CCG, East and South Cheshire CCGs it is the Think Pharmacy scheme that delivers minor ailments. The number of responses expressing uncertainty about the scheme in Cheshire East (East and South Cheshire CCGs) and Vale Royal CCG indicates that there is perhaps a knowledge gap amongst people who are eligible to access the Think Pharmacy scheme. It was noted that those areas within the Pharmacy First scheme in the West Cheshire CCG area appeared to be more aware of minor ailments.

With regards to the Think Pharmacy and Pharmacy First Schemes, there were some gaps of knowledge as to what conditions were covered. For example, with comments such as “*is it everything or just certain ones.*” This suggests that pharmacies could benefit from an awareness campaign which details what is available as part of Minor Ailments Schemes.

During this survey period Healthwatch Cheshire visited a number of community pharmacies, medical centres and GP surgeries and there is a great deal of information concerning ‘self help’, ‘staying well’ and ‘where to go for the right medical care.’

The number of people accessing the seasonal flu vaccination at a pharmacy; 31% in Cheshire East and 25% in Chester West, suggests that the message around flu jabs are being listened to and taken up, but that there is scope for these numbers to increase and take the pressure off GP surgeries.

In conclusion, our survey found that pharmacies are a widely used and valued resource but that there is scope for an increase in awareness around the Minor Ailments Scheme in particular and what treatment is available and for what ailments.