

February
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**Mystery Shopping
exercise of**

**Access to Emergency Hormonal Contraception
in Hackney**



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Introduction

Increased pressure on GP services and difficulties accessing appointments mean that pharmacies are being increasingly promoted as an accessible point of access (delete and just say access point) for minor ailments and some (delete *some*) other services. These (services) include vaccinations and a range of common health concerns, including access to sexual health services. 16+ Hackney residents can access a wide range of free sexual health services locally - [Homerton sexual health services](#).

This includes information about [contraception](#), local sexual health clinics (Clifden Centre, John Scott Clinic, Ivy Centre, and 80 Leadenhall in the City of London), how to access services if you are aged under 17, as well as their offerings around free [PrEP treatment](#).

Residents can also access a range of support(s) for their sexual and reproductive health, such as Emergency Hormonal Contraception (EHC), STI testing and treatment, and more, at your GP practice, or a local community pharmacy. This service, also commissioned by the local Public Health team, offers health promotion, advice, and information on a wide range of topics, including ways for individuals to protect themselves against HIV and other STIs.

To ensure quick, easy, and free access to support and information Healthwatch Hackney decided to explore how accessible and young people-friendly local pharmacy services are with the help of some young volunteers and support from Public Health Hackney.

Public Health Hackney was a key partner for this project as they currently commission some of the services delivered in pharmacies including Emergency Hormonal Contraception. We worked with them to develop the project brief and materials so that it would be a mutually beneficial piece of work.

Given the scale of challenges that people may face with the increasing cost of living, it is even more important local residents and especially young people are aware of and have easy access to the free contraceptive services that are commissioned.

Our Aim

The aim of this review is to provide an overall snapshot of young people's experiences of pharmacies across Hackney through mystery shopping activities.

By doing this, we aim to improve the local sexual health services and to ensure these are accessible and inclusive to all young people and other residents regardless of their age.

Our objectives are to:

- improve access to emergency contraception, safer sex and sexual health advice
- reduce the number of unintended pregnancies by use of EHC
- increase knowledge, especially among young people, of the availability of EHC from the community pharmacies

We aim to evaluate the quality of service and ease of access to emergency hormonal contraceptives with Public Health Hackney, which funds free access.

This includes assessing the service was:

- welcoming, inclusive, clear, friendly, safe, and non-judgmental
- visibly advertised in the pharmacy
- offering strict confidentiality and is sensitive to a young person's right to a confidential service
- giving advice and information that was accurate and of a high standard

Background

Each year, pharmacies are invited to enter into a contract with the London Borough of Hackney to provide free access to Emergency Hormonal Contraception together with Chlamydia Testing and Treatment and access to condoms. The individual contracts with pharmacies are for one year, and are renewed each new financial year, upon signature. The overall duration of the pharmacy agreement is until 2025.

About the different types of Emergency Hormonal Contraception (EHC) and who can use it?

Most women can use the emergency contraceptive pill. Girls under 16 years old can also use it.

There are two types of Emergency Contraceptive pills

Levonelle – can be taken within 3 days of unprotected sex

ellaOne – can be taken within 5 days of unprotected sex for it to be effective – the sooner you take it, the more effective it'll be. .

Who should not take the pill?

Anyone who is allergic to anything in it, has severe asthma or takes any medicines that may interact with it.

There are no serious short or long-term side effects from using any of the two emergency contraceptive pills. However, some people may experience some side effects. For more information, please go to <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/contraception/emergency-contraception/>

Methodology

Between May 2022 and September 2022, a team from Healthwatch Hackney, including volunteers, ran a 'mystery shopping' activity to gain an overall snapshot of the access to Emergency Hormonal Contraception in Hackney by phoning and visiting the local pharmacies.

An email notification was sent on 25th March to the Local Pharmaceutical Committee as well as to all individual pharmacies informing them about the planned visits. However, the exact dates and times of the visits were not disclosed.

Mystery shopping is one of many methods used to gather feedback about health and social care services and can be a useful means of exploring the real experience of service users.

Initial inquiries were made to assess the current provision of Emergency Hormonal Contraception services within pharmacies across Hackney. With help from Public Health Hackney and the Local Pharmaceutical Committee, Healthwatch Hackney collated information about the 38 community pharmacies in Hackney that had signed up for the scheme to provide free Emergency Hormonal Contraception services.

According to Public Health Hackney, between March and November 2022, 38 pharmacies signed up to provide free access to Emergency Hormonal Contraception. We were able to call 37 pharmacies and carry out mystery shopping the service via phone calls, which will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

We were not able to reach one pharmacy as it appeared that the provided phone number was not correct. A few pharmacies had wrong telephone numbers displayed and initially we were unable to reach them, meaning further research was needed.

In addition, based on the results of our mystery shopping calls we choose two pharmacies in each Neighbourhood to conduct mystery shopping visits. Where possible, we chose one pharmacy where the staff said they provide free access to Emergency Hormonal Contraception, and another pharmacy where staff said that they do not provide free access to Emergency Hormonal Contraception, despite Public Health Hackney having commissioned them up to provide a free service.

Volunteer Recruitment and Training

We would like to thank our brilliant volunteers Becy Ainsworth, Nikki Khalesi, Yasmin Tayane, Abigail Asant and Norah Aldosary for their hard work, time and commitment to this project.

Some of the volunteers who took part in this project were our existing volunteers. Other volunteers were recruited through the Hackney CVS.

Before carrying out the mystery shopping activities, volunteers were required to attend a comprehensive training session. The training sessions were designed to equip volunteers with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to carry out the mystery shopping activities (telephone calls and visits) as well as to provide an understanding of what is expected of them. They covered things such as what mystery shopping is, what makes a good mystery shopper, common 'giveaways', the importance of confidentiality, useful memory techniques, role plays, exit/get out strategies, and 'top tips' for each of the scenarios/activities.

The volunteers had the opportunity to go through the questionnaires, practise completing them, and ask any questions. Following this, volunteers could decide whether they wished to take part in the project or not.

The mystery shopping project involved making telephone calls and carrying out visits to pharmacies. Volunteers were encouraged to review the training materials and 'top tips' sheets for each activity carrying them out.

Telephone calls

We called the 38 pharmacies on the list provided by Public Health Hackney.

There were 2 possible scenarios that could have been allocated to the young mystery shoppers:

- Emergency hormonal contraception – general inquiry about how to access it and if it is free of charge service.
- Emergency hormonal contraception – general inquiry about how to access the service and if it is free of charge. The volunteers pretended they are a young person calling from home and speaking quietly and do not want their parents to overhear the conversation. With this scenario, we wanted to assess how accommodating the pharmacy staff will be in such a situation.

Volunteers were given scenarios that acted as guides for the calls (e.g. you have just moved to the area and would like to know how to access the service). They were also provided with information about the service for their own information.

Visits

16 pharmacies were visited between August and October 2022.

We selected two pharmacies in each of the Hackney Neighbourhoods.

Pharmacies were selected on the basis of the findings from our telephone mystery shopping. We selected one pharmacy where there was a charge for the EHC and one where the service was offered for free.

The visits involved looking out for certain information (posters, leaflets, signs, etc), taking in the general appearance and feel of the pharmacy, and the way volunteers felt they were spoken to.

Where pharmacies were charging for the service, the mystery shopper was told to ask to be signposted to where it could be obtained for free and to make a note of whether this information was provided voluntarily.

Mystery shoppers had been trained to ask to speak to a female pharmacist when they walked into the pharmacy. This was to give a sign to the sales person that the mystery shopper wants to discuss a sensitive issue.

One other volunteer was required to act as shy, worried and someone who needed help with EHC.

Where the service was free of charge

23 pharmacies offered the service for free.

Of these:

- 2 pharmacies were unable to offer the free service on the day due to the locum pharmacist not being trained to deliver the service
- 1 pharmacy had run out of stock, but the mystery shopper was signposted to another pharmacy
- 2 pharmacists offered the mystery shopper to either pay for the service or have it for free under the NHS
- 3 pharmacists gave conflicting information to both mystery shoppers about the charge of the service, so more than one call was needed to be made to clarify.

What questions were asked?

- 7 pharmacists asked the mystery shoppers if they lived in Hackney
- 3 pharmacists asked if the mystery shopper is registered with a Hackney GP
- 6 pharmacists did not ask any questions
- 3 pharmacists asked the mystery shopper when they had had unprotected sex

We called the following pharmacies

❖ Woodberry Wetlands Neighbourhood

- ❖ Armstrong Dispensing Chemist, N4 2EX
- ❖ Park Pharmacy, N4 2AA
- ❖ Rowlands Pharmacy, N4 2HE
- ❖ Safedale Pharmacy, N16 9DL

❖ Clissold Park Neighbourhood

- ❖ Allen Pharmacy, N16 9PA
- ❖ Benjamin Pharmacist, N16 7JD
- ❖ Safedale Ltd, N16 0AP
- ❖ Safedale Ltd (Albion Road, N16 0TA
- ❖ Superdrug Store, E8 2LX

❖ Hackney Downs Neighbourhood

- ❖ Asvacare Pharmacy, E5 9BU
- ❖ Day Lewis, E5 8BY
- ❖ F. A. Strange, E5 8EQ
- ❖ Hackney Pharmacy, E9 5BQ

❖ Well Street Common Neighbourhood

- ❖ Bees Pharmacy, E9 5DG
- ❖ Silverfield Chemist, E9 6AS
- ❖ Clockwork Victoria Park Pharmacy, E9 7HD
- ❖ K. Sonigra Pharmacy, E9 7PX

❖ Springfield Park Neighbourhood

- ❖ Dunsmure Pharmacy, N16 5JY
- ❖ Green Light pharmacy, N16 6LU
- ❖ Land Pharmacy, N16 6TY

❖ Shoreditch Park & The City Neighbourhood

- ❖ Finstead Pharmacy, N1 5LG
- ❖ Judd's Pharmacy, N1 6BT
- ❖ Murrays Chemist, N1 7QJ
- ❖ Spring Pharmacy, N1 5LG
- ❖ Unipharm pharmacy, E2 8AN

❖ London Fields Neighbourhood

- ❖ Clarks Healthcare Ltd. E8 5QJ
- ❖ Dev's Chemist, E8 1NH
- ❖ Guardian pharmacy, E8 4AE
- ❖ Haggerston Pharmacy, E8 4HU
- ❖ J Edmunds Pharmacy, E8 2JS
- ❖ Kingsland Pharmacy, E8 4AA
- ❖ Norlington Chemist Ltd, E8 4PH

❖ Hackney Marshes Neighbourhood

- ❖ Bees Pharmacy- Kalpesh Chemist, E5 0HD
- ❖ Clockwork Pharmacy (Mare Street)E8 1HP
- ❖ Clockwork Pharmacy 236 Well Street E9 6QT
- ❖ Clockwork Pharmacy 239 Well Street E9 6RG
- ❖ Regal Pharmacy, E5 0LP
- ❖ Safedale Pharmacy, E5 0NS

Pharmacies who charged for the free service

15 out of 38 pharmacies said they are charging for the service. Of these:

- 1 pharmacist said that they had run out of stock
- 5 pharmacists did not signpost the mystery shopper to another service for free Emergency Contraception
- 6 pharmacists voluntarily signposted the mystery shopper to other services including another pharmacy, GP practice or the local sexual health clinic
- 4 pharmacists signposted the mystery shopper to another free service only when asked
- 2 pharmacists invited the mystery shoppers to a consultation.
- 1 pharmacy gave conflicting information about the charge of the service
“The first person said that I can have it for free with a prescription but wasn’t able to tell me where to get the prescription from. Another person took over and said that they don’t provide the service for free but I can try other pharmacies.”

What questions were asked?

- 2 pharmacies asked when the mystery shopper had had unprotected sex so that the call handler could tell the price of the appropriate pill
- 11 pharmacists did not ask any questions and did not offer a consultation
- 10 pharmacists did not ask for any information but informed the mystery shopper of the cost of the pill

We visited the following pharmacies

❖ Woodberry Wetlands Neighbourhood

- ❖ Rowlands Pharmacy, N4 2HE
- ❖ Safedale Pharmacy, N16 9DL

❖ Springfield Park Neighbourhood

- ❖ Dunsmure Pharmacy, N16 5JY
- ❖ Land Pharmacy, N16 6TY

❖ Clissold Park Neighbourhood

- ❖ Benjamin Pharmacist, N16 7JD
- ❖ Safedale Ltd, N16 0AP

❖ Shoreditch Park & The City Neighbourhood

- ❖ Finstead Pharmacy, N1 5LG
- ❖ Spring Pharmacy, N1 5LG

❖ Hackney Downs Neighbourhood

- ❖ Day Lewis, E5 8BY
- ❖ F. A. Strange, E5 8EQ

❖ Hackney Marshes Neighbourhood

- ❖ Bees Pharmacy- Kalpesh Chemist, E5 0HD
- ❖ Clockwork Pharmacy (Mare Street)E8 1HP

❖ Well Street Common Neighbourhood

- ❖ Silverfield Chemist, E9 6AS
- ❖ K. Sonigra Pharmacy, E9 7PX

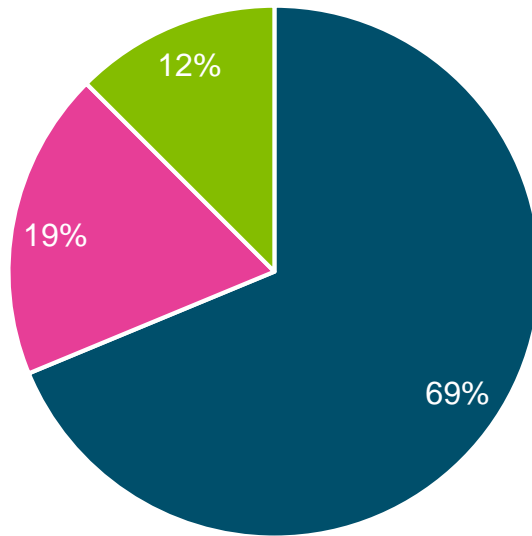
❖ London Fields Neighbourhood

- ❖ Clarks Healthcare Ltd. E8 5QJ
- ❖ Guardian pharmacy, E8 4AE

Mystery Shopping Visits

- 15 of the 16 visited pharmacies confirmed the findings from the telephone mystery shopping.
- Although all the pharmacies were visited after they signed up to provide free EHC according to Public Health Hackney, **only 7 out of the 16 visited pharmacies said they were offering free Emergency Hormonal Contraception.** Nine were only offering the over-the-counter pill.
- One pharmacy offered free service over the phone, however, requested payment for the same service during the physical visit.
- Some mystery shoppers were not offered a consultation, especially when there was no access to free EHC at the pharmacy
- All pharmacies were accessible to young people by public transport
- During some of the visits, the mystery shopper was assisted by their friend. Their wish to attend the consultation accompanied by their friend was granted in all instances

Did you find the staff welcoming?

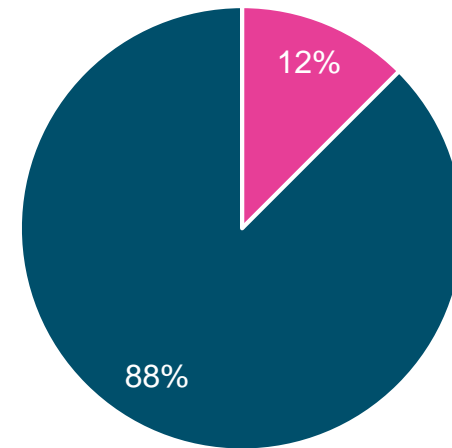


■ Yes ■ No ■ Neutral

“The staff were very welcoming and had good energy and they were quick and efficient to deal with my enquiry.”

“The woman behind the counter did not seem friendly neither did she look enthusiastic to serve me which seemed weird as she was very friendly and nice to the people that were in front of me. I don’t want to round it down to racism but the people that were in front of me prior were white and she seemed extremely happy to serve them.”

Did you notice any information within the pharmacy mentioning the EHC service anywhere within the pharmacy?

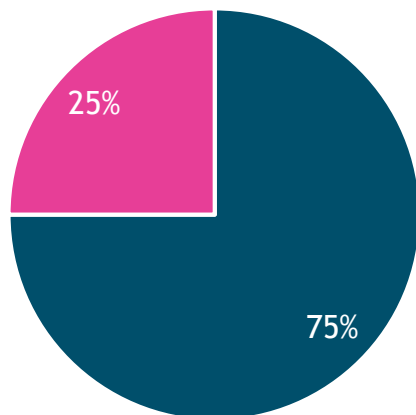


■ Yes ■ No

“There was an image on the consultation room door saying “This pharmacy is committed to providing a safe, comfortable environment where patients and staff can be confident that best practice is being followed at all times and the safety of all is of paramount importance.”

“The pharmacy seemed cluttered and cramped I didn’t look for a confidentiality statement.”

Was it easy to see the location of the consultation room?



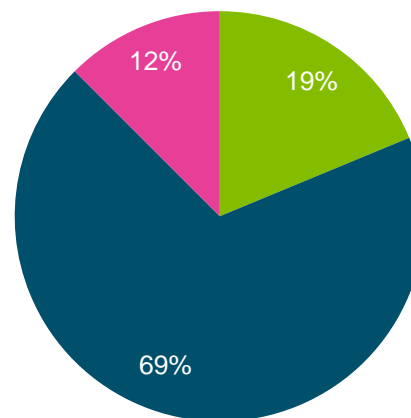
■ Yes ■ No

“Yes, The consultation room was very clear to see as there was a big sign that said, “consultation room”.

“I noticed a small door in the hall, which can probably be a consulting room, but there was no written sign on it, I am not sure there actually is any consultation room.”

“It wasn’t easy to see where the consultation room was as it was behind the front desk and the door was closed, the pharmacist opened my door from her end.”

Did you notice a confidentiality statement anywhere in the consultation room?

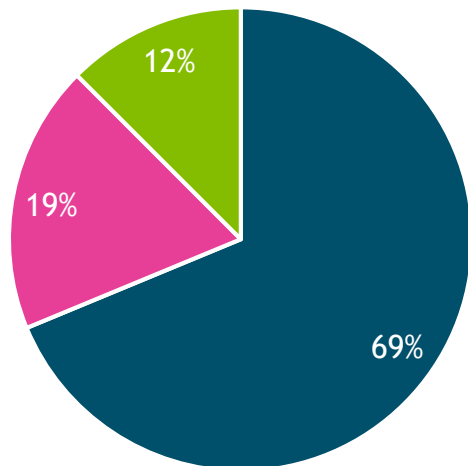


■ Yes ■ No ■ Neutral

“No, and medication from the previous customer was laying around, which made me think about confidentiality after I left myself.”

“ I did not see any confidentiality statement, but the pharmacist reassurance that everything was confidential.” On the side of the form, it says in bold “private and confidential.” which I think is a reassuring statement.”

Did you feel comfortable during the consultation?



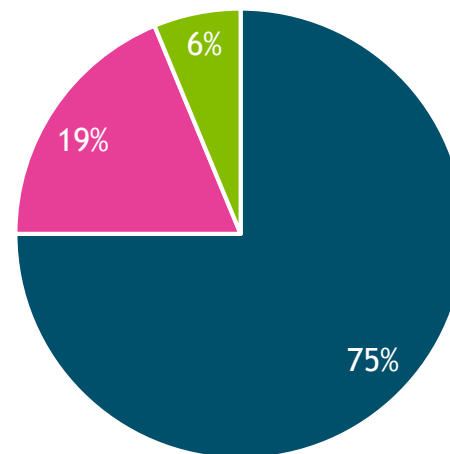
■ Yes ■ No ■ N/A

“Yes, the pharmacist had a great sense of humour and the mood was very relaxing.”

“I felt really uncomfortable and not helped at all, I just wanted to leave the chemist.”

“I was quite disappointed as the pharmacist was both a female and a woman of colour. I did feel more at ease until she started speaking. She seemed to be in a rush, and she was not friendly or smiley.”

Did you feel you were treated with dignity and respects?

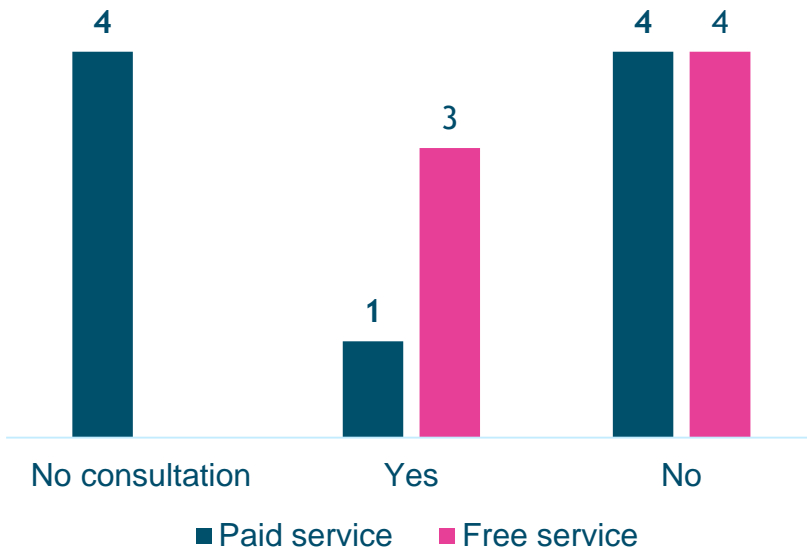


■ Yes ■ No ■ Neutral

“Yes, I felt like I was being treated with dignity and respect, none of the questions were out of topic or to personal.”

“I don’t feel like I was treated with respect and the environment of the pharmacy seemed very moody as both the woman in the clerk and the pharmacist weren’t friendly at all.”

Did the pharmacist give you information about contraception in the future, e.g. safe sex?

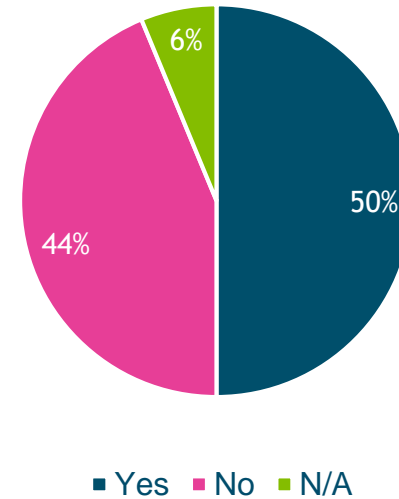


“She spoke to me about the different options of contraception, for example, the implant, the coil, the depo etc. She even went on to explain how each contraception was put in the body which I was impressed by.”

“He mentioned he could provide me with free condoms, but they had run out. He also suggested to consult with my GP about best type of long-term contraception such as pills or coil.”

“The pharmacist did not give me any but seemed more concerned about me paying for a pill.”

Were you satisfied with the consultation outcome?



“Yes, it was a calm experience and the lady was very clear and articulated the information very well.”

“No, I am not sure the pharmacist was fully aware of the sensitivity of the matter.”

No. Overall, it wasn’t the best experience as she gave me the wrong pill and did not recognise that.”

“Not really, it wasn’t thorough and I felt some risks were overlooked. “

Where the service was offered free of charge

One of the pharmacies that said they provide free access to EHC could not provide the free service on that day due to the locum pharmacist not having the required training.

- 7 pharmacies offered free access to the services
- All pharmacies voluntarily invited the mystery shopper to a consultation and asked for all personal details (Date of birth, name, address, when they had had unprotected sex, when was their last menstrual cycle)
- 3 pharmacies offered information about contraception in the future
- None of the pharmacists talked to the mystery shopper about safe sex

“He requested the contraception but before getting it, he talked through a lot of points such as the different types of contraception. For example, the coil, the patch, the implant, and the depo. He explained what they are and what they do but I told him I wasn’t interested in contraception however I was impressed that he went into so much detail including stating statistics etc. He also explained the different contraception pills and the percentage of effectiveness.”

“The pharmacist did not give extra information about future options if the pill was to fail, and also did not talk about safe sex or any other form of contraception to avoid relying on emergency contraception. Did not speak about STI’s at all or where I could get a screening, I felt like there was a lack of information that he did not include in the conversation like the side effects of the tablet or even the difference between Levonelle and EllaOne.”

“The woman seemed very nervous and provided limited information about the different types of contraception. The lady didn’t seem like she had knowledge of the different types of contraceptives, neither did she offer any types of contraception.”

Pharmacies who charged for the free service

- 9 of the 16 visited Free EHC commissioned pharmacies charged for the service EHC supply
- 2 out of the 9 pharmacies offered consultation to mystery shoppers. On these two occasions, pharmacists invited the mystery shopper to the consultation room voluntarily.

“She invited me to the consultation room straight away and didn’t discuss anything in front of anyone which I really liked in comparison to other pharmacies I have attended.”

- 1 of the 2 pharmacies offered information about contraception in the future
- None of the pharmacists talked to the mystery shopper about safe sex
- 5 pharmacists invited the mystery shopper into the consultation room only when the volunteer asked for a private conversation

“What I particularly didn’t like was that the pharmacist did not invite me to the consultation room straight away but tried to ask me questions in the customer waiting area which I found very uncomfortable and inappropriate.”

“She didn’t initiate privacy when I told her that I need to talk to her in private. She spoke to me when there were a lot of people around, so I had to ask her if there was a consultation room.”

- 2 pharmacists did not invite the mystery shopper into the room telling them they cannot offer the service free of charge
- 4 out of the 9 pharmacists voluntarily signposted the mystery shopper to another free service
- 5 pharmacists signposted the mystery shopper to a free service only when asked by the volunteer

However, in two instances, the mystery shopper was told to google for this information. During one of the visits, the mystery shopper was told there are no pharmacies offering a free service.

What questions were asked

In 14 out of 16 instances, the mystery shoppers were asked questions to identify the appropriate pill.

- Where the service was free of charge, mystery shoppers were asked the standard question “usually read from a form”.

*Name and date of birth / The name of their GP / Their ethnicity / When was their last menstrual period?
When they had unprotected sex / Is this their first time having emergency contraception*

“The pharmacist gave the option to pay for the emergency contraception straight away. I refused and asked for the free ones. Before he asked me any questions he went to collect the tablets. We started completing the form for free contraception. The questions asked were not personal or judgmental. The usual questions were asked. My name and GP address? my ethnicity? If this was my first time having emergency contraception when was the last period?- to see what pill would be more suitable for me, as there are two different ones.”

- Where there was a charge for the service, the mystery shoppers were mainly asked about their last period and when the accident happened

Surprisingly, two mystery shoppers were specifically asked only about their age.

One commented, *“She asked for my age. I felt strange as I did not understand why she asked for my age, even though there is not a free service.”*

Local Pharmaceutical Committee comment: The age of the customer is usually asked to ensure the treatment is age appropriate according to the product licence.

Another volunteer said *“The pharmacist didn’t ask me any questions, but she waited for me to speak, and when I said, “I’m here for the”.. she finished the sentence for me and said “contraception pill.” Immediately, she said they are not free, and she didn’t even ask about my situation or even try to figure out what contraceptive pill I needed. She told me that it was £25 straight away.”*

Feedback on the consultation room

- Mystery shoppers were able to enter and observe 15 out of the 16 pharmacies' consultation rooms
- Some mystery shoppers were not offered a consultation, especially when there was no access to free EHC at the pharmacy, so not all mystery shoppers were able to provide feedback about the consultation.
- On 9 out of the 16 occasions, respondents thought the consultation room was clean while 4 commented on the room being cluttered.
- 3 mystery shoppers commented that the room was accessible and another 3 said that the consultation room was not accessible.
- In 6 of the rooms, mystery shoppers said there were 2 chairs, and in another 6 that there was only 1 chair.
- On 7 occasions, the mystery shoppers said that the consultation room was too small. In another 6, the mystery shoppers said the consultation room size was acceptable.

“The consultation room was very small and it was decently cleaned but a bit cluttered. There was just one chair and there was enough distance between me and the pharmacist especially when it seemed like she was still social distancing as she wore a mask.”

“It was a small room, with one chair inside the room. It was easily accessible. No clutter spotted.”

Recommendations

Local Authorities and commissioners of NHS and public health services have an important role to play in providing accessible, safe, and confidential services to all service users and particularly young people.

Public Health Hackney and the Local Pharmaceutical Committee should ensure regular follow-up and monitoring of local pharmacies commissioned to deliver certain services free of charge to eligible residents.

Based on the findings from both the telephone calls and visits made to pharmacies, we identified the following areas for improvement to ensure these services are accessible and inclusive to all young people, and to other residents.

Patient's views and experience - monitoring and evaluation of the patient's experience

These recommendations address the importance of capturing young people's experience of access and delivery of the service as part of service development.

Environment - physical environment, staff training, skills and attitude

These recommendations address the importance of the physical environment as well as the training, skills and attitude that the pharmacy staff need to deliver young people-friendly services.

Publicity

These recommendations address the importance of the content and design of the information available promoting a range of sexual health issues, including contraception, STIs, relationships, use of condoms and sexuality.

We recommend that Public Health Hackney, Local Pharmaceutical Committee and pharmacy leads convene a working group including young people to discuss the recommendations below and their implementation.

Support to create and facilitate this group is available through the Local Communications and Engagement Team which works with 16+ network, young System Influencers and public representatives.

Environment - staff training, skills and attitude

Ensure more pharmacists are trained to deliver Emergency Hormonal Contraception consultations and provide other sexual health information.

All pharmacy staff who are likely to come into contact with young people to receive appropriate training on:

- Full range of contraceptive options, promoting positive sexual health, and preventing pregnancy and STIs
- Equality, diversity, understanding how to engage and communicate with young people, in a way that feels safe and friendly
- Understanding the sexual health needs of young people and how to discuss them in the context of sexual health and relationships
- Managing sensitive and/or difficult consultations
- Safeguarding (Adults and Children) to enable staff to recognise signs of abuse and neglect and to act and report appropriately

All pharmacy staff who are likely to come into contact with young people should:

- Be able to recognise and respond to different sexual health needs such as those relating to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and different sexual health issues
- Be able to encourage young people to make safe and informed choices, including resisting peer pressure and delaying early sex
- Be familiar with information about other local services for young people

Pharmacies to provide a safe and young people-friendly environment by ensuring maximum confidentiality. This includes proactively inviting service users to a private place (consultation room) as soon as the need is recognised.

- All staff routinely explain the confidentiality policy to young people to enable them to understand their right to confidentiality
- Staff to ensure that young people are not asked any potentially sensitive questions where they may be overheard by other staff members or other patients

Environment - physical environment

The right and appropriate environment and atmosphere are more likely to contribute to ensuring confidentiality for service users regardless of their age. It is important that services are young people friendly which will relate to physical arrangements as well as staff attitudes and actions.

Pharmacies should provide safe and young people-friendly environment by

- Ensuring leaflets and posters promoting confidentiality are available within the pharmacy
- Ensuring greater promotion of their consultation room as a private and confidential space
- Ensuring full access to their consultation room as well as making sure it is accessible
- Ensuring a comfortable atmosphere in their consultation room by providing a clean welcoming environment

Individual pharmacies to ensure are have enough stock of Emergency Hormonal Contraception for instant delivery.

Publicity

- Public Health should provide information about the service in a variety of languages and formats also suitable for people with learning disabilities, physical disabilities or sensory impairments.
- The content and design of the leaflets should be co-designed with young people
- The leaflet should provide information about:
 - **What** the service offers
 - **How** to access the service, including young people's right to attend a consultation on their own without the involvement of a parent or a carer.
 - **What** will happen when they access the service
 - **How** to give feedback or complain about the service
 - **Young people's entitlement to a confidential service.** This information should include: what data is collected, any limitations to confidentiality - who has (will have) access to this data, and under what circumstances this information may be disclosed or shared.
- Leaflets should be distributed and made available in schools, social clubs, and other appropriate places where young people are more likely to attend. Digital information should be also available. More places for promoting services should be discussed with young people.
- Ensure leaflets and posters are available within pharmacies informing about the available services
- Emergency Hormonal Contraception consultations to include information about sexual and reproductive health and contraception in the future including reversible long-acting methods of contraception, condoms with information and guidance on correct use, free confidential pregnancy testing, referral to NHS-funded abortion services, sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing and treatment

Patient's views and experience - monitoring and evaluation of the patient's experience

Ensuring service users and in particular young people, have the best possible experience of care and support is essential for health services.

Services should be accessible and appropriate for young people. It is therefore important that young people are consulted, and their feedback and recommendations used to drive service improvements.

- A feedback opportunity should be offered to service users at the end of their consultation. This can be either given in a form of a hard copy or a QR code for online access
- The feedback form should include information about Healthwatch Hackney as an independent body service users can reach out to share their experience
- Patient feedback should be regularly reviewed and acted on appropriately
- Reports on the patient experience to be shared with Healthwatch Hackney

Response to our recommendations

We would like to thank the Public Health Hackney and City and Hackney Local Pharmaceutical Committee for their support and contribution.

Yogendra Parmar, Chief Executive Support, City and Hackney Local Pharmaceutical Committee

“We welcome your report and will use the findings to target service improvement resources. The main root cause for most of these findings are the ongoing pharmacy workforce pressures, that have been exacerbated by the pandemic/ Brexit and the recruitment of Pharmacists into GP practices means that Pharmacies are extremely capacity constrained and are often running on locums. Last calendar year saw the highest number of days of unplanned pharmacy closures due to workforce issues. Lloyds, Tesco and Asda have announced plans to close a significant number of their stores.

Until very recently, pharmacists new to Hackney were unclear on how to accredit to provide these services or how to order free condom supplies. A pharmacy sexual health update webinar was hosted on 18th Jan 2023 to help address this gap. A resource pack to help teams accredit is to be cascaded shortly.”

Froeks Kamminga, Senior Public Health Specialist, *Sexual and Reproductive Health // Business Healthy*, London Borough of Hackney & City of London Corporation

“Thank you for your comprehensive report and the insights from your mystery shopping exercises. The overall exercise was very useful and will contribute to an improved service for all City and Hackney residents. The work of Healthwatch Hackney and all the volunteers is much appreciated.”

Pharmacies play a crucial role in offering low-barrier access to sexual and reproductive health services and this report touches on very important aspects of sexual health service delivery:

- **Accessibility**
- **YP-friendly attitudes and behaviours**
- **Privacy and confidentiality**
- **Promotion of services**

For a detailed response go to page 28

It is noted that 40% of pharmacies that had signed the contract with the London Borough of Hackney (LBH) to deliver enhanced sexual health services, including free EHC, did not offer this as a free service. This is highly concerning. Since the preliminary findings in 2022, work has begun to better understand and rectify this situation, and LBH is actively liaising with the Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC).

For context, it is useful to take into consideration that many pharmacists have been lost to community pharmacies following COVID-19 and Brexit, with some leaving the UK and others moving into GP pharmacist positions. There is therefore a challenging staffing environment in community pharmacies, resulting in high turnover and use as well as cost of locum pharmacists to provide cover.

To further complicate this, locum pharmacists do not have the local accreditation necessary to provide EHC, as the [Patient Group Direction](#) (PGD) is specific to each locality. PGDs provide a legal framework that allows certain registered health professionals to supply and/or administer specified medicines to a pre-defined group of patients. When a locum pharmacist is providing cover, they cannot issue free EHC as they are not locally accredited, which is likely why in a number of cases, the mystery shoppers were referred elsewhere.

However, this does not negate the fact that the situation needs to be improved, and that everyone who needs EHC should be able to walk into a contracted pharmacist and get a good quality, friendly and confidential free service.

To address this, the following actions and initiatives have been or are being undertaken:

- Inventory of accreditation and self-certification of all pharmacies that have signed the contract with LBH to assess which pharmacies need further support with administration and registration under the scheme
- Improved liaison between LPC and LBH
- Training and engagement event on 18 January 2023 for all pharmacies that included refresher training on condoms distribution scheme, Chlamydia screening and treatment, and EHC provision. The online event was attended by around 25-30 pharmacists.
- Follow up via email and Pharmoutcomes to cascade all presentations and recordings (of the training event), and further guidance on accreditation and self-certification on the Pharmoutcomes platform.

The Public Health team will also advocate for NEL-wide PGD accreditation, which would make it easier for locum pharmacists to dispense EHC.

Pharmacies play a crucial role in offering low-barrier access to sexual and reproductive health services and we will work with the LPC and pharmacies to continually improve the accessibility and quality of the services that are being delivered.

Final words

Healthwatch Hackney is the local independent watchdog for health and care services.

It is our duty to ensure services are accessible, treatment and care are provided with respect and dignity and valuing diversity.

We highlight challenges faced by Hackney residents to improve the standards of care in the borough and to support healthcare providers in delivering the best possible service.

This includes accessing Emergency Hormonal Contraception free of charge at the commissioned pharmacies.

Healthwatch Hackney will therefore continue to review the service delivery with the view of reducing the number of commissioned pharmacies charging for the service to 0%.

healthwatch
Hackney

Contact us:



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