



 **The use of Slough Walk In Centre at
Upton Hospital by vulnerable people**

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About Healthwatch

Healthwatch is the independent consumer champion for health and social care in England. Healthwatch's function is to engage with local people to seek views about locally delivered services, signpost service users to relevant information and to influence the design of local health and social care provision.

Healthwatch Slough is part of a network of local Healthwatch across 152 local authority areas that launched in April 2013 to ensure local voices are heard and enable them to influence the delivery and design of local services.

Our sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care and to speak out on their behalf. Healthwatch have statutory powers, as stated in the Health and Social Care Act 2012, to ensure the consumer's voice is strengthened and heard by those who commission, deliver and regulate health and care services. Healthwatch Slough helps people get the best out of local health and social care services; whether it's improving them today or helping to shape them for tomorrow.

Background

The contract for the Slough Walk-in Centre at Upton Hospital expired in December 2015 but has been extended for a further 18 months until June 2017. The Slough Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and NHS England have been working together to seek views on:

- what service changes could be piloted during this 18 month extension
- what the longer term future of the Slough Walk-in Centre might be

Healthwatch is interested in the needs of people who find it difficult to access traditional primary care services, such as those with language barriers, those with substance misuse issues or homeless people, who may have difficulties registering with a GP or booking and keeping appointments.

We are also aware of Slough resident's need for primary care services to be available outside of normal working hours, such as during evenings and at weekends and when GP practices. Slough residents have also told Healthwatch they want access to more same day services for conditions they view as urgent.

Slough residents have also told us about a desire to have primary care services to be available across different locations, including, the town centre which is easily accessible by various forms of public transport.

Healthwatch Slough has access to a Community Chest Fund where it commissions local groups to undertake exploratory pieces of work. Healthwatch Slough asked The Dash Charity to carry out a survey of it's client group about their usage of the Walk In Centre at Upton Hospital and what would they do if this facility were no longer available.

The Dash Charity (formerly Berkshire East & South Bucks Women's Aid) supports men, women and children affected by domestic abuse in the Slough and Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead areas and provides a range of support services including advocacy, group work and refuge accommodation.

The Slough Walk In Centre

The Slough Walk in Centre is open 8am - 8pm, 7 days a week and has two component parts;

As a GP practice with a registered patient list (**6409** @ 1st April 2015) and secondly a facility to see patients on a walk in basis (**40,416** attendances 2014/15)

The service is nurse led with GPs on site for 12 hours a day, employed by Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust.

The walk in service is intended to provide treatment for minor illnesses and injuries such as:

- Throat/ear/eye infections
- Rashes
- Urinary tract infection
- Coughs (not longstanding)
- Assessment/treatment/advise about minor injuries (although there are no x-ray facilities)
- Emergency Contraception

The service is not meant to replace services for Slough GP surgeries and is not meant to deal with:

- Non urgent appointments for patients registered at other GP practices
- Management of chronic disease
- Further investigation or referrals - blood tests/scans/to a speciality
- Repeat prescriptions/ medical sick notes
- Ear syringing
- Minor surgery skin tags/moles
- Second opinions
- Compression bandages
- Sexual health screening or family planning

The Patients Survey carried out end of 2013 asked respondents to state the main reason for visiting the walk-in centre rather than another service. Various responses were given and are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 Main reason for choosing to visit the Walk-in Centre

Main reason	%
I've been before	25%
No appointments at my GP	19%
Open at weekend	17%
Close and convenient	11%
Emergency situation	10%
Advice	4%
GP Practice to me to come	4%

Don't have a GP	2%
2 nd opinion	2%
Dressing change	1%
Other own reason	5%

* respondents could choose more than one response

It needs to be noted that the survey was carried out before the Slough CCG practices initiated the extended hours sessions as part of the Prime Ministers challenge fund (PMCF) in July 2014.

Patient consultation

The data was compiled through the facilitation of a client focus group with some refuge based clients and questionnaires being completed with clients of The Dash Charity's group programme, The Freedom Programme.

20 clients were interviewed in total, all of which live within the Slough area. 11 of these clients were refuge based and 9 clients were community based. All were current clients of the Dash Charity and has experienced some form of domestic abuse within the past year. Views and experiences of accessing treatment at Wexham Park Hospital were also discussed.

The views of staff members supporting these clients were also sought, through face to face interviews. Three staff members of the Dash Charity were interviewed, two Refuge IDVAs and a community based IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate).

At first glance - Views on Slough Walk-In Centre

The views expressed on Slough Walk-In Centre through the focus groups and questionnaires were generally positive.

Those using the service for GP appointments felt that they could easily get an appointment should they need one and that same day GP appointments were available. The appointment time slots are managed well and the majority felt that they received a good service from the Centre. Most felt that staff, including the reception staff, doctors and nurses were polite and helpful.

Only two clients (from refuge) made negative comments around the service as a whole and felt that the attitude and manner of reception staff could be better. In terms of the GP service, other suggested improvements included, more staff to be available to answer the telephone when booking an appointment and more

opportunity for telephone consultations to avoid having to visit the walk-in/GP in person.

In terms of suggested improvements to the Slough Walk In Centre, **a lack of seating** was a key theme from the respondents. Many felt that there was not enough seating in the Centre, particularly given long waiting times. The **lengthy waiting times** were attributed particularly to the Walk-In service, with some feeling that children and in one case a child with disabilities should be given priority.

The Dash Charity Staff Views on Slough Walk In Centre

All of our refuge clients use the Centre as they will be registered with a GP. In terms of our community based clients, our clients will tend to access the Walk-In Service as an alternative to a GP or A&E.

The Walk-In service does work well, although there can be long waiting times. It can be difficult sometimes to access the centre by phone.

Waiting for a prolonged period of time in a crowded waiting area is not a great option when it comes to contagious illnesses and it is felt that some people access the walk-in clinic unnecessarily, for example a child with a cough/cold etc.

There is also **limited patient information** available and the Dash charity were told recently that we were unable to display leaflets/posters at the Centre.

From a refuge perspective, the refuge staff have a good working relationship with staff at the Centre who understand our client's unique circumstances. There have been issues occasionally where centre staff have been unaware of the arrangement we have with the centre, although issues have always been resolved amicably via the Practice manager. Specific requests, for example to see a female GP, have been responded to positively.

“Any closure would have an enormous effect, we would have to find an alternative GP surgery willing to take temporary registrations and this could impact on A&E services. Our clients may not be able to register elsewhere without ID/documentation and it is imperative, with the physical and emotional needs of a client who has suffered prolonged domestic abuse, for them to be able to access a GP during their stay in refuge accommodation.”

A deeper look - How refugee patients use the Walk In Centre

The Dash Charity refugee clients have a unique experience of the Slough Walk in Centre as all refugee clients habitually use the service in order to register with a GP. This is due to the fact that the registration is on a temporary basis whilst they are in refuge and clients often lack relevant ID to register with a surgery, due to the fact they often flee their homes in a crisis situation.

The Dash Charity supports up to 50 families a year through refuge accommodation and all will be encouraged to register at the Slough Walk In Centre with a GP within a week of their intake.

As one client stated *“It’s the only place we can access a GP as we are in temporary accommodation, other GP’s will not register us, therefore we don’t have a choice”*.

2 out of 11 clients shared that they would register elsewhere should they have a choice, although could not provide demonstrable reasons why.

The Community based clients tended to use the Walk In Centre on a more ad-hoc basis. 4 out of 9 clients stated that they **would use the service out of hours or when they struggled to get an appointment with their own GP**. 5 out of 9 clients stated they used the walk-in service initially with a view to see a nurse, examples given were for minor injuries or where symptoms were being presented that they were unsure whether a GP appointment or visit to A&E was warranted. **The vast majority of community based clients stated that they used these services predominantly for their children.**

The community based clients also commented that the Walk In Centre was **conveniently and centrally located**, making it easier to access than other services, including Wexham Park Hospital.

The need for Slough Walk-In Centre

The respondents overwhelmingly felt that the Walk In Centre was an essential local service and were concerned about the impact that a closure of the service would have.

Refuge clients shared concerns about their ability to access a GP and other services that are accessed through a GP, such as Talking Therapies, specialist counselling etc. which are so often used by clients experiencing domestic abuse.

Comments included:

‘It provides a vital service for many people and would impact on the accessibility for some to see a GP’

‘I am worried I would have to make a longer journey to access NHS services and have longer waiting times elsewhere’

Community based clients felt that any closure would mean **a lack of options available out of hours and when having difficulty accessing a GP**. All felt that this would mean that there would be a big impact on Accident and Emergency (A&E) at Wexham Park Hospital as people would travel here as an alternative leading to increased pressure on A&E, inappropriate use of A&E and longer waiting times for patients.

One respondent also mentioned the fact that the Walk In Service is so well established in Slough and so any closure or change in service/pathways could lead to confusion and people not knowing where to go to access support.

Use and experience of Wexham Park Hospital

9 out of 20 respondents had visited Wexham Park Hospital within the last 12 months. The majority accessed A&E, with one client accessing antenatal and labour ward. This high percentage could be attributed to the effects of domestic abuse. Four clients had accessed A&E 4 times or more over the 12 months, with two responding just ‘lots’.

Clients had noticed an improvement in facilities at the hospital, although said that waiting times were still very long. The hospital is easy to access by public transport, although parking is an issue with respondents citing it being ‘overcrowded’ and ‘impossible to find a space’. Parking is also expensive.

The Dash Charity Supporting Clients to access Health Services

Throughout all our services, whether refuge or community based, The Dash Charity meets regularly with clients and discuss their individual needs. A bespoke support plan will be created for each client and is revisited within these one to one sessions. The Dash Charity works very much from a multi-agency perspective and are well informed as to the services available for our clients within the local area.

Seeking to empower clients by giving them information on their options to enable them to make informed decisions.

Other services we access in order to support our clients include, Garden Clinic, Turning Point, Talking Therapies, A & E Wexham Park Hospital, CMHT, CAMHS, 111 telephone medical advice, Health Visiting Team and the Crystal Midwifery Team.

Clients are encouraged to access 111 for initial advice out of hours and 999 in an emergency.

Conclusion

Of the 20 people that were involved in discussions about the Slough Walk In Centre the overall findings suggest that the Walk In Centre is a vital local service and is well received and used by many.

However, waiting times can be lengthy and uncomfortable with a lack of seating available.

There have been mixed messages as to the service received, but generally positive.

Slough CCG and NHS England, as commissioners, have to ensure that they secure high-quality, efficient services that meet patients' needs. Closure of the Walk In Service would have a big impact on presentation at Wexham Park A&E, the Dash Charity refuge clients and limits options for healthcare for more vulnerable groups of Slough residents.

Recommendations

- Waiting areas to be reviewed. Could there be an option for extending seating or for people to return should a long wait be anticipated?
- Wider education on which services to access when to avoid unnecessary use of the service. More information to be distributed around GP Extended hours in the Slough area.
- More literature/posters in the waiting areas, which may help with this wider education and access to water.
- More options for telephone consultations initially to avoid overcrowding the centre.
- Consideration of how particularly vulnerable groups such as refugees, children and homeless people access primary care out of hours.

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