

Healthwatch Wirral

Musculoskeletal self-referral pathway review



January
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healthwatch
Wirral

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from calls made by Healthwatch Wirral to Wirral residents who self-referred into the Wirral Musculoskeletal (MSK) Service at Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. The self-referral service was available for the following GP practices during its trial stage: Civic Medical Centre, Eastham Group Practice, Greasby Group Practice, Heatherlands Medical Centre, Marine Lake Medical Centre, Myrtle Group Practice, Orchard Surgery, Prenton Medical Centre, Spital Surgery, Sunlight Group Practice, Upton Group Practice, Villa Medical Centre, and West Wirral Group Practice.

The purpose of Healthwatch Wirral's calls was to understand people's experience of the self-referral process, including its ease of use and any accessibility challenges they may have faced. This report provides a snapshot of those experiences. A more comprehensive evaluation of the overall self-referral process is recommended to analyse its effectiveness in full.

To ensure data security, a Data Sharing Agreement was implemented, with personal data being transferred securely, stored in protected files, and destroyed after use. Only anonymized raw data was retained for analysis.

A total of 133 patients were contacted. Of these, 32 did not respond and 11 declined to participate, resulting in 90 completed responses.

Overall, the findings indicate that most patients found the self-referral process straightforward and easy to complete. However, some reported difficulties with digital-only channels, which highlights the importance for multiple referral options to avoid worsening health inequalities for those who struggle digitally. Respondents generally reported good accessibility to service locations and expressed positive sentiments about staff friendliness, which contributed to a smoother referral experience.

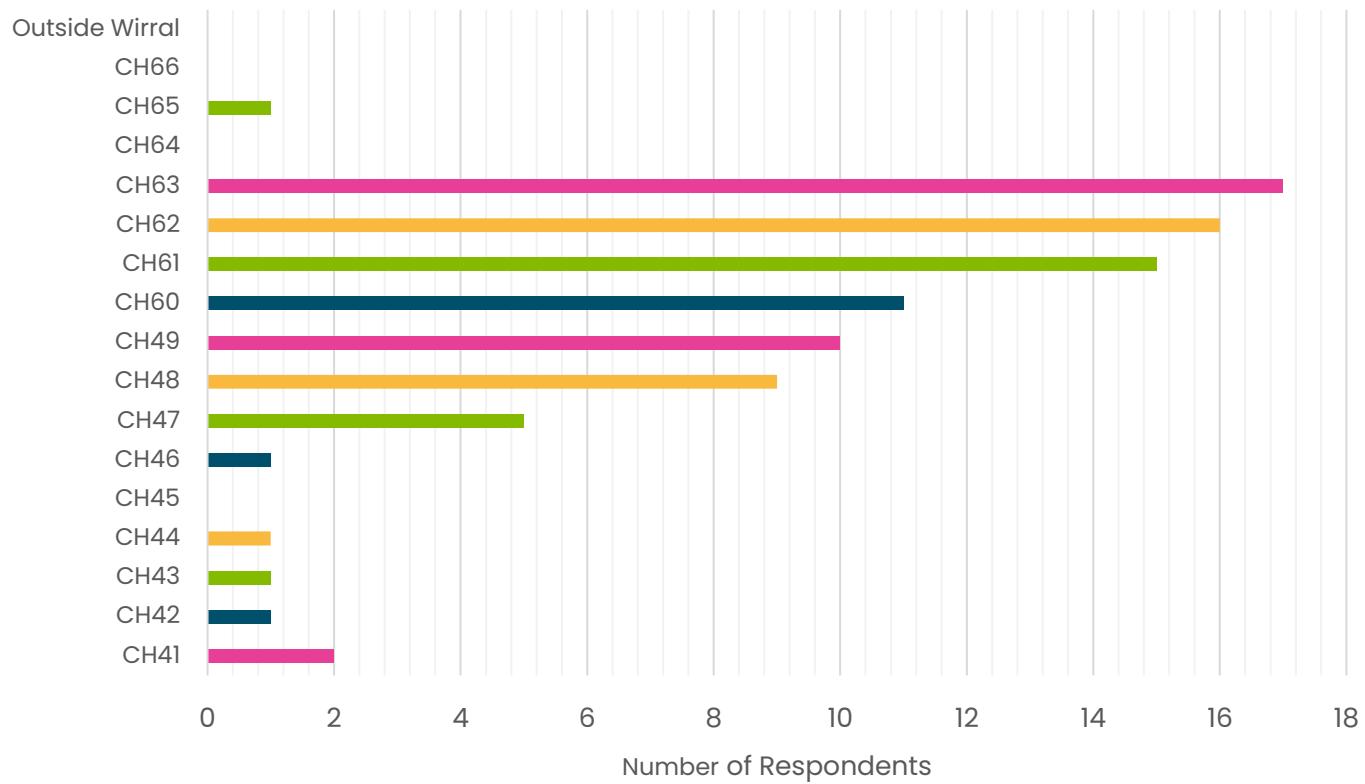
Moreover, Healthwatch Wirral recorded that negative feedback focused on long waiting times and limited appointment availability as only 45.6% (41 out of 90) of respondents had received an appointment at the time of completing the telephone survey.

As the MSK self-referral process is currently within its trial phase, Healthwatch Wirral recommends undertaking a full impact assessment prior to extending the model out to other GP practices in Wirral. It is recommended to evaluate:

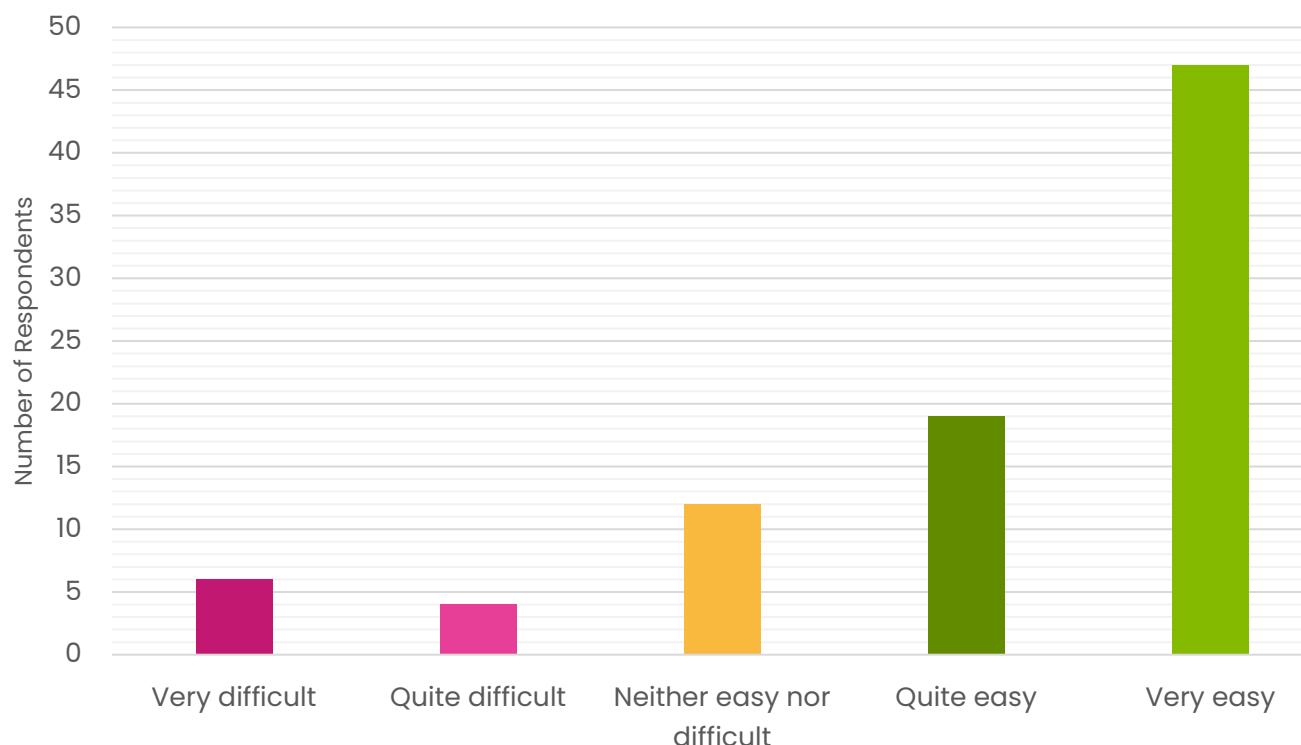
- Waiting times for patients who self-refer compared with those referred by a healthcare professional.
- Waiting times for patients who self-refer compared with GP practices that offer in-house physiotherapy roles as part of their additional services.
- Pathways for patients presenting with non-musculoskeletal issues, including:
 - How these issues are identified during the self-referral process,
 - How these issues are identified during any physiotherapy treatment,
 - How patients are informed,
 - How primary care is notified and liaised with,
 - The appropriate pathway and who is responsible for any potential follow-up care.
- Enhancing the self-referral questionnaire process by adopting a structured, adaptive clinical assessment. This means an adaptive questionnaire model which changes the questions based on the patient responses to improve the effectiveness and appropriateness of the self-referral.
- Whether the self-referral process is equally accessible to all population groups, especially those who may be digitally excluded, to not unintentionally widen health inequalities.
- How often self-referrals are clinically appropriate compared with referrals from healthcare professionals, and the effect this has on individuals.
- How the self-referral model affects the wider system, including changes in physiotherapy demand and any operational impacts on GP Practices or those delivering physiotherapy treatment.

Findings

Q1. What are the first four digits of your postcode?



Q2. How easy did you find it to make the referral for yourself?



Q3. Can you tell us why you found making the self-referral easy or difficult?

Themes	Positive	Negative
Ease of process (simple/clear/quick)	47	3
Appointments unavailable / long waits	0	8
Support from GP/others (links or completed)	6	1
Technical or form issues	0	4
Communication / notifications lacking	0	3
Awareness of self-referral	1	1
Finding the link / confusing first page	0	3
Accessibility / channel preference	1	1
Had to use both online and phone	0	1
Multiple issues require separate referrals	0	2

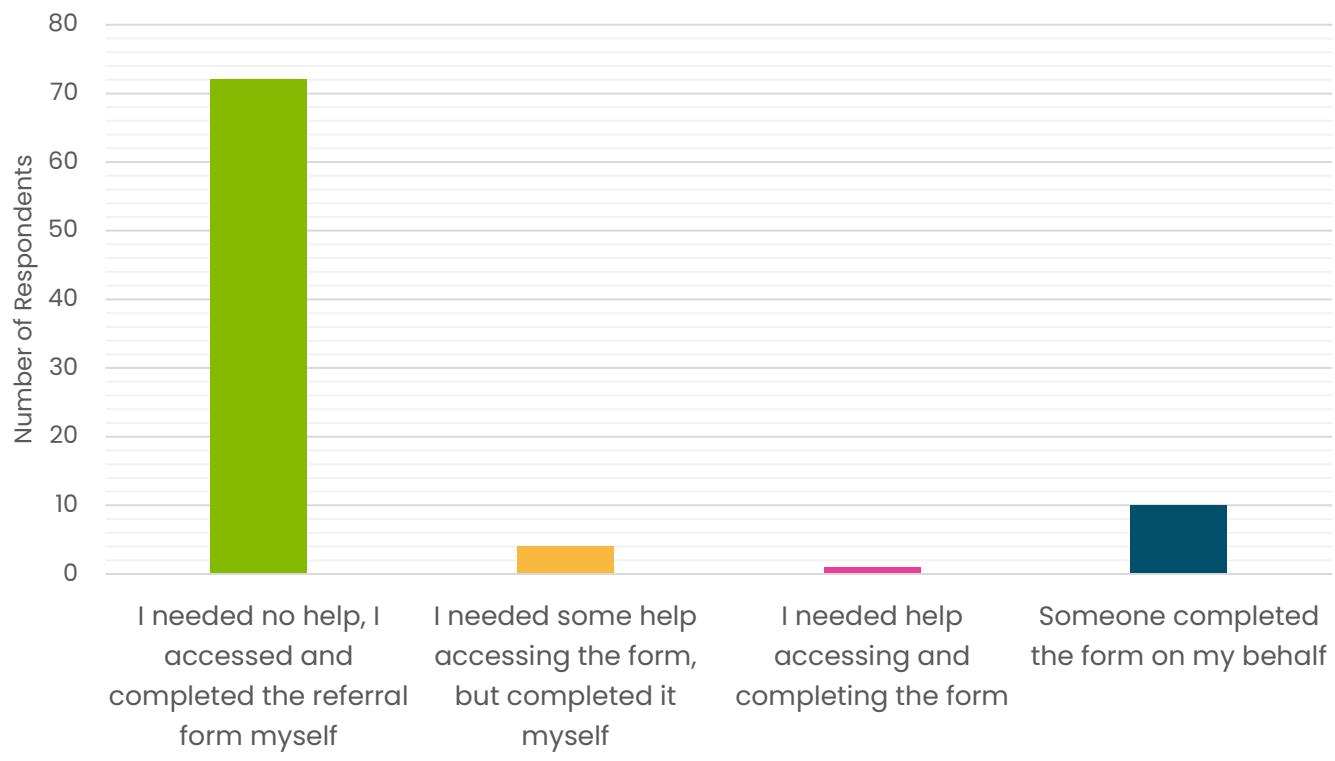
Positive Responses	Count
A family member did it for me.	1
Because I was given a link and able to book own appointment immediately	1
Clicked on link...easy	1
Did not know I would have to self refer, thought GP would do it.	1
Easy process online	1
Easy to access the form from the link I received. The form itself is easy and you can add as much detail as necessary which is very useful	1
Easy to do	1
Easy to do by link	1
Easy to follow - straightforward. Was told what to do, easy process	1
Followed instructions and no problem	1
Got info easily and GP sent me the link	1
GP did the referral for us	1
GP sent me link and it was straightforward to follow	2
Husband helped	1
I found it very straightforward and self-explanatory	1
I was quite easy	1
I would say it was quite easy	1
Instructions clear & laid out simply	1
It was easy to access online and the answers were easy to complete	1
It was easy to do	1
Online easy process	1
Pretty clear on instructions and what to do	1
Quick, and easy	1
Quite straightforward, easy to follow referral process.	1

Really easy to do	1
Really good	1
Received link via BLINX, which took me straight through to right page	1
Seemed quite quick	1
Simple	2
Straightforward	17
Text message, very quick	1
The self referral was done by the GP practice themselves, then I followed the info on my NHS app.	1
The self referral was fine.	1
The website had no complications - very straightforward.	1
Very easy	3
Very effective	1
Very good as hard of hearing	1
Went online and straightforward	1
Total	58

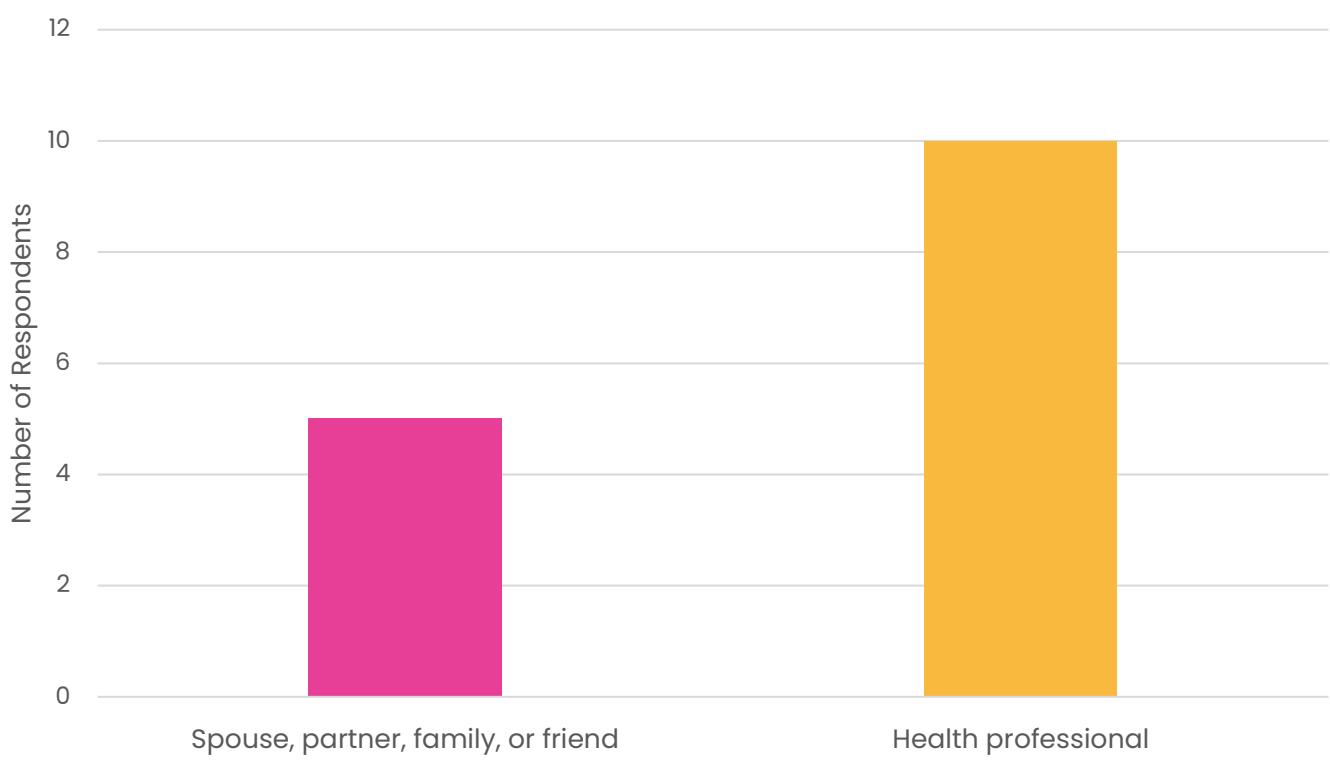
Negative Responses	Count
I cannot recall any issues, apart from there's no feedback online to say how you'll receive the appointment information, or how long it might take before you hear back. An electronic response would be better	1
Computer code error when tried online, so phoned directly to book	1
Confusing as the questions would not allow me to enter all of the details in space provided	1
Contacted GP for appointment then had to go fill another form in. Had to do separate appointments for different parts of body. 13 week wait.	1
Didn't realise that you had to scroll down to bottom of page to click referral button	1
First page confusing	1
Getting appointment nearly impossible	1
I did not follow through with the referral as my condition got better	1
I don't like using screens if I don't have to due to having Glaucoma. Prefer using phone, or having face to face appointment.	1
I have ADHD so found the process very hard as I could not get it to work. I think for me I would prefer to be referred by my GP	1
I work at WUTH and already seeing a physio for a problem, and because I had another problem I had to do another referral	1
It was easy to go onto the internet and insert code, but have not yet had any response (apart from to wait until December)	1
No appointments available. Been over 6 weeks trying to get one	1

no appointments available so had to phone	1
Once I knew about the self-referral, the form was relatively easy, and I was told I'd be contacted by post within a week. I was surprised not to get a text or other online notification. The letter arrived with a link to make an appointment, but no appointments were available. I chased it up, to be told that an appointment should become available in about 12 weeks. Found the time waiting between communications and appointments very frustrating and the condition is becoming more painful and debilitating. It was also frustrating that my GP didn't seem to be aware of the self-referral process when I first contacted them about my condition, and it would have saved time to know about it earlier	1
Received link from hospital and followed it easily. Think it would be more difficult for elderly and those not familiar with IT	1
Self explanatory when I actually found the link on GP's website, it was not clearly there and I had to search. Other people may find it impossible to find	1
There were no appointments at all, done twice	1
Venues not available so not had appointment yet	1
When I logged in, was told NHS number was not needed, then afterwards was told NHS number was needed	1
Total	20

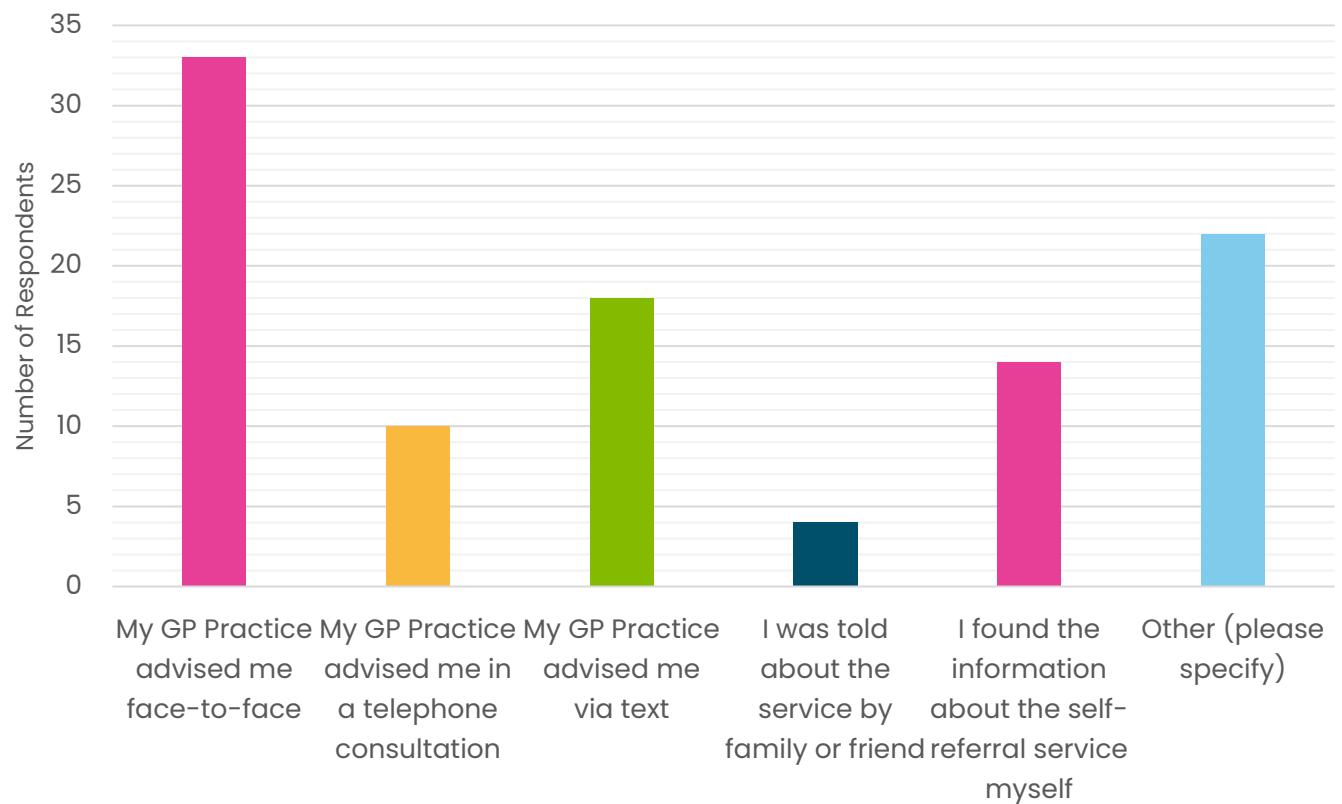
Q4. Did you need any help accessing and completing the referral form?



Q5. If you need help completing the referral form, who helped you?

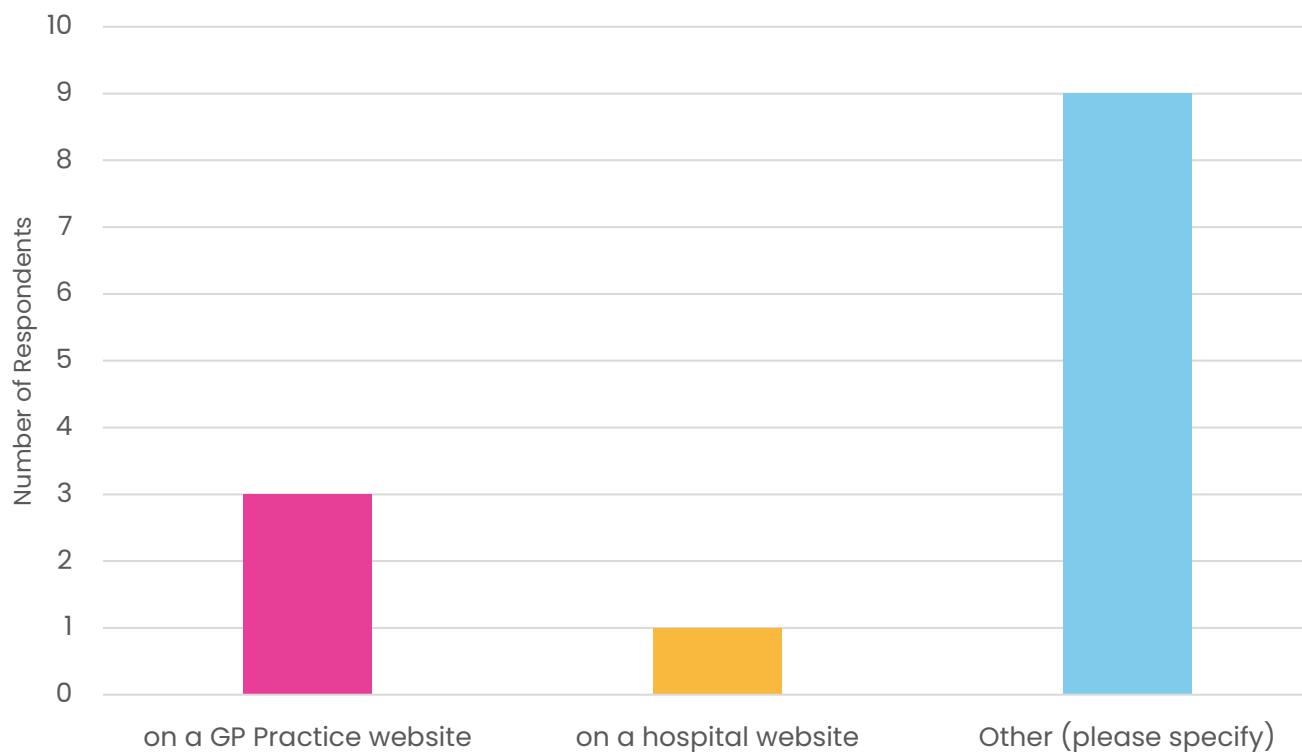


Q6. How did you find out about the self-referral process?



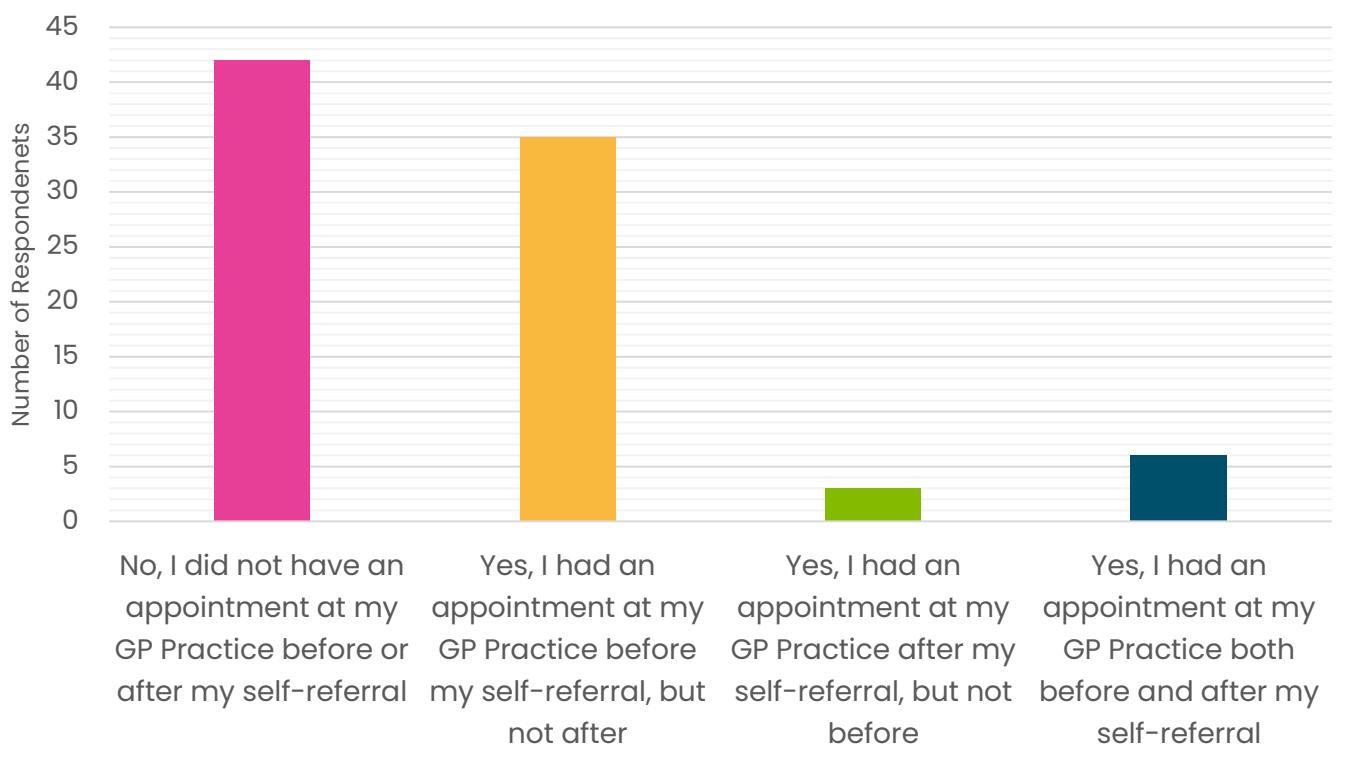
Other	Count
BLINX	3
Don't know	2
eConsult	1
Facebook	1
Nurse Practitioner	2
Online	2
PATCHs	7
NHS App	2
Work in Primary Care	2

Q7. If you found the information about the self-referral service by yourself, how did you find it?

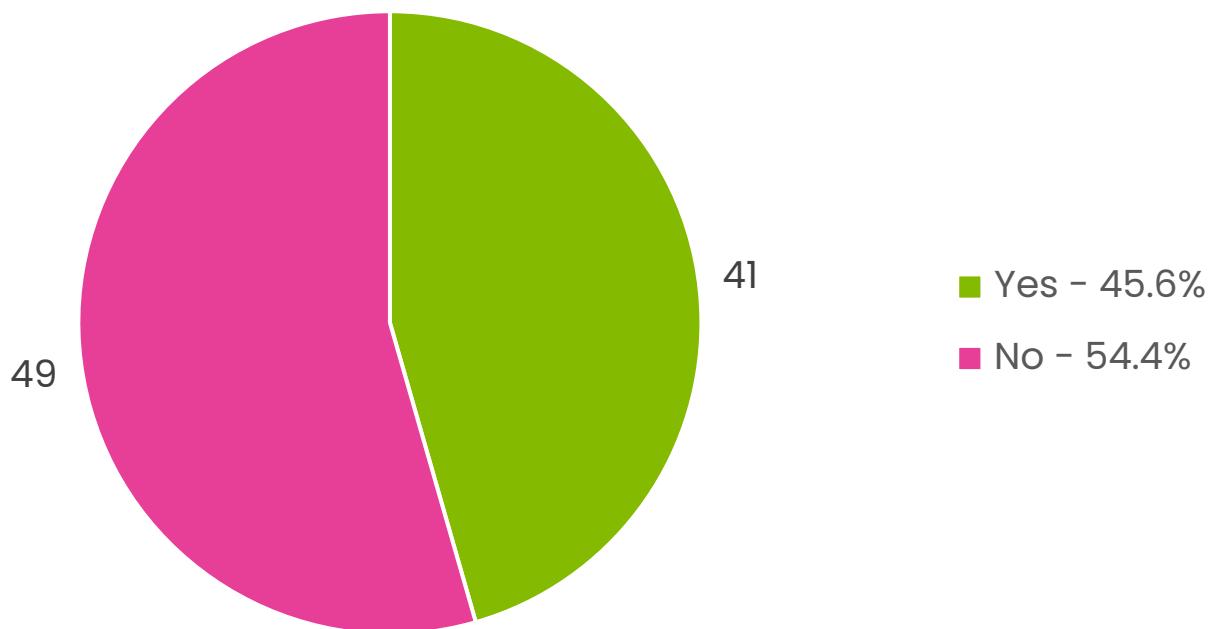


Other	Count
GP	1
GP Waiting Room	1
eConsult	1
PATCHs	3
NHS App	2
Facebook	1

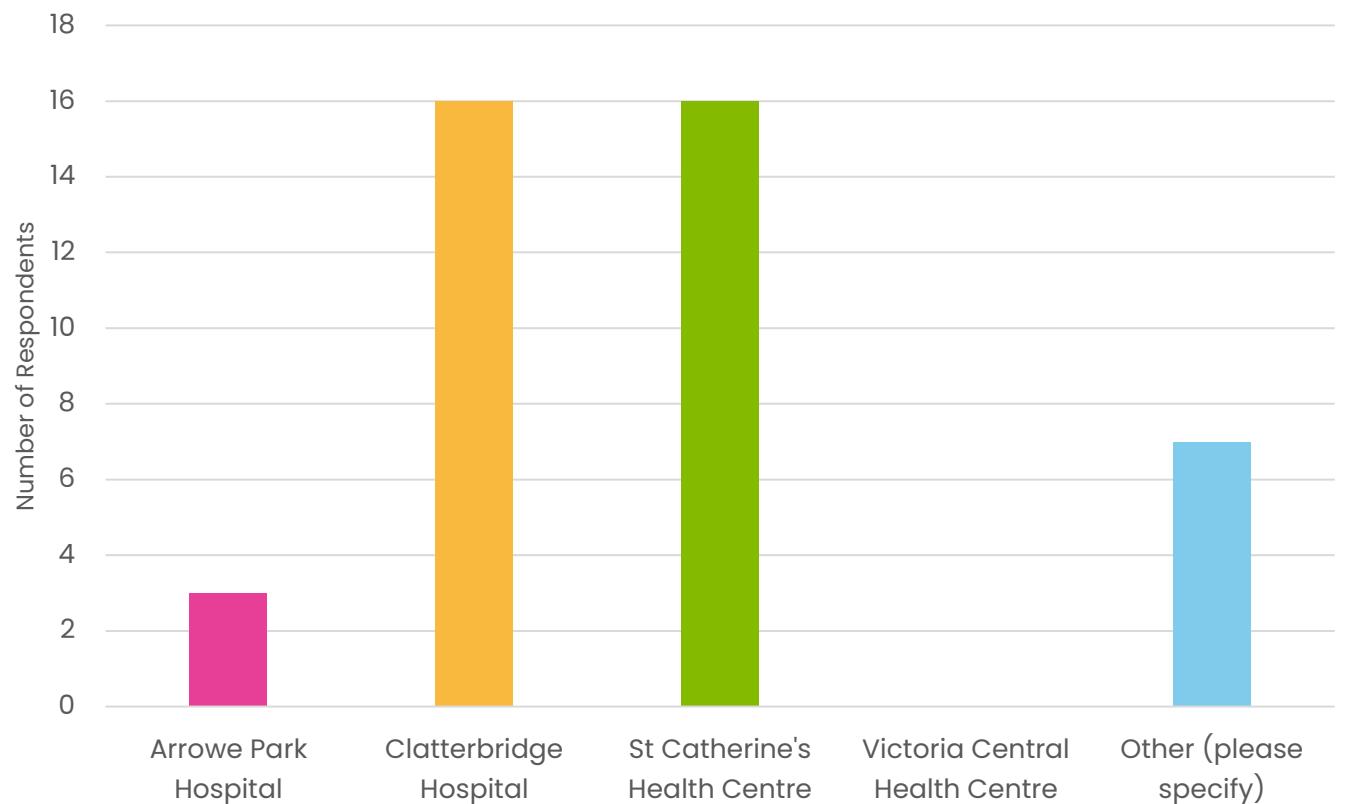
Q8. Have you had a GP appointment **about your MSK issue, before or after making your self-referral?**



Q9. Since making this referral, have you attended an MSK appointment yet?

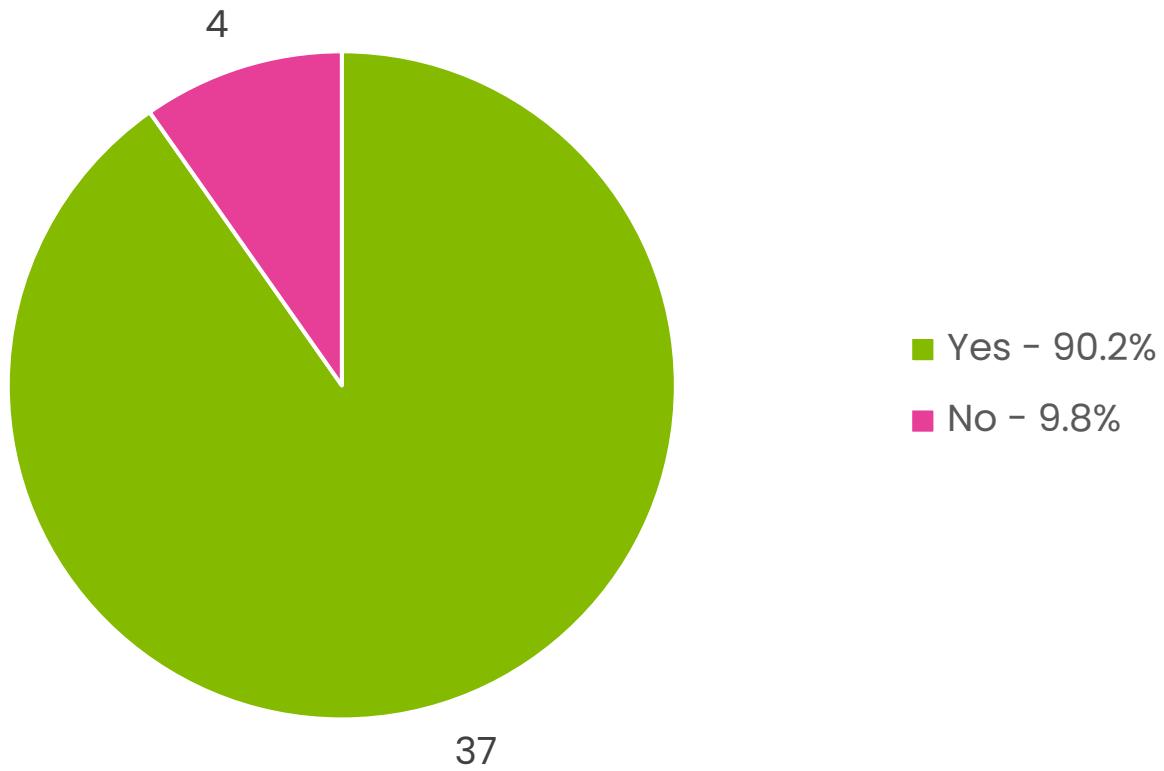


Q10. Which site did you attend for your MSK appointment?



Other	Count
Moreton Community Clinic	1
Both St. Catherine's Health Centre and Clatterbridge Hospital	1
Eastham Health Centre	4
Spire Murrayfield	1

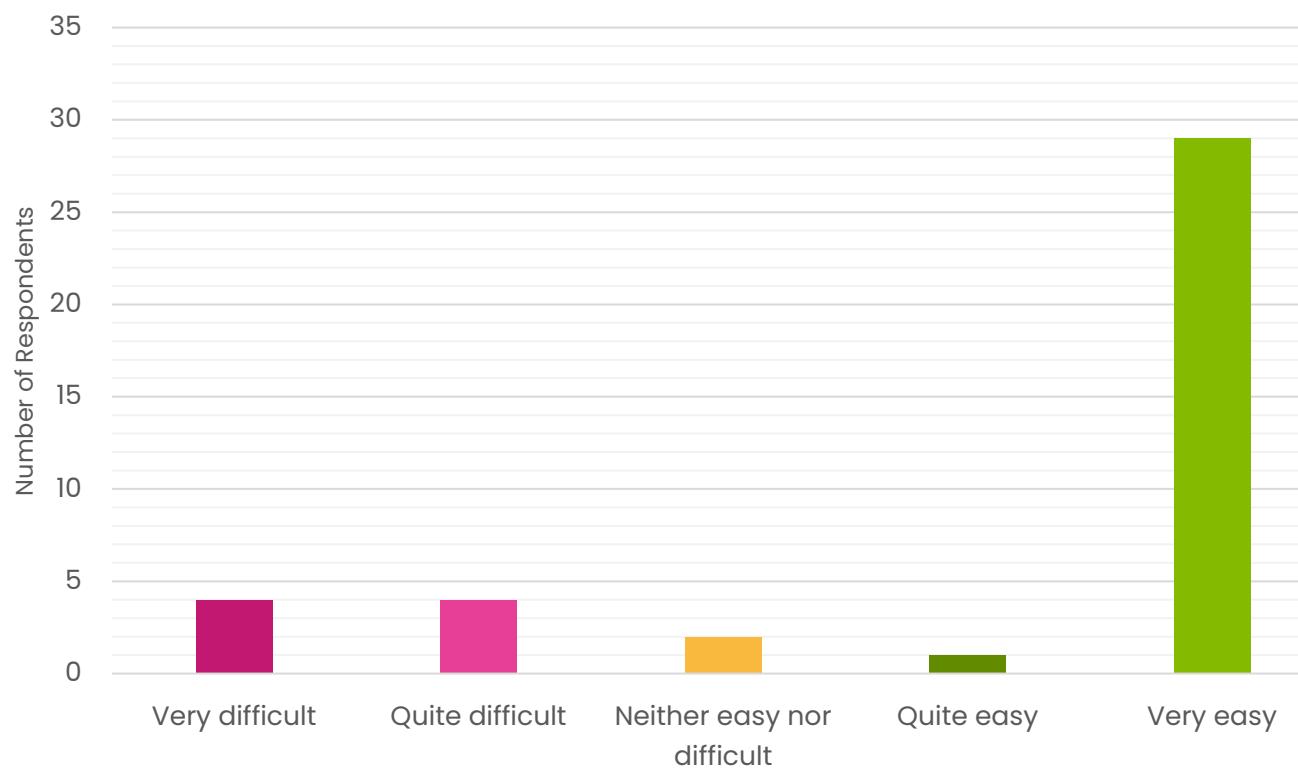
Q11. Was this location convenient for you to travel to?



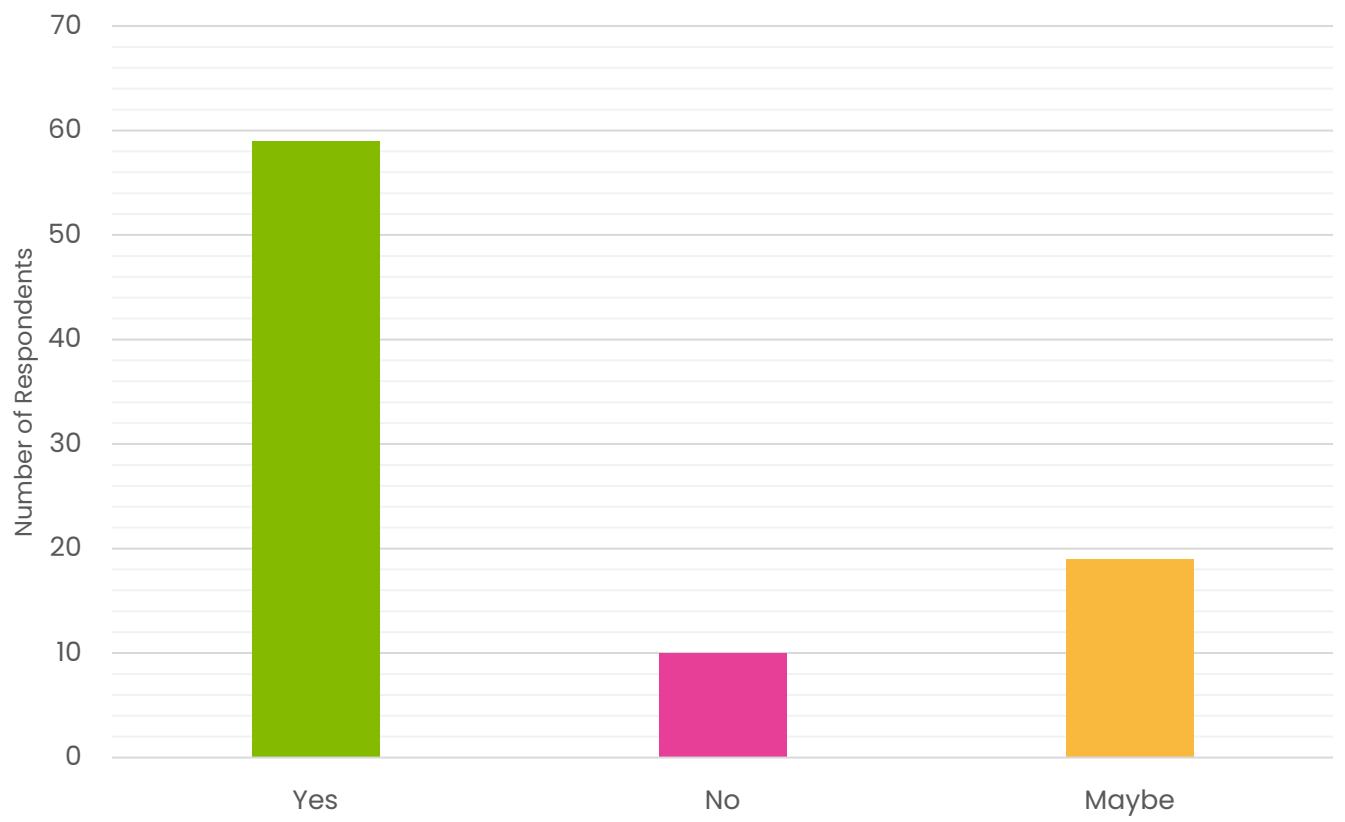
Q12. Why was the location not convenient?

Negative Responses	Count
A bit difficult as I do not drive	1
Harder to get to	1
Clatterbridge would have been better	1

Q13. When you went into the building, did you find it easy or difficult to locate and access the correct department?



Q14. Would you recommend the self-referral process?





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