



Mystery Shopper Pharmacy Evaluation

During 2015/16, volunteers from Healthwatch Hounslow successfully carried out Mystery Shopping scenarios evaluating the services provided by the Pharmacies in the Hounslow Borough.

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Introduction

The Mystery Shoppers Pharmacy evaluation project was carried out to evaluate the working of the pharmacies in the Hounslow borough.

Volunteers were recruited as 'mystery shoppers' to assess services in the community pharmacies. Evaluations were based on set criteria that included:

- Appearance
- Pharmacist availability
- Waiting time
- Attentiveness
- Professionalism
- Leaflets and website referrals

Background

Healthwatch Hounslow wanted to find out what people in the borough thought of the services provided by the Pharmacies in Hounslow. Our volunteers as 'mystery shoppers' were able to successfully complete scenarios evaluating services offered in 17 pharmacies out of the 20 pharmacies they visited including 10 pharmacies in Hounslow Central, 5 pharmacies in Heston and Cranford and 2 pharmacies in Feltham.

Designing the service

The mystery shoppers evaluated the services on criteria that they had developed. The criteria included ease of access, professionalism and waiting times, the condition of waiting areas, the friendliness of staff, and the quality and accuracy of information provided etc.

Outcomes and learning

The report offers individual outcomes and overall reviews from the different scenarios carried out by our Volunteers.

Aim and Objective

The objective of the evaluation was to find out the quality of pharmacies in the Hounslow borough. By visiting 20 pharmacies in the three largest areas of the borough we would get an indication as to how effective they are at providing their services.

By using the 'mystery shopper' method deployed in retail to assess quality of customer service and product knowledge, we could gain an insight into what the average customer experience is like when visiting pharmacies in the borough without the pharmacist knowing that they are being assessed.

Scope

By figuring out the quality of the Pharmacies in the Hounslow Borough we wanted to ascertain their effectiveness and also planned to identify the loopholes along with their positives, existing in the Pharmacies of the Hounslow borough, in return enhancing the patient overall experience.

Some of the key areas of assessing the pharmacies were:

- **Appearance** – cleanliness, space and number of seats provided etc. which is vital for the elderly and people waiting, as well as overall hygiene.
- **Leaflets and Posters** – Explaining what services they provide, promoting healthy living/other services. Which is great for making people aware of what pharmacies can help them with.
- **The pharmacists** themselves, whether they were professional, attentive, helpful and able to give useful advice and their availability.
- **Referrals** – Do they refer to other services you can visit to help, such as GPs. Do they point you in the right direction if you need help with something a pharmacy cannot help you with.

Our mystery shopper will have their say, based on their experience what they found to be good and what the pharmacy can improve on. Lastly, they will say whether they would come back or not with the reasons explaining this.

Scenarios

Using 3 different scenarios, we will be asking pharmacists for help regarding illnesses that they should be able to advise in.

Scenario 1 – For all pharmacies.

A neighbour in her **mid – 40's** has **Type 2 Diabetes** and has difficulty speaking English with her mother tongue being Cantonese. She suffers from symptoms such as excess tiredness and wants to alleviate this, but is too shy to ask for help. You offer to help her and go to the pharmacy to see what they can do.

Scenario 2 – All pharmacies, especially ones that have been commissioned by the local authority to offer stop smoking services.

You have a family member that has been coughing non-stop for a few months and you think it is down to **smoking**. You want to find out what support and advice they can offer.

Scenario 3 – For pharmacies that offer Minor Ailment services commissioned by the CCG

You have a son or daughter who is **under 16** and you suspect they have **conjunctivitis** (a self-limiting condition). Symptoms include: redness, tearing up, discharge from the eye in the morning. They are at home resting and you want to see what products or advice they can offer you.

The three scenarios were chosen as they will draw out responses that will give us a chance to assess the pharmacy's ability to provide advice and guidance on 3 different but popular illnesses. We also chose an age range to include young and old, as well helping someone who is not a fluent English speaker but is entitled to healthcare nonetheless, giving the pharmacist a chance to maybe provide an interpretation service or another useful solution of reaching the person in question.

Results

Central Hounslow

Out of 11 pharmacies visited in the Central Hounslow area, our mystery shopper was unable to complete a scenario on one occasion where a Sales Assistant did not allow the mystery shopper to talk to a pharmacist because they wanted the child (patient) to be present (for scenario 3). In another instance the mystery shopper had to come in later as the pharmacist was not in until after 1.30pm.

In terms of appearance, 9 out of 11 were described as clean. 3 out of 11 were described as spacious or big. 3 were described as being small or tight, with one of those being described to resemble a corner shop. One of the main problems that were found amongst the interior of the pharmacies was lack of seats. 4 out of 11 were described as having not enough chairs or no waiting area at all. This would be a problem if there were elderly patients waiting for the pharmacist or queuing up. One was found to have its own consultation room.

Out of the 11 pharmacies visited only one had a missing pharmacist. On this occasion our mystery shopper had to return after 1.30pm. We found this concerning, because if you are a pharmacy and a shop you should have a pharmacist available from opening to close for business.

Overall

Out of the 11 pharmacies visited our mystery shopper decided they would return to all but three.

- On one occasion, the pharmacist said aloud the symptoms the family member was having (scenario 2) to another, for the 6 people behind our mystery shopper to hear. This one also denied having a stop smoking service when they did. Which showed a lack of knowledge on the services they provide.
- In another instance, the sales assistant refused the mystery shopper of seeing the pharmacist. They wanted the patient to be present (scenario 3). Our mystery shopper stated that they wanted the option to talk to a pharmacist even if they had to wait.
- The final one was because the pharmacist would only give prescription medicine and no advice. They explained that they cannot offer information on something like this (scenario 1) but can only offer prescriptions.

The mystery shopper praised most pharmacies for being friendly, welcoming and helpful in the advice they provided. One even was ready to provide a translation for medicine into Cantonese to help out the neighbour in scenario 1. Comments on where the pharmacy can improve have been quite varied, from improving on product knowledge to customer care, but the most mentioned were the lack of leaflets and chairs. Leaflets are important as this allows patients and customers to take with them potentially important information or details which they can have at hand at all times, as well as making them aware of new services they did not know about. Chairs are essential, especially if you are a large pharmacy and have elderly people attending often, they need to have place to rest while waiting. Our mystery shopper found seating to be an issue at some pharmacies in Central Hounslow.

Mystery Shopper Questionnaire Responses

Pharmacies Visited	Appearance	Pharmacist	Provided leaflets and website referrals
Hounslow			
Amin Pharmacy	Big, clean and spacious	Attentive, professional and helpful.	No
Asda	Small	Very helpful.	No leaflets, website referral yes.
Hebert & Herbert (280 Staines Rd.)	Clean and spacious	Attentive, professional but dealt only in prescriptions.	No leaflets, website referral yes when prompted.
Hounslow Central Pharmacy	Small and tight	Attentive, professional and helpful.	No leaflets, website referral yes.
Jade Pharmacy – Isleworth	Clean and tidy (too many posters)	Three Pharmacist available, attentive, professional and helpful.	No
Boots the Chemist	Clean, not enough seating	Unprofessional, patient privacy not maintained.	No
Herbert & Herbert (106 Staines Rd.)	Clean	Attentive, professional and extremely helpful.	Leaflets yes, no website referrals.

Bath Road Pharmacy	Clean, own consultation room	Attentive, very professional and helpful.	No
Boots Pharmacy	Clean and organised (not enough seating)	Attentive, professional and helpful.	No
Hounslow East Pharmacy	Clean but small (no waiting area)	Attentive, professional and helpful.	No
NOT COMPLETED			
Hounslow Central Pharmacy (38 Lampton Rd.)	Looked more like a corner shop	Pharmacist available only after 1.30pm.	No
Shah Pharmacy	Big and spacious (not enough seating)	Sales assistant did not allow diagnosis, wanted patient to be present.	No

Heston & Cranford

Out of 5 pharmacies visited in Heston & Cranford, scenarios were completed at each place. Appearance wise all 5 were described as being clean, bright and spacious with no negative comments on description, except for one pharmacy not having enough seating to accommodate people waiting.

A pharmacist was available on all 5 visits, where on one instance a stop-smoking specialist helped the mystery shopper with advice and treatment for scenario 2.

Overall

Out of 5 pharmacies, our mystery shopper has stated they would return to all of them. Some of the comments range from great advice, very detailed and honest. When asked to comment on what the pharmacies did best, our mystery shopper described one as having “amazing customer service and knowledge” and another as “informative, engaging and knowledgeable”.

In terms of where they could improve we find that leaflets come up as an issue. In one case, nothing regarding stop-smoking to give to our Mystery Shopper during scenario 2, with only two out of 5

offered leaflets. The seating issue came up at one pharmacy, where only two seats were available while 4 people were waiting.

Mystery Shopper Questionnaire Responses

Pharmacies Visited	Appearance	Pharmacist	Provided Leaflets and website referrals
Heston & Cranford			
Bhogal Pharmacy	Recently renovated, clean, bright & spacious	Attentive, professional and helpful.	Leaflets yes, no website referrals.
Medico Pharmacy	Clean, spacious & bright, had a consultation room	Pharmacist available but met stop-smoking specialist.	Leaflets yes, no website referrals.
Jade Pharmacy (Heston Rd.)	Clean and large	Attentive, professional and helpful.	No
Dunn Chemist	Bright & clean, only 2 seats in the waiting area	Attentive, extremely professional and helpful.	No
Jade Pharmacy – Vicarage farm Rd.	Clean, big & spacious (two shops combined)	Attentive, professional and helpful	No

Feltham

Out of the 4 pharmacies visited, 2 successful scenarios were carried out. One was due to the pharmacist being away on lunch, the other a sales assistant opted to help out and as scenario 2 was being carried out they simply said the stop-smoking specialist was not in and therefore they could not help and they opted to assist instead.

Our mystery shopper comments on appearance were mostly positive, clean and spacious being the most used words for description. One was however described as having rubbish on the floor, but this could be the result of them being inside a large chain supermarket.

Out of 4 pharmacies visited in Feltham between 1.30pm to 2.08pm our mystery shopper had the chance to speak to only one pharmacist. With 2 instances, a sales assistant was involved in offering advice instead of a pharmacist.

Overall

Out of the two pharmacies with successfully carried out scenarios, our mystery shopper stated they would only return to one of them and only for prescription and not for advice, as they did not offer any until prompted (scenario 3) on how to clear infection. The reasons for not returning to the other pharmacy was due to the unkempt appearance of the shop and the fact they would rather run by their symptoms to trained professional rather than a sales assistant.

For the two pharmacies with successful scenarios carried out, our mystery shopper praised one for having a sufficient amount of seating and the other for being approachable and friendly. However, in areas for improvement, one of the pharmacies needs to be cleaner and allow the public an option to talk to a pharmacist, while the other should offer advice on how to treat someone suffering without being asked to and not just give medicine.

At one pharmacy where our mystery shopper did not carry out a scenario even though the pharmacist was available, they were described as unapproachable and unhelpful, giving no good advice at all and not referring the mystery shopper to other pharmacies nearby.

Mystery Shopper Questionnaire Responses

Pharmacies Visited	Appearance	Pharmacist	Provided leaflets and website referrals
Feltham			
Asda Pharmacy	Exclusive area for pharmacy, rubbish on the floor, 6 chairs in the waiting area.	Pharmacist available but sales assistant offered help instead.	No
Boots Chemist (Harlington Rd.)	Clean, had a consultation room.	Attentive, professional and helpful.	No
NOT COMPLETED Boots Chemist (138 The Center)	Clean and spacious	Pharmacist not available – on lunch.	N/A

Boots Chemist (76 The Centre)	Clean & spacious (limited seating area).	Pharmacist not approachable. Sales Assistant informed that stop-smoking specialist not available.	No
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Conclusion

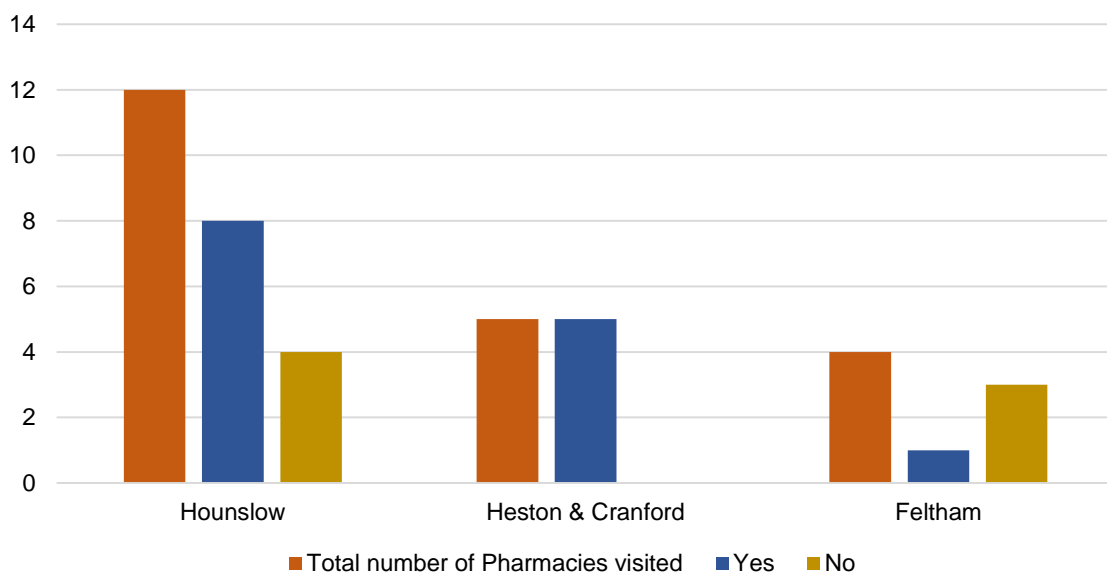
Out of 17 completed scenarios our mystery shopper wouldn't return to 3 of them. The pharmacists themselves have been attentive and engaging with the mystery shopper, the reason for not returning came down to the advice given by pharmacists.

In one example the pharmacist stated that they do not give advice but can only offer prescriptions. Offering advice on medicine should be something a pharmacist, should be able to do. It is understandable that a GP is best for advice as they have your medical history, however a pharmacist should be able to advise on what medicine can alleviate certain ailments.

Another pharmacy failed the mystery shopper test due to the pharmacist denying that they offer a no smoking service, on top of that loudly stating the patient's symptoms for the complete store to hear. This shows low levels of basic professionalism.

Demographic evaluation about people who would go back again to the same pharmacy

Would you visit again



Recommendations

20 pharmacies in the borough of Hounslow were visited for this project. Largely, people’s experiences of staff attitudes were positive, although this was not consistent. With regards to information provision, some people felt it was not always easy to find information and sometimes it was not friendly.

Based on the findings from our Mystery Shopper volunteers and the visits made to pharmacies, the following recommendations are made to improve the quality of community pharmacy services in the borough of Hounslow:

- **Leaflets and Posters:** Information leaflets/posters to be clearly displayed within the pharmacies. Multilingual leaflets would also pose benefits to wider community.
- **The pharmacists:** Although staff attitudes were only an issue in the minority of cases, it is still important for the general public to feel at ease and respected when using their service and to be provided with some privacy at the same time.
- **Appearance:** Increase in the number of seating areas to provide comfort to the waiting people, along with maintaining the overall cleanliness within the pharmacies.
- **Availability:** Pharmacists to be available during the business hours to provide the patients with the ease of dealing with an informative and knowledgeable pharmacist rather than a sales assistant. Being able to speak to the pharmacist will definitely provide more comfort to people and enhance their experience.

Mystery Shopper Questionnaire Responses

Pharmacies visited	Things they did best	Things they can improve on
Hounslow		
Amin Pharmacy	Offered to do prescriptions and to provide literature in Cantonese	Tidy the leaflet area.
Asda	Very helpful	Patients should be allowed to ask minor questions. Since it is a big shop so more seating is required.
Hebert & Herbert (280 Staines Rd.)	Friendly and welcoming	Could be more helpful and could refer to other services.

Hounslow Central Pharmacy	Pharmacist was approachable	The Sales Assistants could improve on their customer service.
Jade Pharmacy – Isleworth	Were able to give a solution	Had leaflets and offered other services to help diabetes.
Boots the Chemist	Pharmacist was approachable	Good level of knowledge about their services.
Herbert & Herbert (106 Staines Rd.)	Gave good advice about their stop smoking service	Could provide more leaflets.
Bath Road Pharmacy	Very helpful and informative	More seating needed in the waiting area.
Boots Pharmacy	Very knowledgeable and offered medication	More seating needed to be provided for the elderly.
Heston & Cranford		
Bhogal Pharmacy	Customer service and knowledge was amazing	Pharmacist was not in at 9:10 and sales assistant did not know when they were going to be in.
Medico Pharmacy	Had a smoking specialist	Should provide more leaflets, also give a chance to speak to the pharmacist.
Jade Pharmacy (Heston Rd.)	Pharmacist was informative, engaging and knowledgeable	They need more leaflets. Nothing on stop-smoking.
Dunn Chemist	Very knowledgeable, offering solution and advice	Need more seats in the waiting area.
Jade Pharmacy – Vicarage farm Rd.	Friendly and approachable and provide great advice	Could provide more leaflets.
Feltham		
Asda Pharmacy		

	Exclusive area for pharmacy and 6 chairs in the waiting area	Option needed to speak to the pharmacist instead of Sales Assistant. Needs to be cleaned as there was rubbish on the floor.
Boots Chemist (Harlington Rd.)	Approachable and friendly	They should offer advice without being asked on how to reduce pain and stop infection.
NOT COMPLETED Boots Chemist (138 The Center)	NA	NA
Boots Chemist (76 The Centre)	NA	Very poor customer service.

Healthwatch Hounslow

An independent organisation that gives people a voice to improve and shape services and help them to receive the best of health and social care services.

Healthwatch Hounslow:

- Enables people to share views and concerns about local health and social care services;
- Provides evidence-based feedback to both commissioners and providers so as to influence, inform and, if necessary, challenge decisions and plans; and
- Provides or signposts information about local services and how best to access them.

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