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# What we're hearing about urgent and emergency care pathways

July 2024

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"I had a transplant 21 years ago and I am concerned about my symptoms getting worse, so wanted to be seen quickly. It makes me feel so relieved that I can see someone today."



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## Report overview

In April and June 2024, our local volunteers visited Aldershot Urgent Care Centre (UCC) and Frimley Park Hospital's Emergency Department to talk to people about what led them to those particular services for treatment.

When we attended the Frimley Primary Care board, we heard that there was a need to better understand people's decision making and choices when seeking urgent or emergency care. We wanted to find out more and to share people's experiences to help the system learn and plan accordingly, ensuring people can get the best possible care in the most efficient and accessible way.

This report is designed to highlight the themes that people spoke to us about and includes quotes from local people to provide context on these themes. Whilst this report accurately reflects what we heard from the individuals we spoke to, we are aware that it may not be representative of everyone's views of a particular service.

Any urgent or concerning experiences within this report have been escalated to the appropriate teams. All appropriate information and advice and signposting has already been given.

If you would like more information or examples of what people have shared, please get in touch.

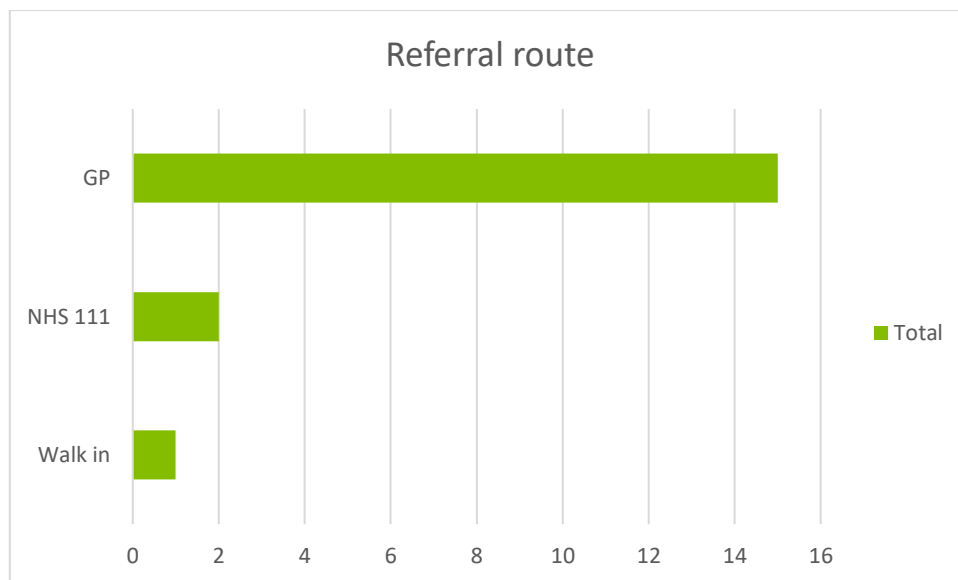
### **The majority of people we spoke to sought advice from primary care before attending elsewhere.**

- We spoke to **46** people across **4** visits (2 to Aldershot Urgent Care Centre, 2 to Frimley Park Hospital A&E).
- 24 people identified as female, 20 people identified as male (2 preferred not to say).
- 34 people were working age adults. 17 out of 18 people we spoke to at Aldershot UCC were under 65 years of age.
- **36** people had sought advice from at least 1 other service before we met them.

- **7 people knew about the Urgent Care Centre** prior to their episode of care on the day we met them.
- 1 person thought you could walk in without an appointment.

## Aldershot Urgent Care Centre

As shown in the bar chart below, 15 out of 18 people had been referred by their GP. Only 2 people had been referred by NHS 111. No one had been redirected by A&E.



Whilst most people said they wouldn't have considered A&E for this episode of care, there is some evidence to suggest being seen at the UCC reduces demand on A&E:

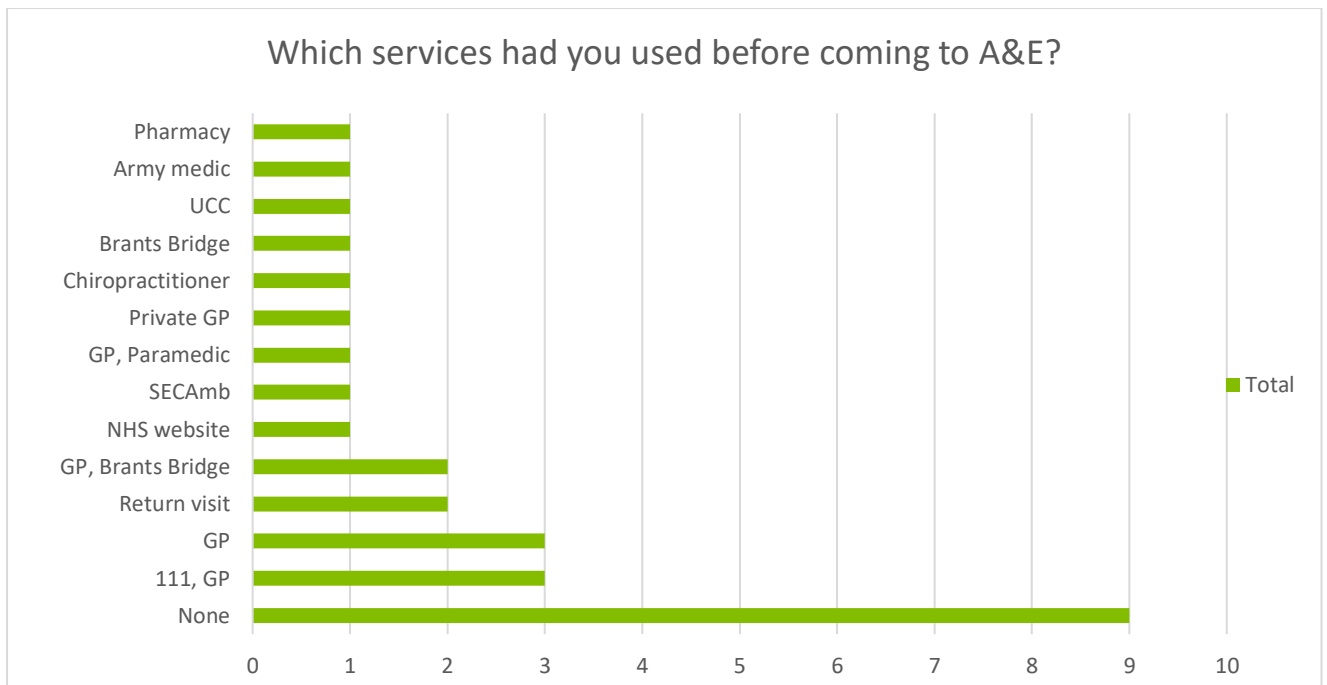
“Before contacting my GP this morning I had been to the chemist on Saturday who had given me some medicine and also advised me if it didn't improve to contact my GP. I rang the surgery this morning who were unable to give me an appointment but as my throat got worse, I decided to ring 111. I was not aware of this centre, I was referred here by 111. I think it is a good service to have as it meant that I could be seen today rather than get worse overnight. I would go to A&E if I was unable to swallow and not be able to see anyone, which I thought I might be doing this evening before I was offered this appointment.”

**239927**

## Frimley Park Hospital

17 out of 28 people had sought medical advice from other services before going to A&E as detailed in the bar chart below.

6 of those had been in contact with more than 1 service. 2 other people were returning for further support following a previous visit.



Of the 9 people who hadn't tried any alternative services first, 8 identified as male and equally represented all adult age groups. Reasons for not seeking care elsewhere ranged from serious injuries requiring emergency care to "losing faith in the GP to help".

## What we heard

### People don't know about the UCC

[Aldershot Urgent Care Centre \(UCC\)](#) is an alternative to hospital A&E services in non-emergency situations. People may be referred to the UCC by their GP, 111 or via a redirection from A&E. There is also a walk-in service for children under 12 in the afternoon. It is currently a pilot service, as such it may not be surprising that it is not universally well known about:

"I was not aware of this service before today and think it is good."

**213554**

"I knew that this health centre was here, but I didn't know that there was an urgent care department."

**213539**

Promoting the service and encouraging people to access it through NHS 111 could help to reduce demand on GPs. During our visits to A&E, patients were being given flyers and we saw posters advertising the UCC and we recognise that it can take time for people to be aware of new services in the area.

Walk in appointments are available for patients under 12 between 2-6pm, however, this message isn't well understood by all:

"My boss told me about the urgent care centre in Aldershot so I went there but when I got there, they told me there were no walk in appointments, it was booked appointments only and advised me to come to A&E. I drove here and to be honest I probably shouldn't have because my eye has just been getting worse and worse and I've now cannot see out of it at all.

[UCC advised the person to go to Frimley Park Hospital A&E] I must admit I'm a bit panicky as it's not a nice feeling at all I've got even more stressed when I had to queue for ages to get into the car park.

I was not asked at the urgent care centre how I was going to get Frimley A&E or whether I could even. I think this is an emergency, hence the reason I'm here. It would've been good to have known that the urgent care centre was not for walk in because my manager at work went online and felt that it was. I think it should be. Something that could have been an improvement for me today would've been if the urgent care centre had contacted A&E to let them know I was coming in and also perhaps talk to me a bit more about what was happening to find out whether I was fit to drive etc."

216943

### **Overflow from GPs**

15 out of 18 people we spoke to had been referred by their GP after requesting a GP appointment. No one had been redirected from A&E.

“I queued for over half an hour on the phone today to get an appointment with the GP. I was told by them that they only had one person in, so they were referring people to the UCC. They got me the appointment here.”

**213539**

“[GP] practice sent me here this morning to see someone about my cough. The receptionist heard me coughing on the phone and told me I needed to be seen. She found me the appointment here.”

**213541**

“I rang [my GP] practice this morning who said they were out of appointments, so booked me in to the UCC. I rang today as I have severe eczema in my ear. The pharmacist at Aldershot had given me a spray to use. I need to see the doctor for a follow up.”

**213552**

“I am here today with my 4 year old son who has swollen neck glands. We went to the pharmacy at Morrisons yesterday who advised to see GP today if no better. My wife rang the GP this morning who said to come here.”

**213554**

### **What else had/would people try?**

Whilst we know that emergency departments are extremely busy, attending A&E was not a consideration for nearly all but 1 of the people we spoke to at the UCC as they didn't consider their ailments to be an emergency.

"If this wasn't available, I would have just kept nagging my GP. I wouldn't have gone to A&E. I have used NHS 111 before, but I didn't feel it necessary today as I got an appointment here quickly."

**213535**

"I would use NHS 111 but not A&E unless I was seriously ill."

**213552**

"If I had not got an appointment today, I would have waited another day and tried again. I would have tried NHS 111 if that hadn't also worked. I would not go to A&E."

**213553**

"If I was not sent here I would use NHS 111, which I have done in the past. Before that, I would have just gone to A&E."

**213543**

The 1 person who would have considered A&E had been told by a pharmacist that their 4-year-old needed to be seen by a GP and was concerned that their symptoms had not improved:

"I have used NHS 111 before. If we had not got an appointment here today, then I would have gone to A&E as my son cannot move his neck."

**213554**

### **Accessibility considerations for the UCC**

Cost of parking and better signposting of the centre were identified as areas that could be improved for people using the service:

"Free parking would be better – I would have had this at the GP practice. It has cost me to get here. I found it ok though and would use again."

**213539**

"I didn't know about the UCC before today. I found it hard to find – the signposting upstairs isn't good and the lady sitting

on the main reception at the entrance was sending people the wrong way.”

**213542**

### **Pleased with service**

Overall, the people we spoke to were pleased with the service they had experienced at the UCC and would consider going again in the future:

“I wouldn’t change anything about the process of booking here today, it was made quite easy for me.”

**213542**

“The service here has been really good, it is quick and good to be seen on the same day.”

**213543**

“I had a transplant 21 years ago and I am concerned about my symptoms getting worse, so wanted to be seen quickly. It makes me feel so relieved that I can see someone today.”

**213544**

### **Eligibility**

Staff who we spoke to during our visit were not entirely clear who was eligible for the service and said it was the surrounding area in North East Hants and not Surrey Heath. Whilst those attending had been referred by their GP practice there wasn’t a sense that anyone was being turned away, however, clarity and consistency in messaging would help avoid confusion.

### **Are people attending A&E appropriately?**

On the whole, yes. Most people we spoke to had contacted other services such as 999, their GP practice, Minor injuries unit–Brants Bridge, first:

“I was brought in today by a paramedic after my daughter called 999 for me. She could hear that I was struggling over the phone. I left in a rush and I’m going to be admitted for a few days... I’ve been really happy with the service I have



received. I was taken to hospital via ambulance in December 2022 as well. They keep saving my life here!"

**213577**

"I have had my finger amputated and I have infection in my stump. My GP advised for me to go to A&E. It's difficult to access for me. I had to take a taxi. I have been treated well here though and always fill out the Friends and Family test."

**213669**

"Initially had an online consultation with my GP and was referred to Brants Bridge MIU in Bracknell. 1 hour later had had an ECG and was referred onto the Emergency Department at Frimley Park Hospital.

Triaged quickly and had a further ECG. Referral pathway has been perfect."

**216914**

Others felt they wouldn't be seen effectively elsewhere. Those who mentioned needing an X-ray had not considered Brants Bridge, where X-rays are advertised as available 8am-8pm, Sunday to Friday:

"I brought myself here today. I came straight here and parked in the car park. I didn't call 111 first. I need an X-ray on my hand. I do know about the urgent care centre at Aldershot as I'm in the military and my GP is there. I know they don't have an X-ray machine though and would have sent me here if I went there first.

I've used Aldershot UCC lots of times for the kids. It's very good and I would use it for other things.

I've been waiting a while to be seen. I wouldn't make a complaint about this though as I know they are busy."

**213578**

"I have come here today as I fell off my bike and I need an X-ray on my wrist which is swollen and very painful to check that it is not broken. I did not ring 111 or my GP practice because I was at work in Frimley Green and thought it best

just to come straight here. I did not know that there was a minor injuries clinic at Bracknell I could've gone to.

I was here last month as I had problems with my eye which I had seen my GP about earlier in the week. My GP had given me some eye drops and cream to deal with a sty but it got infected, so I decided to come to A&E. I did not ring 111 as I didn't even think about doing that but realised now that I could have done so. I did not go back to my GP at the time because the treatment they gave me hadn't worked so I didn't feel that they would do anything different."

**216942**

Despite long waits, some people are put off alternative routes due to previous experiences:

"I've been here about 11 hours. I was triaged very quickly and I'm now waiting for some test results. It's that bit that takes the time.

I've used 111 before but found it a nightmare. They were asking the same questions over and over again. It put me off using them again, I would just come straight to A&E now. You get seen a lot quicker here than at the GP!"

**213579**

These people had also been passed around different services, eventually ending up in A&E:

"I think I may have rabies and the GP had little knowledge of it, so that's why I'm here. I did call 111 and I was referred to the rabies helpline and they referred me back to the GP who sent me here. My GP has been very poor in dealing with this."

**213666**

"I am at Frimley A&E because my GP told me to come here. I rang 111 over the weekend for the first time on Saturday when I made 2 calls and nobody rang me back on the second time on Sunday morning. Eventually someone rang me back

8 hours later at 8pm and told me to call my GP in the morning. The reason I rang was because I was having pain in my legs, then arm which then spread to my neck. I had just returned from holiday on a long flight so was concerned in case it was DVT [deep vein thrombosis]. I rang my surgery at 8am on Monday, I had to ring a couple more times and eventually a GP rang me at 9pm and advised me that I needed to go to A&E as soon as possible. He was taken aback and said I should've been told to go to A&E straight away from Ill given the fact that I have been travelling and my symptoms. He was concerned that if it was a DVT then the fact that I had pain in my neck means a clot may have broken off and travelled there."

**213014**

Others have not considered any alternative services:

"I bought my father here today and did not seek any medical advice from my GP or Ill before. We have been waiting in the Minors area for 2 hours."

[Person accompanied by son who was acting as an interpreter as father has no English.]

**217219**

## **Praise for A&E**

There was praise for staff working in A&E, particularly in challenging circumstances:

"My mum was in A&E last week and there were 20 patients ahead of her waiting for rooms, so she was in the corridor for ages. She was assessed and manipulated (what I mean by that is that they were moving around all of her limbs to check she had not broken any) and it was awful to be treated like that. Mum's dignity was lost completely. There were people walking past all of the time which was very embarrassing for Mum and to be honest I found it hard to see. Although all of the staff from nurses, doctors and people giving out tea were kind and caring."

**216941**

"...the staff here are very helpful. Apart from the wait, I've received a first class service."

**213579**

## **Issues with parking and getting into Frimley Park Hospital**

People were finding it difficult to access the hospital site and were put off attending as a result or it made their visit more difficult.

"Access to hospital site very problematic. I had a fall a few weeks ago and was unable to get in so gave up. All other care good. Triaged quickly."

**216915**

"I was referred here by the Bracknell MIU who I visited this morning as I am struggling to breathe and have real shortness of breath.... Due to my symptoms this morning they saw me straight away and told me that it was important I go straight to A&E. I did not think of going to A&E even though I was struggling to breathe as knew that I would be seen quickly at the Bracknell walk in centre and was concerned that there would be a long wait at A&E in Frimley.

My husband drove me here and one thing that is not good is that he had to drop me off at the roundabout coming into the hospital as the traffic was at a complete standstill and he couldn't even get into the hospital to pull up in the drop-off zone. This was not good given my shortness of breath and made me quite anxious, I don't know how long it's going to take him to park and I really could do with his support while I'm in here."

[A Healthwatch Surrey volunteer sat with the lady as she was worried and anxious.]

**213017**

“I have brought my Mum who is 82 here as I called our surgery today who sent out their paramedic who then referred Mum here. I drove as was able to, rather than take up the ambulance resources. We had to wait over 40 minutes to get into the car park. I cannot use the drop off area as Mum is in a wheelchair and it was chaos there. There is no system in place so that I can use the 10 minutes drop off. We are now waiting to be triaged.”

**216941**

The challenges that both staff and patients are under in emergency departments makes it all the more important to identify and promote other services such as the Urgent Care Centre for people to access the care they need. We hope that the feedback shared within this report can be used as part of the review of the pilot.

## Thank you

We would like to thank everyone who gave their time and shared their experiences with us.

We would also like to thank our volunteers who supported us on these visits and to the staff teams who welcomed us.

## About Healthwatch Surrey

Healthwatch Surrey champions the voice of local people to shape, improve and get the best from NHS, health and social care services. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure decision makers listen to the experiences of local people.

We passionately believe that listening and responding to local people's experiences is vital to create health and social care services that meet the needs of people in Surrey. We seek out people's experiences of health and care services, particularly from people whose voices are seldom heard, who might be at risk of health inequalities and whose needs are not met by current services. We share our findings publicly and with service providers and commissioners to influence and challenge current provision and future plans.

We also provide reliable and trustworthy information and signposting about local health and social care services to help people get the support they need.

## Contact us

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We are proud to be commended in the National Healthwatch Impact Awards, recognising our work helping to improve local NHS and social care. You can view [our video](#) highlighting how feedback has enabled us to make positive changes to health and social care services.



We are committed to the quality of our information. Every three years we perform an audit so that we can be certain of this.

## Luminus

The Healthwatch Surrey service is run by Luminus Insight CIC, known as Luminus.

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