

GP Access - Beacon Medical Group Plympton Surgeries



Engagement Report

February
2022





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Introduction

Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay is the independent consumer champion for people using health and care services in Devon. Healthwatch listens to what people like about services and what could be improved, and shares those views with those who have the power to make change happen. In May 2021, Healthwatch became aware of rising feedback around difficulties in accessing GP Services from Beacon Medical Group in Ivybridge. As a result, Healthwatch produced a provider report for Beacon Medical Group highlighting the issues being raised. At a subsequent meeting with Beacon Medical Group and NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group, it was agreed to undertake further face to face and digital engagement around specific topics from patients not only registered with the two Beacon surgeries based in Ivybridge, but also from the Group's surgeries in Plympton.

Methodology

The engagement took place between 6th September and 18th October 2021. The survey consisted of 16 questions about people's experiences contacting and communicating with Beacon surgeries based Plympton and Ivybridge. There were also two questions at the end of the survey to collect demographic information (age and gender). The survey was distributed and publicised online via the Facebook pages of Healthwatch Devon and Healthwatch Plymouth (see Appendix 1); six posts promoting the survey reached a total of 14,491 people and were engaged with 2,344 times.

A total of 616 people responded to the survey; 253 respondents (42.17%) were Plympton patients and 347 respondents (57.84%) were Ivybridge patients. This report will focus on the experiences of Plympton patients; the experiences of Ivybridge patients are detailed in a separate report. A summary of the most notable findings from the Ivybridge patients' surveys is available in Appendix 2.



Key findings

- 90.78% of respondents who had called the surgery in the last four months felt they waited in a queue for a long time to speak to someone; of these respondents, 48.67% said they waited longer than 30 minutes.
- 34.98% of respondents found the online consultation process “not easy” or “not so easy” to use, and 40.36% found using it “easy” or “fairly easy.” 23.64% found other online services (e.g. booking appointments, repeat prescriptions) “not easy” or “not so easy” to use and 48.77% found other services “easy” or “fairly easy” to use.
- After using the surgery’s online consultation process, 75.21% of respondents said they were contacted by the time specified by the surgery and 24.79% said they were not.
- 83.87% of respondents receive information and messages from the surgery; the most common method of receiving messages is via text/SMS (93.27% of respondents). 69.33% of respondents felt that communications from the surgery met their needs and 30.67% felt they did not.

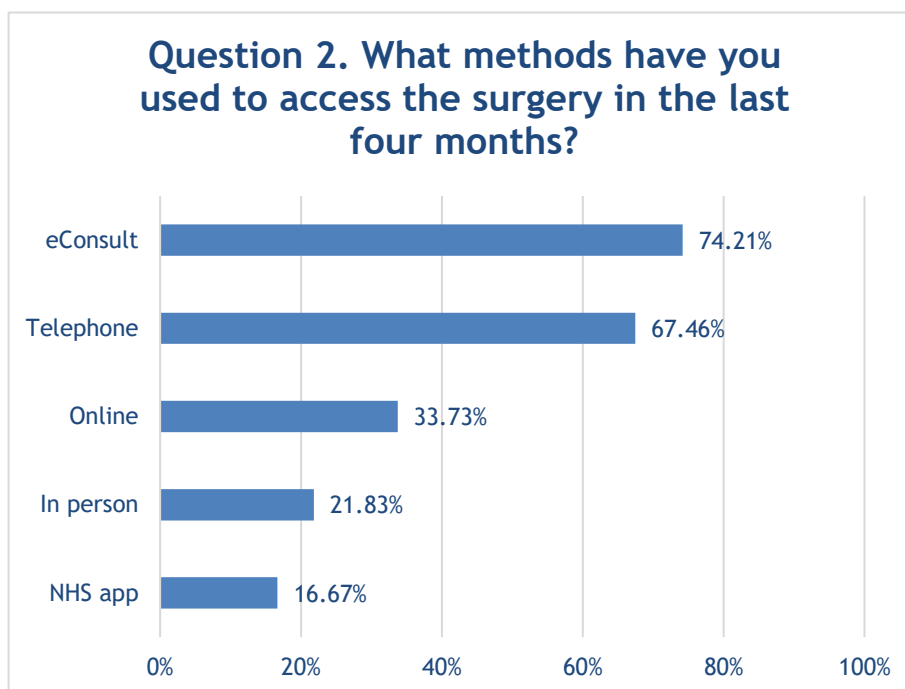
Detailed findings

Question 1. Please select which surgery you are registered with.

253 respondents were registered with Beacon surgeries in Plympton. The survey did not allow respondents to specify which Plympton surgery they were registered with.

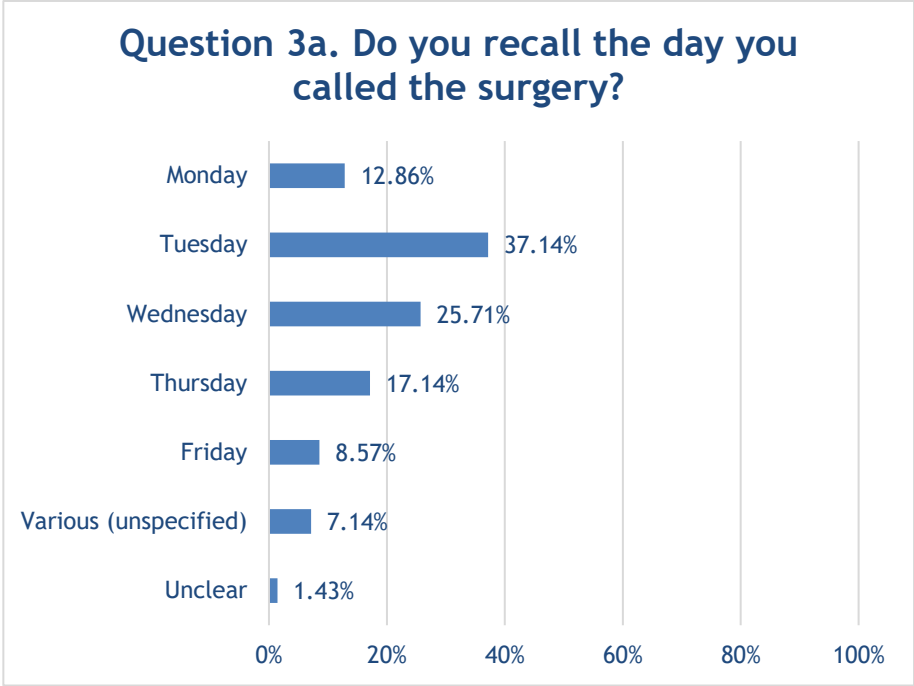
Question 2. Have you had cause to access your surgery in the last four months? If so, what methods did you use? Tick all that apply.

252 respondents answered this question and one did not. As respondents were able to select more than one answer, percentages may total more than 100. 74.21% of respondents (187 people) used eConsult, 67.46% (170 people) contacted their surgery via telephone, 33.73% (85 people) used online methods (e.g. booking and cancelling appointments, requesting repeat prescriptions), 21.83% (55 people) contacted their surgery in person, and 16.67% (42 people) used the NHS app.

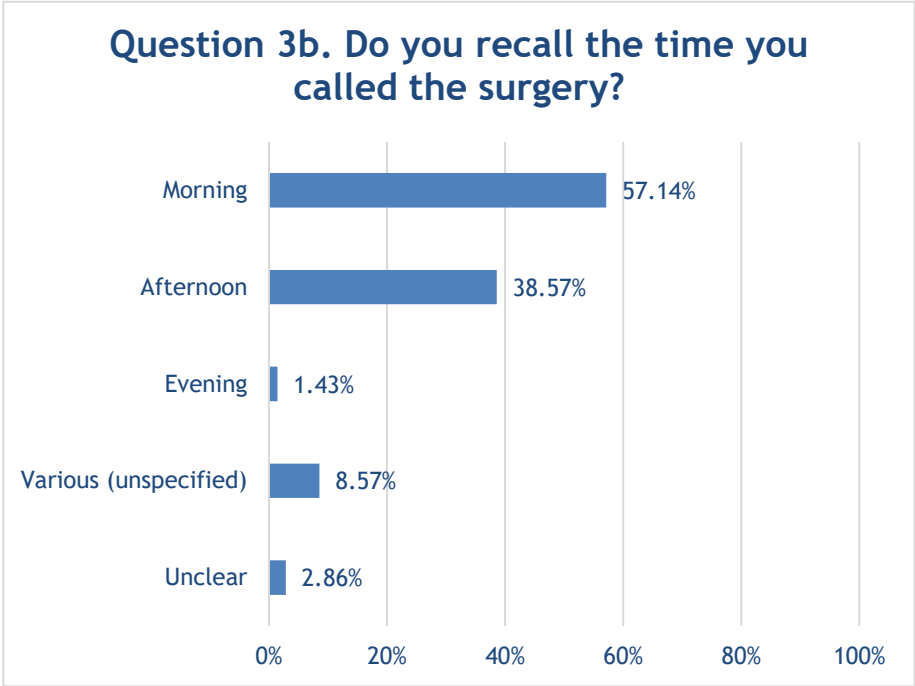


Question 3. Can you recall the day and time you rang the surgery?

70 respondents answered the “day of the week” portion of this question and 183 did not. Some respondents named multiple days, so totals may be greater than 70. 12.86% of respondents (nine people) called their surgery on a Monday, 37.14% (26 people) called on a Tuesday, 25.71% (18 people) called on a Wednesday, 17.14% (12 people) called on a Thursday, 8.57% (six people) called on a Friday, 7.14% (five people) said they called on multiple days but did not specify which, and 1.43% (one person) gave an answer that was not clear. No respondents reported attempting to call their surgery at the weekend.

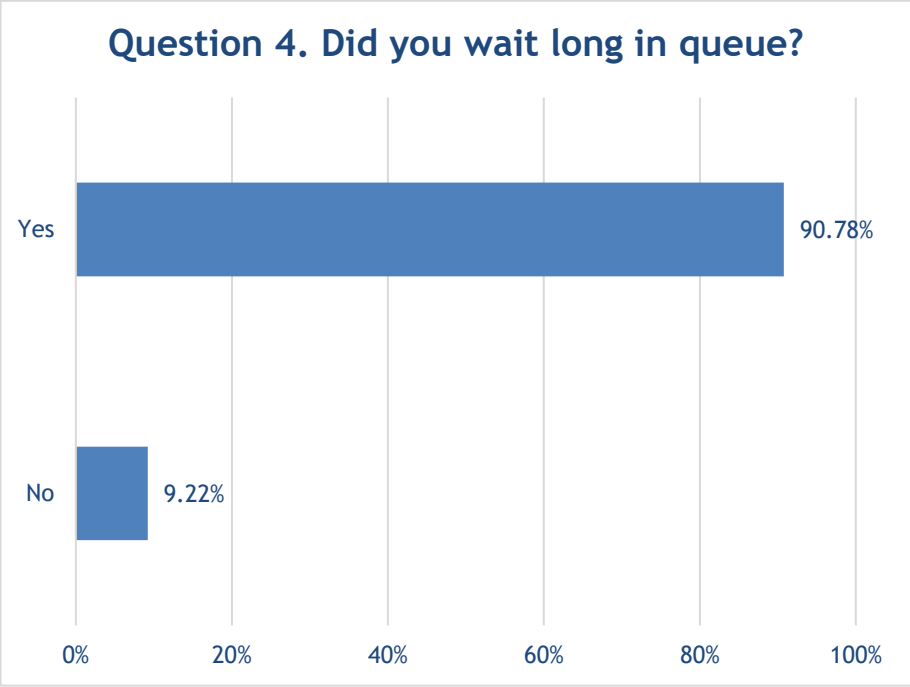


70 respondents answered the “time of day” portion of this question and 183 did not. As some respondents named multiple times of day, totals may be greater than 70. 57.14% of respondents (40 people) called their surgery in the morning (before 12pm), 38.57% (27 people) called in the afternoon (between 12pm and 6pm), 1.43% (one person) called their surgery in the evening (after 6pm), 8.57% (six people) called their surgery various times but did not specify which, and 2.86% (two people) gave answers that were not clear.



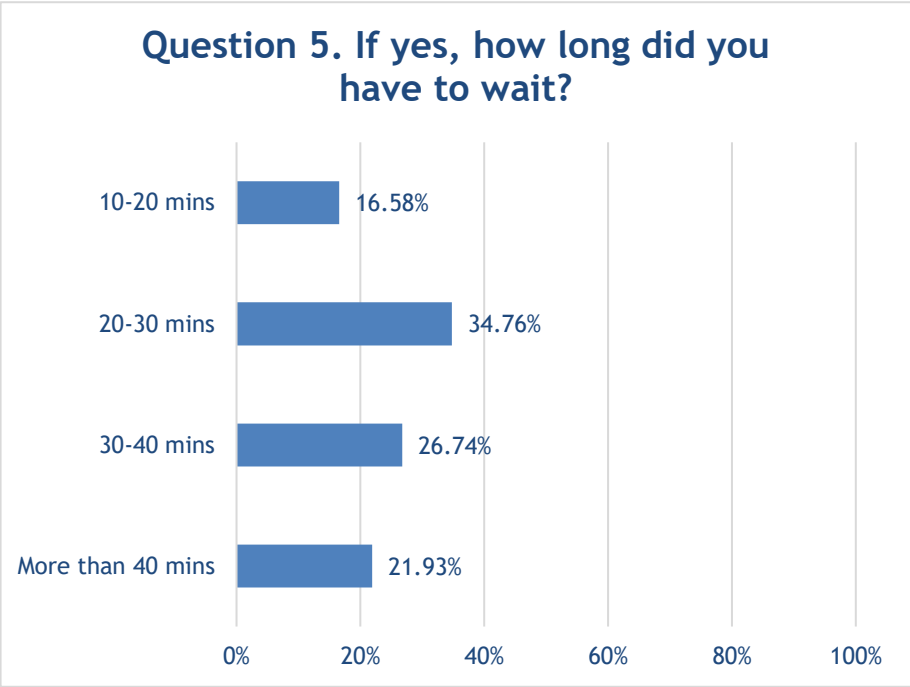
Question 4. Did you wait long in a queue?

206 respondents answered this question and 47 did not. 90.78% of respondents (187 people) answered yes and 9.22% (19 people) answered no.



Question 5. If yes, how long did you have to wait?

Only respondents who answered “yes” to the previous question were included in this analysis; all 187 of those respondents answered this question. 16.58% of respondents (31 people) waited between 10 and 20 minutes, 34.76% (65 people) waited between 20 and 30 minutes, 26.74% (50 people) waited between 30 and 40 minutes, and 21.93% (41 people) waited longer than 40 minutes.



Question 6. What are your expectations of the telephone system, i.e. acceptable waiting times?

198 respondents answered this question and 55 did not. Some respondents expressed what they believed an acceptable waiting time should be, whereas other respondents shared their current experiences of telephone waiting times. It was not always clear whether respondents were referring to the former or the latter in their answers. 56 respondents said they expected to wait no longer than five minutes, 59 respondents said they expected to wait no longer than 10 minutes, and 16 respondents said they expected to wait no longer than 20 minutes. 55 respondents left comments expressing their general dissatisfaction with the telephone system; the most common complaints were long waiting times and calls being cut off.

Expecting to wait no longer than five minutes (56 comments)

- “[I] should not have to wait longer than five minutes.”

Expecting to wait no longer than ten minutes (59 comments)

- “They are currently too long. Five to ten minutes should be [the] maximum for contact.”

Expecting to wait no longer than 20 minutes (16 comments)

- “No longer than a 20 minute wait [is acceptable].”

General dissatisfaction about telephone waiting times (55 comments)

- “It is a long time but what is more frustrating is when you get to number one in the queue [and] it then rings and goes dead... this has happened on more than one occasion. I then had to start the whole process of ringing the surgery again.”
- “Lengthy waiting [...] should never be acceptable and made even worse by recorded messages saying you could do this online instead. No-one would willingly access the surgery by telephone if the query could be dealt with by another quicker means and constant repetition of this information is extremely irritating.”

Question 7. Should there be multi-choice options for appointments, prescriptions etc to speed up the process?

188 respondents answered this question and 65 did not. 126 respondents said yes or made positive comments about the suggestion, 24 respondents said they felt such a system already existed, 20 respondents supported the idea conditionally or made alternative suggestions that would make the booking process easier, and 18 respondents said no or made negative comments about the idea. Alternative suggestions included making it easier to speak to a person or making more appointments bookable online.

Yes (126 comments)

- “Yes! Trying to get any sort of appointment is an absolute nightmare!”

Options already exist (24 comments)

- “When I rang last week, those options were already given. However, the recorded message takes far too long, just under one minute... I believe the recorded message could be condensed to make it much shorter.”

It depends/alternative suggestions (20 comments)

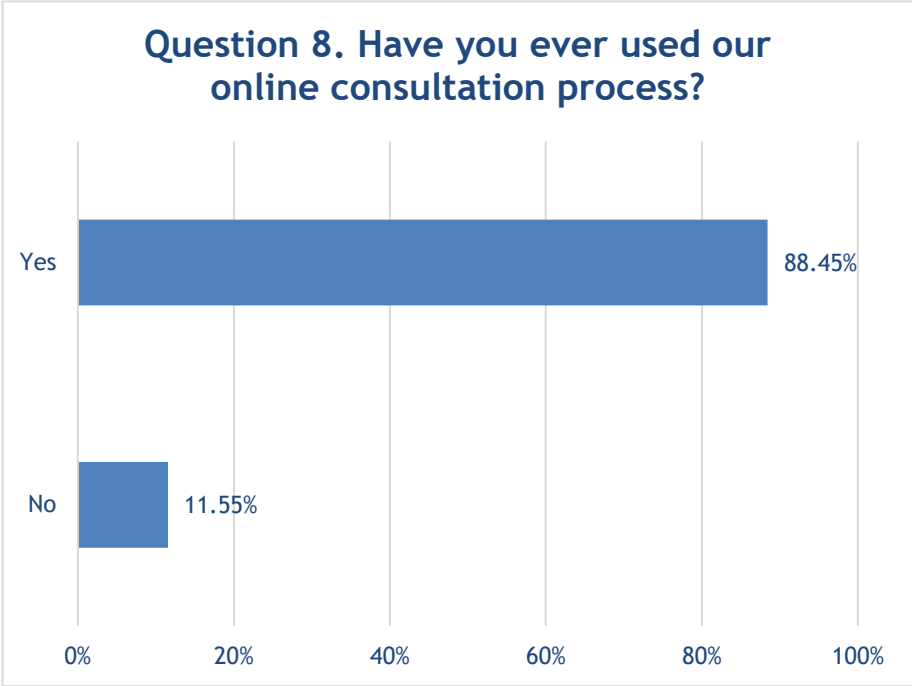
- “Yes, but make them short and snappy. Having to listen to seven different voices that take five minutes to say each doesn’t speed up the process. I shouldn’t have to hear about calling 999 or Covid for 10 minutes before even hearing multiple choices.”

No (18 comments)

- “No, these can be confusing, especially for older generations. Should be straight through to someone that can help.”

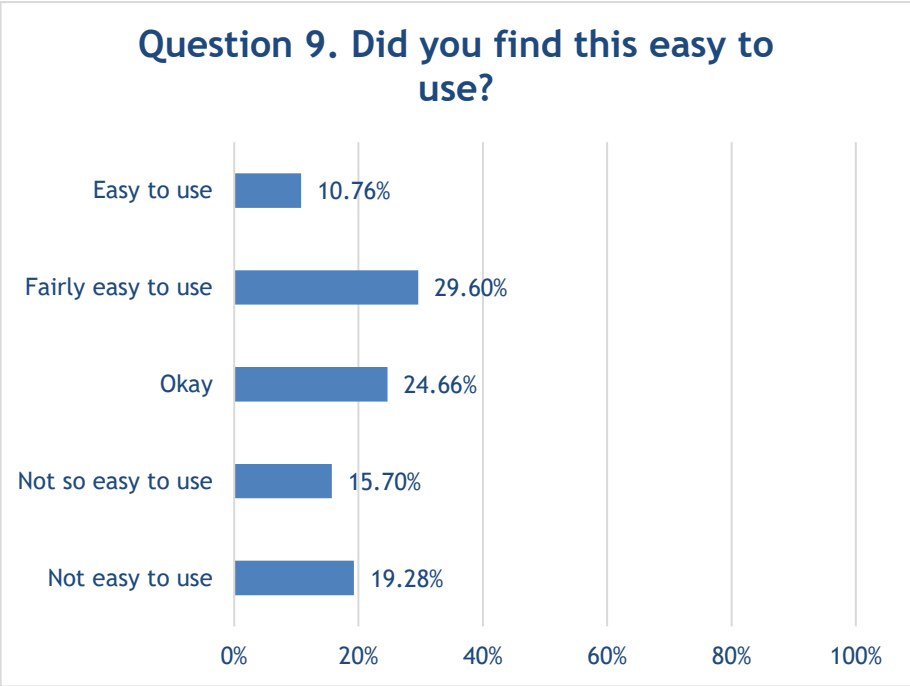
Question 8. Have you used our online consultation process?

251 respondents answered this question and two did not. 88.45% of respondents (222 people) answered yes and 11.55% (29 people) answered no.



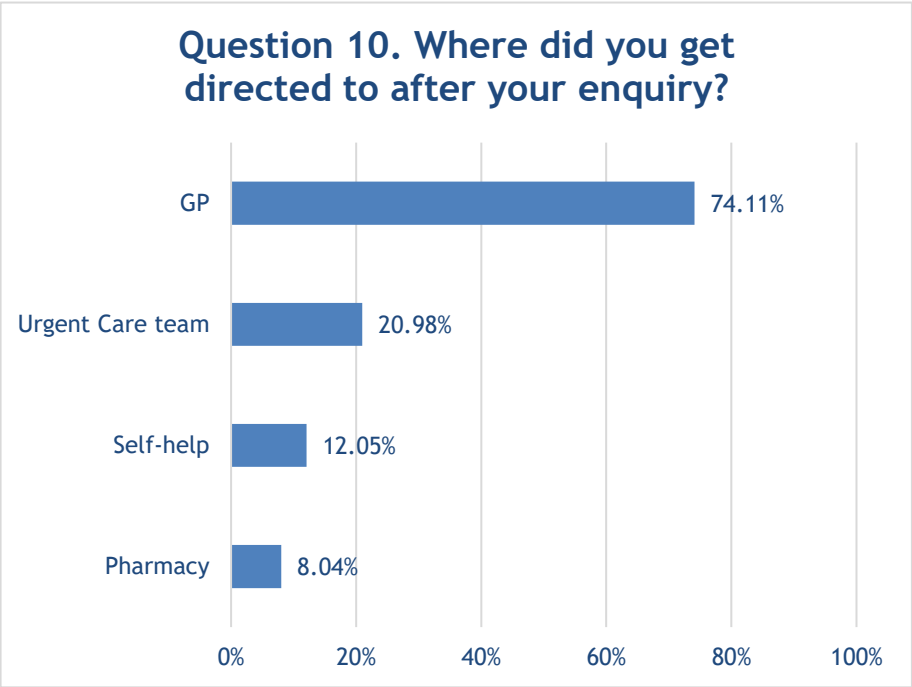
Question 9. Did you find this easy to use?

223 respondents answered this question and 30 did not. 10.76% of respondents (24 people) found the online consultation process easy to use, 29.60% (66 people) found it fairly easy to use, 24.66% (55 people) found it okay to use, 15.70% (35 people) found it not so easy to use, and 19.28% (43 people) found it not easy to use.



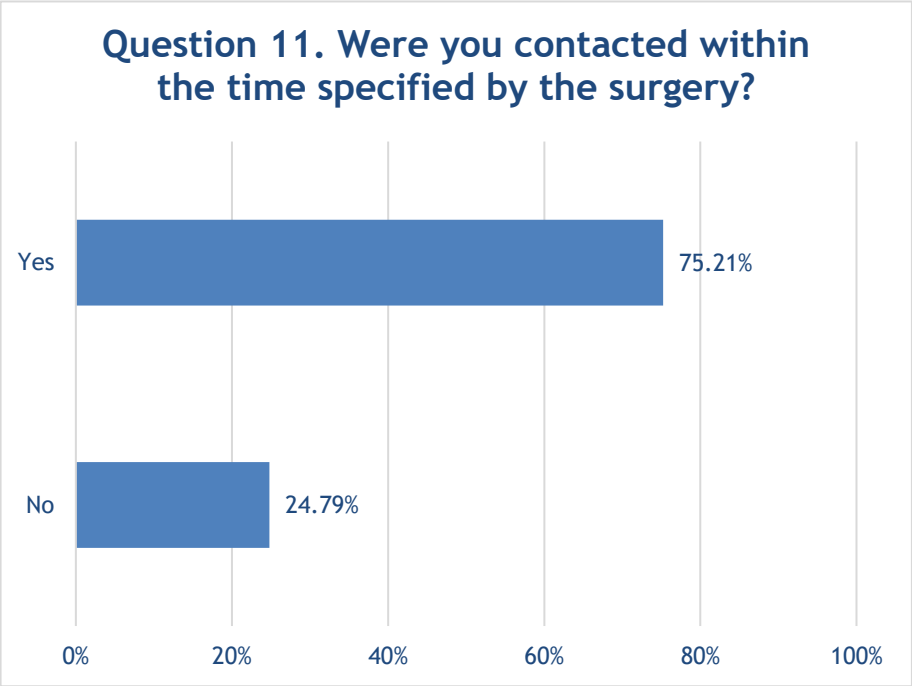
Question 10. Where did you get directed after your enquiry?

224 respondents answered this question and 29 did not. 74.11% of respondents (166 people) were directed to their GP, 20.98% (47 people) were directed to urgent care, 12.05% (27 people) were directed to self-help resources, and 8.04% (18 people) were directed to a pharmacy.



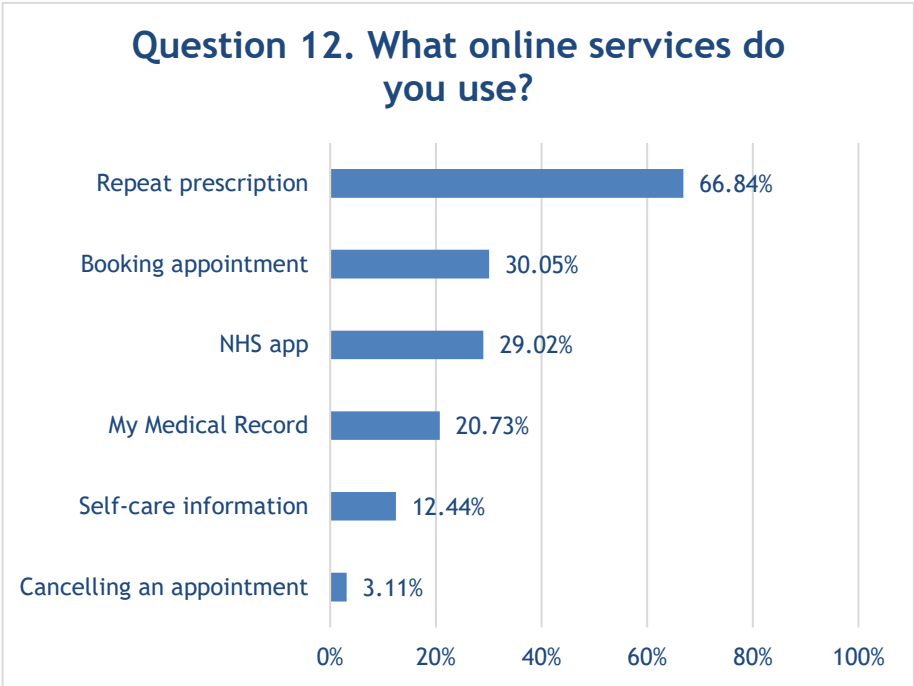
Question 11. Were you contacted within the specified time indicated by the surgery?

234 respondents answered this question and 19 did not. 75.21% of respondents (176 people) answered yes and 24.79% (58 people) answered no.



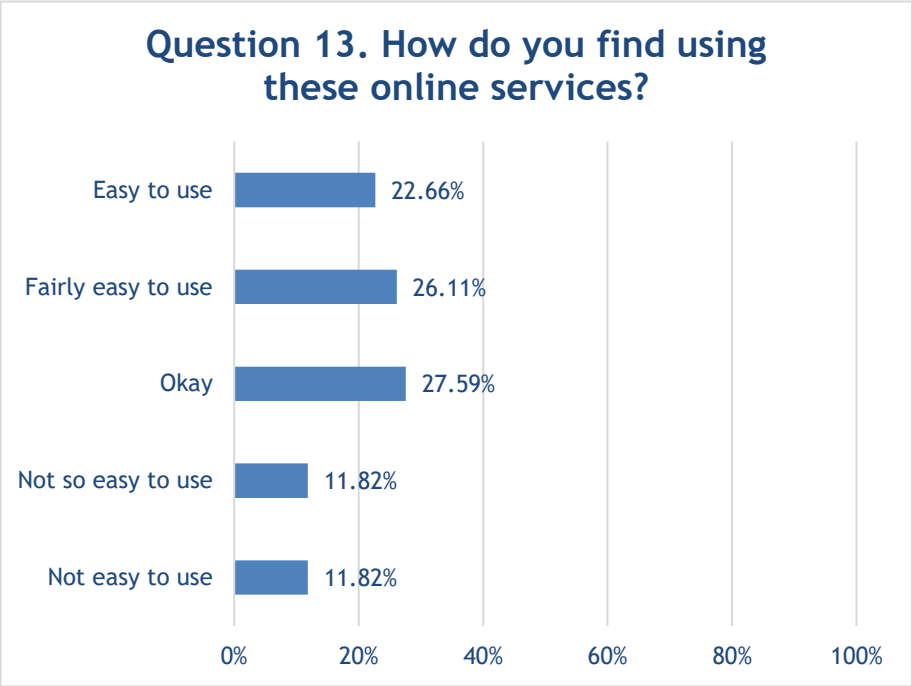
Question 12. What online services did you use? Tick all that apply.

193 respondents answered this question and 60 did not. As respondents could select more than one response, percentages may total more than 100. 66.84% of respondents (129 people) used online repeat prescription services, 30.05% (58 people) booked appointments online, 29.02% (56 people) used the NHS app, 20.73% (40 people) used My Medical Record, 12.44% (24 people) used online self-care information, and 3.11% (six people) cancelled appointments online.



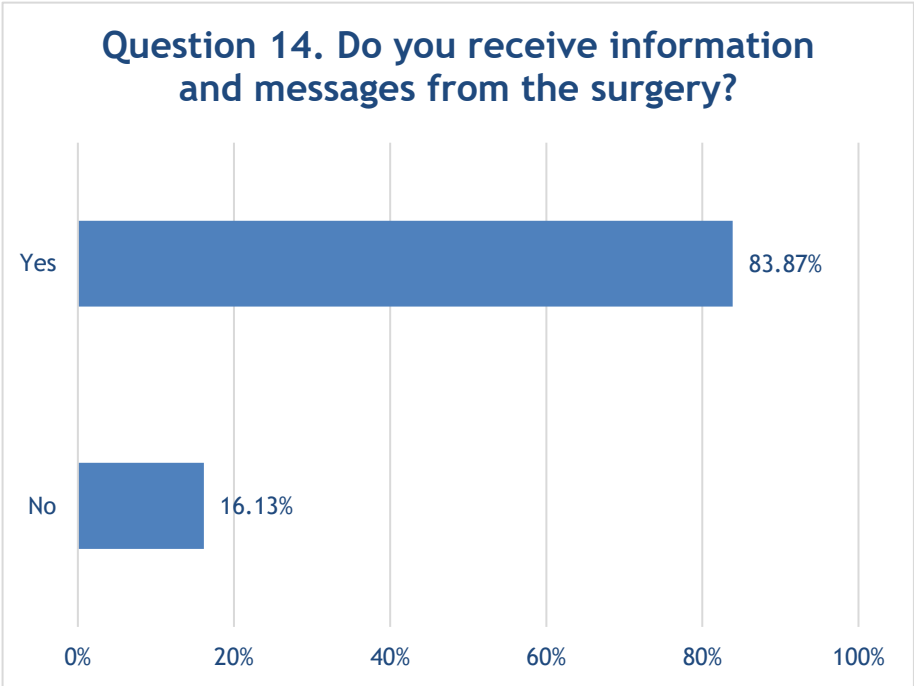
Question 13. How did you find using online services?

203 respondents answered this question and 50 did not. 22.66% (46 people) found online services easy to use, 26.11% (53 people) found them fairly easy to use, 27.59% (56 people) found them okay to use, 11.82% (24 people) found them not so easy to use, and 11.82% (24 people) found them not easy to use.



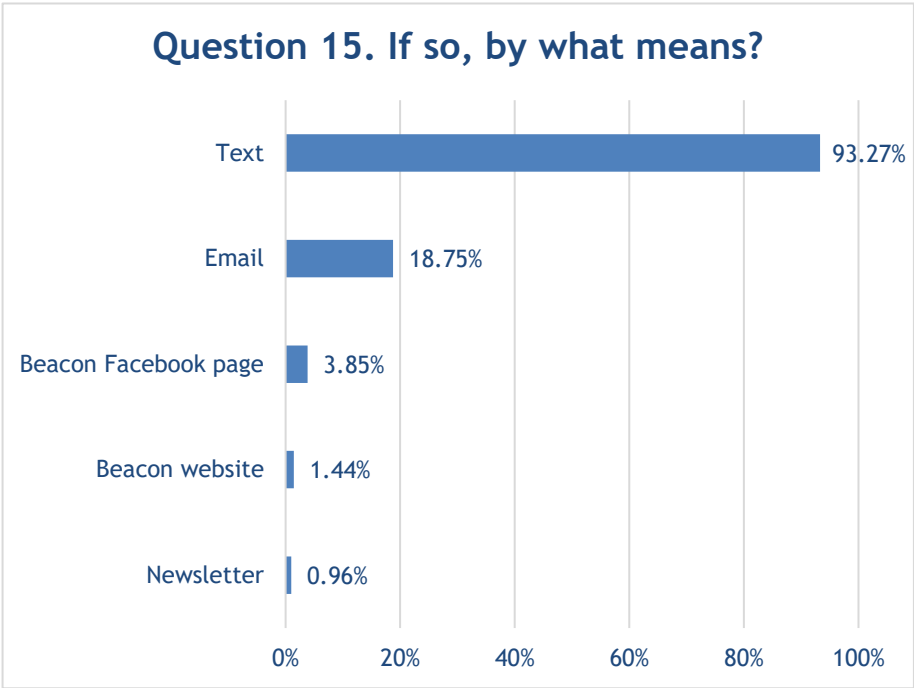
Question 14. Do you receive information and messages from the surgery either about an appointment or general information about Beacon?

248 respondents answered this question and five did not. 83.87% of respondents (208 people) answered yes and 16.13% (40 people) answered no.



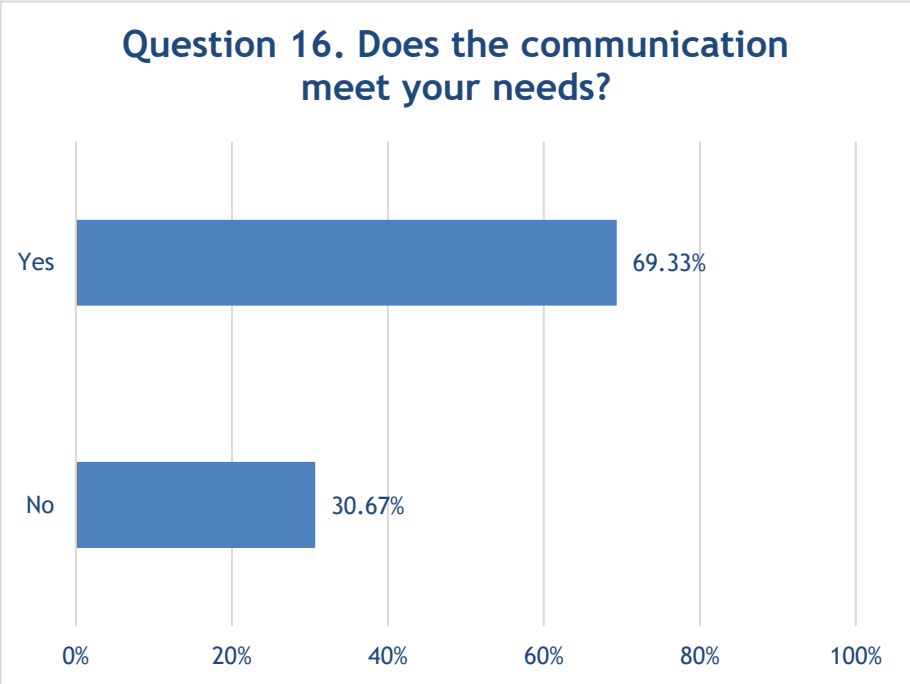
Question 15. If so, by what means? Tick all that apply.

208 respondents answered this question and 45 did not. 93.27% of respondents (194 people) received information via text, 18.75% (39 people) received information via email, 3.85% (eight people) received information via the Beacon Facebook page, 1.44% (three people) received information via the Beacon website, and 0.96% (two people) received information from a newsletter.



Question 16. Does the communication meet your needs?

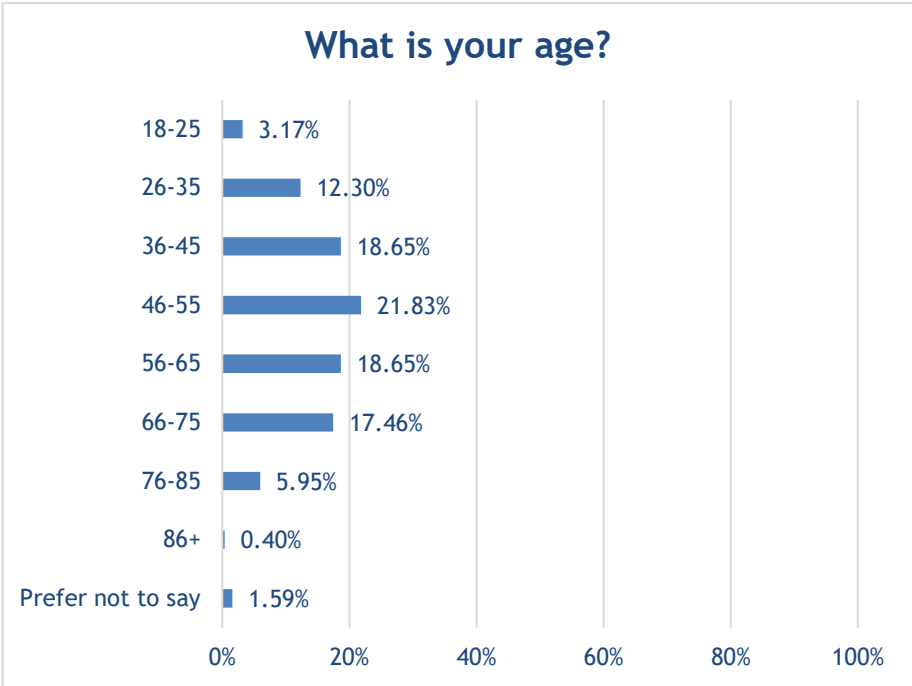
238 respondents answered this question and 15 did not. 69.33% of respondents (165 people) answered yes and 30.67% (73 people) answered no.



Demographics information

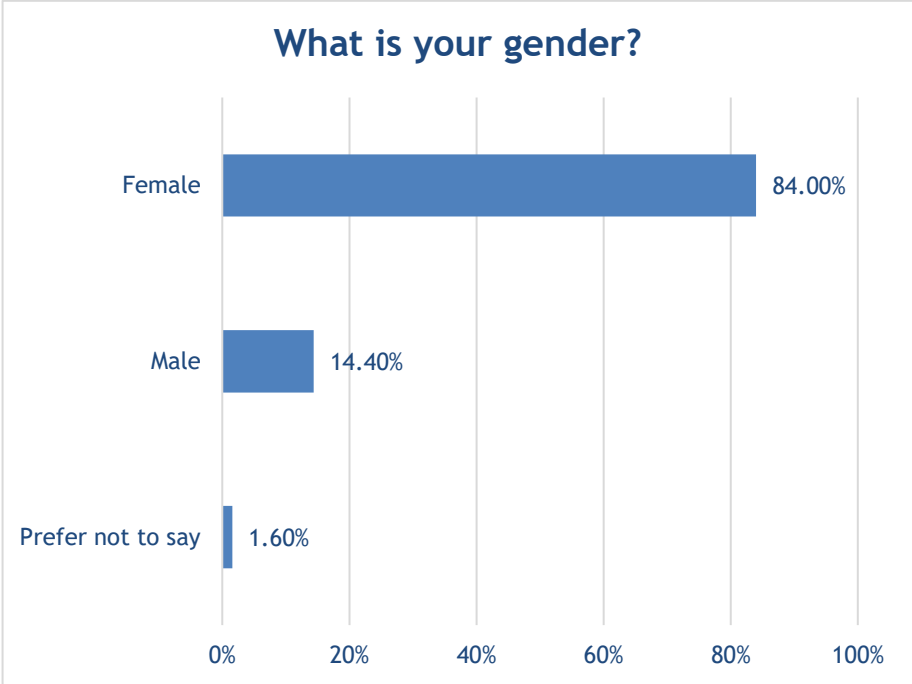
What is your age?

252 respondents answered this question and one did not. 3.17% of respondents (eight people) were aged 18 to 25, 12.30% (31 people) were aged 26 to 35, 18.65% (47 people) were aged 36 to 45, 21.83% (55 people) were aged 46 to 55, 18.65% (47 people) were aged 56 to 65, 17.46% (44 people) were aged 66 to 75, 5.95% (15 people) were aged 76 to 85, and 0.40% (one person) was aged 86 or over. 1.59% of respondents (four people) selected “prefer not to say.” None of the respondents were under 18.



What is your gender?

250 respondents answered this question and three did not. 84.0% of respondents (210 people) were female, 14.40% (36 people) were male, and 1.60% (four people) answered “prefer not to say.”



Other feedback

Other comments regarding Beacon Medical Group surgeries were collected via social media and Healthwatch staff conducting in-person surveys. The most common themes among these comments are summarised below:

Accessing GP services (12 comments)

- “Glenside was a great surgery, then Beacon took over and it lost the personal touch. Then Covid [happened], and now it’s horrendous. All you get is a call back or medication passed to the pharmacy that they don’t tell you about. You think they are ignoring [you], then [you] get a call from the pharmacy a couple of days later to collect your medication.”
- “My husband got promised a call last Thursday! It’s now Wednesday and still nothing. It’s the same for me, when I book online, I get no call.”
- “I have mentioned this before. My concern is especially for the elderly, some of whom have little or no knowledge of the technology involved to contact their surgery. Even the telephone, “listen to the following options then press....” freaks them out. Not all of them have family to help them. Friends and neighbours are often supportive, but there must be some slipping through the net.”
- “I moved to Plympton 3 months before Covid. I have had health problems all my life. I haven’t seen a GP since I moved here, they can’t blame Covid for that. I’ve had several calls, but I’m unable to interact the same over telephone as face to face, and due to this my health has deteriorated. I’m actually considering moving to an area so I can get proper health treatment. They are too good at handing out antibiotics. I’ve had 6 courses this year. None [have] actually done any good.”
- “When you can go to the shops, pubs, and restaurants, and a lot of people have had to work throughout the pandemic, [I’m] not sure why surgeries are continuing to behave as though we are still in lockdown. Watched a man having to plead through an intercom to get his wife’s medication sorted, bad enough on a summer’s afternoon, what is it going to be like when it is cold, dark and miserable. When are they going to open their doors?”
- “My husband is semi disabled, [we] never get a call to see how we are coping, we are in our 70s, if he has a bad turn it’s an ambulance. They are the BEST, it’s a pity so many people use and abuse the 999 system.”
- “Beacon Medical was bad enough before COVID, [it’s] even worse now, doctors need to see patients face to face, how can you diagnose over the phone, or they say send a picture, [it’s] terrible service now, and it’s only going to get worse I’m sure.”
- “Filled in an online consultation... called back within 24 hours... seen by a doctor the same day... the same as during lockdown.”
- “Been trying to get an appointment at Mudge Way for over a week, can never get through to talk to anyone, tells me I am 14th in the queue, rang 111 in the end but they said keep trying with surgery, it’s a joke since Beacon have taken over.”
- “If the receptionist stopped telling everyone it’s Covid related and actually [did] their job by making appointments and not pretending they are doctors, A&E and 111 would be a lot lot quieter.”

-
- "Had to really plead to get a call back from the doctor, and the receptionist wanted me to go elsewhere to get antibiotics for my eyes. As a carer, I just needed it pronto, [I'm] too old to be messed about. [I'm] not a happy bunny, I've worked all through lockdown, I don't deserve this at 61."
 - "[I] called and listened to the options; my health concern wasn't listed. When I didn't choose an option I was cut off! Since I was severely depressed and having fleeting suicidal thoughts at the time, it's a miracle that I bothered to try calling again. I chose a random option then had to wait 45 mins to get through. I did inform the receptionist about what had happened and she said she would make the practice manager aware so that it didn't happen to someone else in the future. Beacon Medical Group is a disgrace."

General feedback about Beacon (three comments)

- "Shocking service. Personal care and compassion no longer exist and results in loss."
- "Beacon Medical Group is a joke, I thought people became doctors because they cared."
- "I'm not impressed with Beacon Medical Group, just gone downhill so much in the past few years. Absolute shambles."

Healthwatch Observations

Healthwatch has the following observation:

- Whilst there were fewer responses to the survey from patients of Plympton surgeries, the results are similar to the survey results for Ivybridge patients, particularly around telephone access. Reading the additional comments, issues generally fall into 2 categories; either trying to book an appointment or for issues around repeat prescriptions.

Healthwatch acknowledge that the Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed how GP services are operating, but patients are continuing to be frustrated in accessing timely support. Whilst we acknowledge that this is not the same for all GP practices in Devon, we are starting to witness increased patient contact about other surgeries with concerns where we have previously received little feedback. Feedback is generally around similar issues that have been highlighted in this and the Ivybridge report and we will raise this separately with the Clinical Commissioning Group.

Healthwatch look forward to meeting with Beacon Medical Group and NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group to discuss the findings from this and the Ivybridge report.

Statement from Beacon Medical Group

We always aim to provide the best possible care for our patients and welcome this survey feedback. Beacon Medical Group is encouraged by the results from this as it reflects that our patients are being contacted within time, they receive regular communication from us and over 80% have used our online services at some point.

It is insightful for us to reflect from the survey when our patients contact us by telephone and what our busiest days and peak periods are so we can investigate looking at resources for this. We note that since this survey was conducted in September 2021 and our improvement plan is in place and is in constant review. We are pleased that this has already delivered a reduction in our call wait times and will continue to work on further improvements. We welcome community feedback and support to help continue with this journey.

Further detailed response can be found at Appendix 3.

Statement from NHS +Devon Clinical Commissioning Group

NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) thanks Healthwatch Devon and Plymouth and Beacon Medical Group for working together to undertake this engagement as a direct response to concerns raised by some patients in terms of patient experience, access and communications at the practice.

This engagement report sets out a detailed approach for engagement, which has provided a good opportunity for patients to contribute and is reflected in a high level of response. There was a good mix of online engagement, face to face and working with the practice to collate patient feedback. The level of detail in the engagement will help to target specific areas for action and clearly understand how the patient experience for Beacon Medical Group could be improved.

Beacon Medical Group has already taken a number of actions to address the main concerns raised in the engagement as part of their improvement plan to address the main issues and improvements are already starting to be made. We look forward to continuing our work with the practice and Healthwatch to ensure the improvement plan continues and that patient experience improves for the most challenged areas highlighted in the report.

It's important to note that as part of the national response to the Covid pandemic, infection control restrictions have required GP practices to change the way they work to limit exposure to both patients and staff, requiring them to move to a more telephone and online access focused 'first contact' arrangement. This has had a direct impact on access to GP practices across the country, and this will have impacted on patient experience. This change to demand and the way patients access their GP will have impacted on call volumes in to the practice and the demand for online consultations, which in turn impacts response times, however Beacon Medical Group is taking steps to manage this demand and improve patient experience.

Recognition

Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth & Torbay would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their experiences.

Appendix

Appendix 1. Healthwatch Devon Facebook post

 **Healthwatch Devon**
23 September at 13:01 · 🌐

Have you recently used Beacon Medical Group's services, or tried to access their services?

Running for a couple more days, please share your views and experiences in a short survey so the practice can gain information needed to make improvements!

You can find the survey at: <http://ow.ly/2xu850Gf8A5>

Thank you to those who have already completed it!

Share your experience of using and accessing Beacon Medical Group services

#yourvoicecounts

 **BEACON MEDICAL GROUP**
healthwatch Devon

Appendix 2. Ivybridge headline findings

N.B. Some questions allow respondents to select more than one answer, so percentages may total more than 100.

- 347 Ivybridge respondents completed the survey. 78.10% (271 people) were registered with Ivybridge Medical Centre and 21.90% (76 people) were registered with Highlands Health Centre.
- Telephone was the most common method of accessing GP surgeries (74.85% or 253 people), followed by eConsult (63.91% or 216 people), other online methods (28.11% or 95 people), in-person contact (21.01% or 71 people), and the NHS app (10.95% or 37 people).
- 94.14% of respondents (273 people) answered “yes” to the question “did you wait long in a queue”? 56.08% of respondents (152 people) said they waited longer than 30 minutes in the queue.
- 35.54% of respondents (102 people) said the online consultation process was easy/fairly easy to use, 42.51% (122 people) said it was not so easy/not easy to use, and 21.95% (63 people) described the process as okay. 65.11% of respondents (181 people) said they were contacted within the specified time indicated by the practice.
- 57.74% of respondents (138 people) used online repeat prescription services, 38.08% (91 people) booked appointments online, 25.10% (60 people) used the NHS app, 20.50% (49 people) used My Medical Record, 6.28% (15 people) used online self-care information, and 5.02% (12 people) cancelled appointments online.
- 45.21% of respondents (118 people) found online services easy/fairly easy to use, 33.72% (88 people) found them not so easy/not easy to use, and 21.46% (56 people) found online services okay to use.
- 93.95% of respondents (264 people) received information and messages from the surgery via text/SMS, 14.59% (41 people) received info via email, 4.98% (14 people) received info via the Beacon Facebook page, 2.85% (eight people) received info via the Beacon website, 1.07% (three people) received info via a Patient Participation Group, and 0.71% (two people) received info via newsletter. 68.81% of respondents (214 people) said the communication met their needs.

Appendix 3. Beacon Medical Group ‘You Said, We Did’ response and actions to survey findings

We always aim to provide the best possible care for our patients and welcome this survey feedback. Beacon Medical Group is encouraged by the results from this as it reflects that our patients are being contacted within time, they receive regular communication from us and over 80% have used our online services at some point. However, the concerns raised around other aspects of the survey have been noted and we have undertaken the following actions:

Telephone Access

It is insightful for us to reflect from the survey when our patients contact us by telephone and what our busiest days and peak periods are so we can investigate looking at resources for this. For the week 31 January 2022 to 4 February 2022 Beacon Medical Group received an average 454 calls a day with a total of 2270 telephone calls. We feel that these figures show the demand and high volumes that our team members work hard to deal with.

Specifically, the survey shows that our patients state that they mainly contact Beacon Medical Group on a Monday, Tuesday and a Wednesday. We have compared this to our own in-house statistical data which we collate daily and is reviewed on a weekly basis. Our data shows us that our busiest day is a Monday, and our call times are generally higher on this day than any other day of the week. Our busiest time of the day is between 11 to 11.30 except on a Monday when it is at 8.00.

Beacon Medical Group is aware that telephone standards could be improved and waiting times can be at levels that do not provide a good level of customer service. We have an improvement plan in place that we are working with and hope that our patients will see an enhancement to our telephone service.

We have also provided training for the team and individuals where standards are not being met, monitoring the statistics more closely and new Team Lead roles have been created to provide support to the telephone team by floorwalking and problem solving. We have also recruited someone with significant experience in managing a busy call handing service, and they will have oversight of this work and to provide support to the team to make further improvement.

Beacon Medical Group updated the care navigation tool which is a set of questions that our Patient Advisors ask patients to ensure that they are directed to the most appropriate person for their medical concern. This tool has been streamlined and is now more efficient and has helped to reduce call waiting times.

We are pleased that our improvement plan has already delivered a reduction in our call wait times and will continue to work on further improvements. The average wait time for answered calls was 14 minutes for October 2021 and this has since reduced to 11 minutes in February 2022.

Booking Appointments

Following patient feedback Beacon Medical Group has received via Facebook, the Friends and Family Test, NHS.UK, and the Healthwatch engagement survey, we have updated our online booking system to allow our patients to book blood pressure, blood tests and smear test appointments online.

It is noted that the 40% of our patients who use the online services use it to order prescriptions. We receive regular feedback about the process of ordering prescriptions, and it has highlighted areas for potential improvement between Beacon Medical Group and the Pharmacies. We are working with our Pharmacy team to enhance this and have a more collaborative approach which in turn will help our community.

Online Services

Looking at the survey results it shows that overall, over 80% of those who completed the survey have used our online services and 40% found this easy to use. On average we Beacon Medical Group receives 206.6 e-Consults on a daily basis with an average of 1033 e-Consults a week.

Beacon Medical Group understands that not all patients are able to use online facilities and anyone who struggles can still utilise the practice phone system. If our patients who are registered to use online services are able to make use of them, this frees up the phone lines to other patients who are unable to.

We regularly promote the use of our online services via social media, banners in our reception areas and via our quarterly patient newsletters.

We have driven numerous campaigns to help with the understanding of the e-Consult and online systems including (pre COVID) offering in house tutorial sessions. We have encouraged our patients to use the iPads that were available in our reception areas where our Patient Advisors and our Patient Participation Group were able to offer support to use these, however we have had to withdraw these due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We hope to introduce these as soon as we can as the infection control guidelines will allow.

As we do not own or build the e-Consult platform, this is a national tool, we pass on patient feedback to the provider regarding suggested changes and improvements. We also encourage our patients to complete the feedback forms provided by e-Consult after it has been used to provide their feedback on ease of use and possible changes to support the process.

Beacon Medical Group welcome community feedback and support to help continue with this journey.

Our actions

Finding	Action	Improvement
Peak periods for incoming calls to the practice are Mon - Weds mornings	Increased levels of staffing resource introduced at peak periods to manage incoming calls	Call waiting times down by 5 minutes during these peak periods
Patients found that it took too long to complete the questions asked by the Patient Advisors when they called Beacon Medical Group	Streamlined the number of questions asked by Patient Advisors using our navigation tool	Call waiting times have been reduced
Ability to book some types of appointments without having to call Beacon Medical Group	Blood test appointments, blood pressure bookings and cervical smear test appointments available to book using our patient partner telephone system and also available to book on line	Patients are now able to book their own appointments, and this has reduced the amount of telephone calls.

Contact us



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