

Pharmacies services or dispensing doctors in County Durham

Research into the experiences of people accessing pharmacy
services in County Durham



Contents

Healthwatch County Durham.....	3
Executive summary	4
Background to this work	6
What We Did.....	7
What We Heard.....	7
What we found.....	9
Recommendations.....	10
Acknowledgements.....	12
Appendices.....	12

Healthwatch County Durham (HWCD)

On the 1st April 2013 under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 152 local Healthwatch organisations were established throughout England.

These Local Healthwatch have been set up across England to create a strong, independent consumer champion whose aim is to:

- Strengthen the collective voice of citizens and communities in influencing local health and social care services to better meet their needs
- Support people to find the right health and social care services for them by providing appropriate information, advice and signposting
- To encourage and support people and groups to share their views about services; listen to people's needs and experiences of services

We achieve this by:

- Listening to people, especially the most vulnerable, to understand their experiences and what matters most to them
- Influencing those who have the power to change services so that they better meet people's needs now and into the future
- Empowering and informing people to get the most from their health and social care services and encouraging other organisations to do the same



We advise



We listen



We speak up

Executive Summary

Following a work plan request by the County Durham's Public Health Team it was agreed that Healthwatch County Durham (HWCD) would carry out a consultation exercise from January to March 2020 to capture the views and experiences of individuals accessing pharmacy and dispensing doctor services across the county. We wanted to collect views about the following:

- The public's knowledge of services that pharmacies can offer
- The effects of the local publicity campaign for pharmacy
- The public's view of access to medicines, particularly delivery of medicines in the Dales

Our programme was halted by COVID-19 and as a result we were not able to carry out face to face engagement in the Dales as originally planned. However, overall we collected the views and experiences of 260 individuals.

What People Told Us

- 53.46% (54%)* access pharmacy services at least monthly
- 55.21% (52%) always visit the same pharmacy service
- 93.82% (94%) can easily access pharmacy services
- 61.54% (62%) normally get to their pharmacy by car or taxi
- 36.29% had problems obtaining their medication from their pharmacy
- 72.2 % use a high street pharmacy with 24.71% (26%) using a GP practice dispensary
- The thing 3 things that pharmacies do well are making sure prescriptions are appropriate and available in a timely manner; knowledgeable staff provide advice and information; good customer care with friendly, caring staff.
- Other services that respondents would like to access from pharmacies include a range of health checks eg blood pressure, blood tests, cholesterol checks, urine samples. Several people commented that they would like the pharmacist to be able to prescribe certain medications that would result in fewer visits to the GP surgery.
- Pharmacy services could be improved by dispensing more quickly, receiving a text message to say medication is ready to collect; reduce paper copies when collecting medication to be more environmentally friendly.
- 82.95% said they were aware of national and local publicity from the NHS to 'self-care' ie to make more use of community pharmacy services as the first port of call for advice and treatment.
- 67.58% said they were now more likely to contact/visit a pharmacy for advice.
- Awareness of the services that pharmacies provide range from dispensing medicines, 96.90% (93%), to sexual health testing, 46.51% (38%) and supplying a limited amount of prescription medication in an emergency, 46.51%.
- Use of services range from the dispensing medicines service, 90.42% (78%) to sexual health testing, 6.25% (1.28%) and supplying a limited amount of prescription medication in an emergency, 19.58%.
- 75.77% (78%) feel comfortable about getting advice from and talking to a pharmacist about health problems
- 58.69% (56%) are able to talk in the pharmacy without being overheard

- 74.23% (75%) have new medication explained to them by a pharmacist
- 76.92% (80%) said that the pharmacy usually has their prescribed medication in stock
- 93.08% (94%) said that the pharmacy staff are polite and helpful
- 14.62% (8%) have used a commercial, online pharmacy

Key Recommendations

HWCD carried out a survey on pharmacy services in 2017 and some of the recommendations made then continue to be appropriate, based on the responses of those who have participated in this survey:

- Respondents asked if pharmacies could dispense medications more quickly. In addition almost 100 respondents had problems obtaining their medication from their pharmacy. We would suggest that this is looked into further to identify where improvements could be made.
- Consideration should be given to offer additional health checks within pharmacies and to be able to prescribe certain medications, to reduce the need to visit the GP.
- The main reason cited for not accessing pharmacies for advice was the lack of privacy, with only 58.69% of respondents saying they could talk in the pharmacy without being overheard. Facilities to enable customers to talk to the pharmacist without being overheard should be made available and clearly advertised.
- When explaining new medication to customers, pharmacists should make it clear that this is what they are doing as currently only 74.23% of respondents were aware of this happening.
- One of the recommendations in our 2017 report was to raise public awareness of the services pharmacies offer. As a result the Public Health team at Durham County Council worked in partnership with the Local Pharmaceutical Committee, the Clinical Commissioning Groups and HWCD to develop a publicity campaign across the County that focused on 'self-care'. A national campaign was also conducted and 67.58% of respondents said they were now more likely to contact/visit a pharmacy for advice. Further awareness campaigns should be considered.
- Respondents' awareness and use of, pharmacy services, has increased since we surveyed the public in 2017. We cannot say that the marketing campaign focusing on 'self-care' has impacted on this outcome but it is possible, given the high percentage of respondents who were aware of the campaign.

Whilst there is little significant change in the way respondents have answered the questions compared to respondents' answers in 2017 it should be noted that:

- Awareness of Flu Services has increased from 69% in 2017 to 82.17%; 30.83% of respondents have used the service compared to 17% previously.

Awareness of Sexual Health Services has increased from 39% in 2017 to 46.51%; 6.25% of respondents have used the service compared to 1% previously.

- Use of the disposing of old medicines service has increased from 43.70% in 2017 to 52.50%.
- Use of Smoking Cessation Services has increased from 4.63% in 2017 to 7.08%.
- Awareness of Sexual Health Services has increased from 39% in 2017 to 46.51%; 6.25% of respondents have used the service compared to 1% previously.
- The number of respondents using an online pharmacy has increased from 8% in 2017 to 14.62%.

Background to the Work

In 2017 HWCD produced a report on the public's views on pharmacy and dispensing doctor services. In 2019 Durham County Council's Public Health Team again requested support from HWCD with a public survey of pharmacy and dispensing doctor services, to inform the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA), 2021-2024, which is produced every 3 years. It is used by NHS England when it assesses new pharmacy applications and by commissioners of pharmaceutical services. The PNA also links into the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Public Health Pharmaceutical lead was keen to gather the public's views on pharmacy / dispensing doctor services early on in the process of writing the PNA as the first draft needed to be ready by mid-July 2020 in order to start the consultation process. HWCD's Board agreed that this work could go ahead. It should be noted that in the light of Covid 19 the County Council has deferred its consultation process until 2022, a decision that has been taken nationally. HWCD, having collected 260 responses to its online survey took the view that these findings should be reported on and can be developed further in 2022.

One of the recommendations from the report published in 2017 was that whilst the public are very aware of some services pharmacies offer, others with a lower profile should be more clearly advertised as this could reduce pressure on other parts of the health care system. In addition the current PNA states that 'The public need to be made aware of what pharmacy can do by all stakeholders working together to promote the role of pharmacy in County Durham'. As a result the Local Pharmaceutical Committee began to work collaboratively in 2018 with Durham County Council, the Clinical Commissioning Groups and HWCD in order to plan a local publicity campaign for pharmacy in 2019. The first campaign provided extra local publicity to the national NHS England Help Us Help You Pharmacy Advice campaign which launched in February 2019 and which positioned pharmacies as the first place to go to for advice on minor health concerns. The second local campaign in the autumn of 2019 then focused on three key themes of:

1. The training and expertise in the pharmacy team.
2. The accessibility of the community pharmacy service.
3. The nature of pharmacy consultations and the services provided.

Following a work plan request by the County Durham Public Health Team it was agreed that Healthwatch County Durham (HWCD) would carry out a consultation exercise from January to March 2020, to capture the views and experiences of individuals accessing pharmacy and

dispensing doctor services across County Durham. We wanted to collect views about the following:

- The public’s knowledge of services that pharmacies can offer
- The effects of the local publicity campaign for pharmacy
- The public’s view of access to medicines, particularly delivery of medicines in the Dales

What We Did

Although we had planned to run the public consultation through to the end of April 2020, it was halted by COVID-19. As a result we ran the consultation from January - mid March but were unable to carry out face to face engagement in the Dales as originally planned. We collected the views and experiences of 260 individuals via an online survey, which we shared via our website, our monthly e-bulletin, social media channels. The survey was also shared with partners and networks across the County. Public Health’s Pharmaceutical Lead raised awareness of the consultation with Durham County Council employees by posting the item on the council’s intranet.

The survey was designed to capture the public’s knowledge of pharmacy services and what else they would like to see offered to support pharmacies to increase the number of users and support the commissioning process. They were also asked about their awareness of the local publicity campaign for pharmacy. There was an opportunity for participants to make comments within the survey.

Respondents were asked to provide the first half of their postcode to enable us to identify which locales were represented. Unfortunately not all respondents carried out this request. Postcode areas that were identified are:

DH1	DH2	DH3	DH4	DH6	DH7	DH8	DH9	DL5		DL13	DL14	DL15	DL16	DL17
TS21	TS28	TS29	SR7	SR8	TS28	TS29	SR7	SR8						

What We Heard

Online Surveys

The responses were analysed via Survey Monkey and the key findings are highlighted below.

In terms of how the public access pharmacy services across County Durham:

- 53.46% access pharmacy services once a month, with 55.21% of people always / usually using the same service
- 93.82% can easily access pharmacy services, with 61.54% of them visiting a pharmacy by car or taxi
- 72.20 visit a community pharmacy i.e on the high street, in a supermarket

In terms of how the public feel about talking to a pharmacist:

- 75.77% felt comfortable about getting advice from and talking to the pharmacist about their health problems
- 58.69% were able to talk in their pharmacy without being overheard

In relation to medication:

- 74.23% said that when they got new medication the pharmacist explained how, when and why they should use or take it
- 36.29% of respondents said they had had problems obtaining their medication

The main problem identified was that medication was in short supply/out of stock/discontinued. Other reasons included the wrong medication was dispensed, items being incorrect or missed off, prescription not collected from surgery.

Of the services offered by pharmacies:

- 96.9% were aware of the dispensing medicines service with 90.42% having used it
- 64.34% of respondents were aware of the minor ailments service with 34.58% having used it
- 82.17% were aware of the adult flu vaccination service and 30.83% had accessed it
- 46.51% were aware of sexual health services and 6.25% had accessed services

We were interested to find out if any of the respondents regularly used a commercial, online pharmacy. 14.62% of respondents said they did, which was almost double the percentage compared to the results of our 2017 survey.

The common themes made in the free text boxes were consistently positive about their local pharmacy with almost 93.08% of respondents stating that pharmacy staff are polite and helpful.

Q7 What does your pharmacy service do well?



When asked what additional services respondents would like to access from their local pharmacy or GP practice dispensary the most requested were home delivery and additional walk-in services.

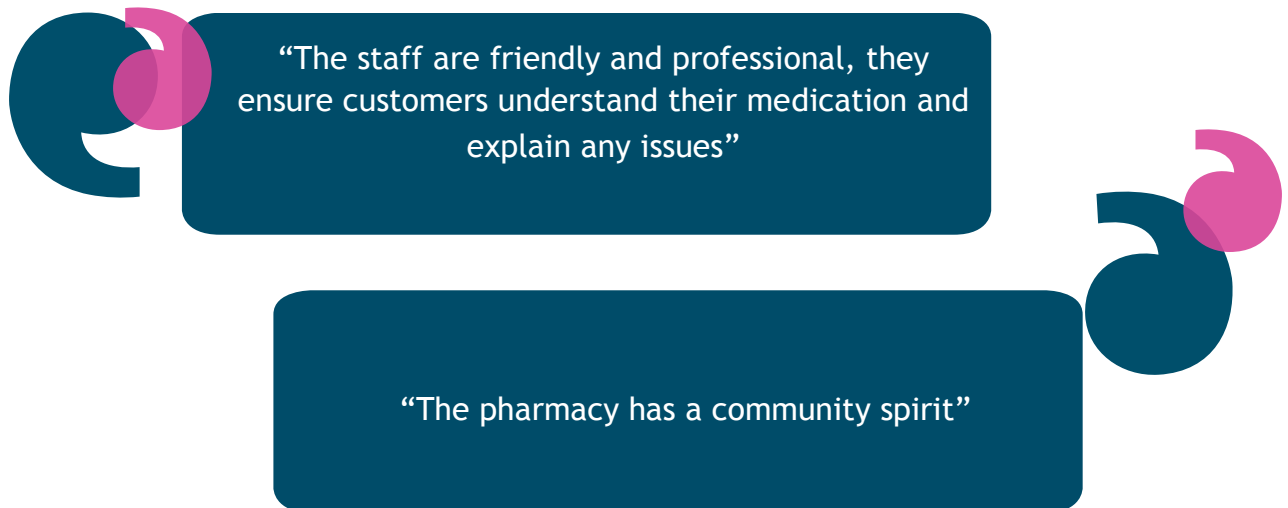
*Denotes results from HWCD’s Pharmacy Survey 2017

Respondents were asked how the pharmacy could be improved:

- More staff
- Having prescriptions ready and dispensing them faster

One of the recommendations from the report published in 2017 was that whilst the public are very aware of some services pharmacies offer, others with a lower profile should be more clearly advertised as this could reduce pressure on other parts of the health care system.

82.95% said they were aware of national and local publicity from the NHS to 'self-care' ie to make more use of community pharmacy services as the first port of call for advice and treatment, with 67.58% saying they were now more likely to contact/visit a pharmacy for advice. Of those who said they were not more likely to contact/visit a pharmacy for advice, the main reason given was a lack of privacy.



What We Found

From the findings of the 260 people who responded to our survey there is no doubt that people accessing pharmacies and GP practice dispensaries across County Durham still value the services that they provide. The main findings are:

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Several people commented that they would like the pharmacist to be able to prescribe certain medications that would result in fewer visits to the GP surgery.

- Pharmacy services could be improved by dispensing more quickly, receiving a text message to say medication is ready to collect; reduce paper copies when collecting medication to be more environmentally friendly.
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Thank You

Healthwatch County Durham would like to thank those who have contributed to this piece of work.

Appendix One

Healthwatch County Durham gathers the views of local people about their experiences of health and social care services to make sure that those views are considered when services are being designed.

Every 3 years pharmacy services are reviewed in order to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the local population. Pharmacy services are either services you receive in your community pharmacy (chemist) or from a dispensary in your GP practice.

The Health and Wellbeing Board in County Durham (of which Healthwatch is a member) will begin work this year to look at whether or not there are adequate pharmacy services in place for 2021 – 2024.

We would like to hear your views on pharmacy services and would be grateful if you could complete the survey below.

How often do you access local pharmacy services in your area?	At least once a week	At least once a month	At least every 3 months	At least every 6 months	At least once a year	Less than once a year
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Do you always visit the same pharmacy service?	Always	Usually	No
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Can you easily access pharmacy services?	Yes	No	Don't know / NA
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Have you had problems obtaining your medication from your pharmacy?	Yes	No	Don't know / NA
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If 'Yes', can you tell us why?

Thinking about the pharmacy service you visit most often, how do you normally get there?	On foot	Public transport	Car or taxi	Other
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What type of pharmacy service do you visit the most?	A dispensary in my GP practice	A community pharmacy e.g. on the high street, in a supermarket	Other
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What does your pharmacy service do well?
Are there any other services you would like to access from your pharmacy service?
Is there any way your pharmacy service could be improved?

Thinking about services from community pharmacies ie those on the high street, in a supermarket only

There has been increasing national and local publicity from the NHS to 'self-care' ie to make more use of community pharmacy services as a first port of call for advice and treatment.

Have you been aware of such publicity?	Yes	No	Don't know / NA
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Are you now more likely to contact / visit a pharmacy for advice?	Yes	No	Don't know / NA
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If "No" can you tell us why?

The following types of services can be accessed from your community pharmacy. Please indicate (✓) if you are aware that these services are available and if you have used the service.

Service	Aware ✓	Use ✓	Service	Aware✓	Use ✓
Dispensing medicines and /or appliances			Advice on the management of self-limiting minor ailments (including referral from NHS 111; accessing a pharmacy minor ailment service)		
Specific advice about new medication (the 'New Medicine Service')			Disposal of old or unwanted medicines		
Supply of a limited amount of prescription medication in an emergency (via referral from NHS 111)			Sexual health services e.g. emergency hormonal contraceptive services; supply of testing kits for sexually transmitting infections		
Adult NHS flu vaccination			Stop smoking advice and/or service		

Thinking about your experience of using community pharmacies:

<i>Please place a ✓ in the appropriate boxes.</i>	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW/ NA
Do you feel comfortable getting advice from and talking to the pharmacist about health problems?			
Are you able to talk in your pharmacy without being overheard?			
When you get new medication from the pharmacist do they explain how, when and why you should use or take it?			
Does the pharmacy usually have your prescribed medication in stock?			
Are the pharmacy staff polite and helpful when you visit or contact them?			

Do you regularly use online pharmacy services?	Yes	No
If 'Yes' can you tell us why?		

Please provide your postcode:

All information is kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act.