



Unity Health Appointment Changes

April 2017

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Unity Health Appointment Changes

Introduction

In February 2016 Unity Health's annual patient survey told them 89% of patients were dissatisfied with access. They began exploring alternatives to the current system.

In June 2016 Healthwatch York published a report, Access to GP Services. For GP practices in general this highlighted:

- Problems making appointments, including a specific concern about student appointments
- Challenges with booking systems
- Positive feedback about online systems once initial barriers had been overcome

This added to Unity's plans to explore alternatives for booking appointments. These plans needed to address challenges over making sure appointments were available for those most in need, and reduce the number of Did Not Attends (DNAs). They identified an online solution to support this work.

They began to inform patients about planned changes.

Service Improvements; As requested by you.

19th Sept 2016



Our appointment booking system is changing on **19th September** following feedback from our Patients. All appointment requests will now be made via our easy online consultation system. Our highly skilled nurse team will then help you get the right information, right help and right appointment first time.

ON THE DAY SERVICE

Visit our **website** now to see how an online consultation works.
Please speak to one of our friendly **reception team** for more information.

www.unityhealth.info

Find us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/unityhealthYork
Follow us on Twitter: @UnityhealthYork



Why is Healthwatch York looking at Appointment Changes at Unity Health?

The new appointment system was brought to our attention by one of our volunteers. They were worried that without support, some people may not be able to make appointments.

We discussed this with Unity Health issue, and our plans to conduct a survey. They explained the reasons for introducing the change, and were very keen to hear more about people's experiences of using the system.

What we did to find out more

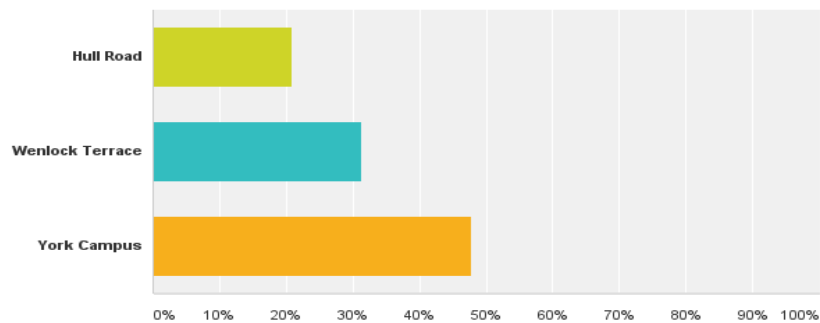
We put together a survey. Unity publicised this to all patients, via email and posters in surgeries. We also promoted the survey via twitter. One of our volunteers also shared details of the survey with University of York student networks, including the Disabled Students Network.

What we found out

We received 767 responses online and 15 paper responses.

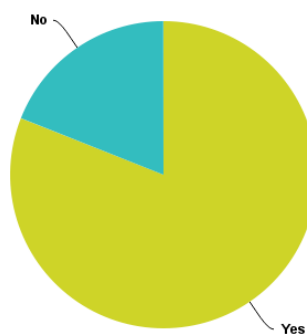
Q1 Which Unity Health surgery do you go to?

Answered: 781 Skipped: 1



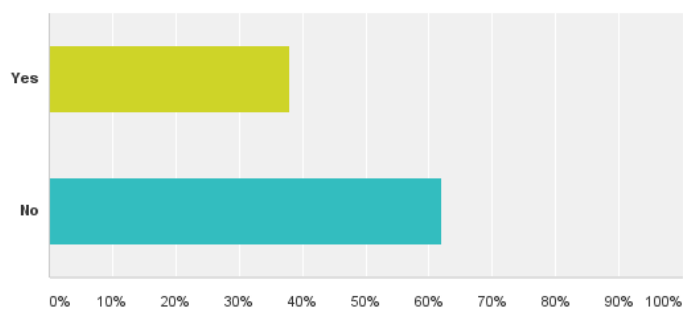
Q2 Were you with Unity Health before 19th September 2016?

Answered: 779 Skipped: 3

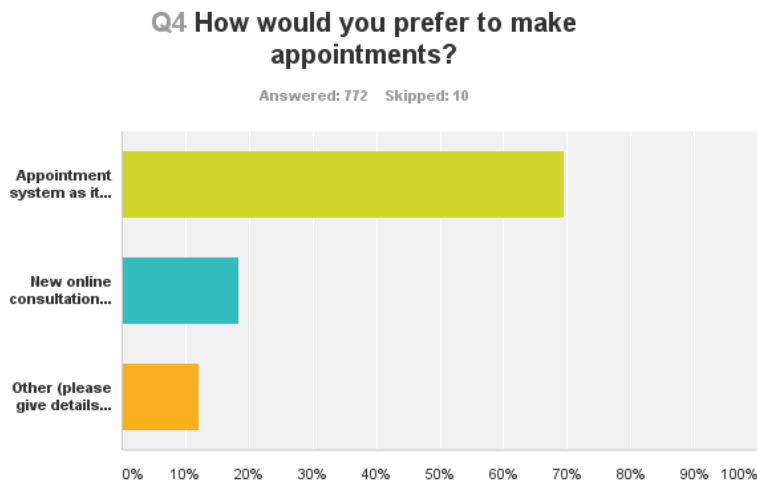


Q3 If yes, did you hear about Unity Health's proposed changes to the appointment system before they came into effect on 19th September 2016?

Answered: 695 Skipped: 87



Making Appointments



The majority responded that they preferred the old system.

There were 256 comments. Themes covered included:

- Lack of access to a computer
- Making contact for urgent, same day appointments
- Need for an alternative system where the appointment is because of an underlying condition
- Request for patient choice around GP and appointment times, so that work, childcare, and study can be accommodated
- Need for the system to be accessible outside standard office hours for those unable to access the internet in work hours

Comments included:

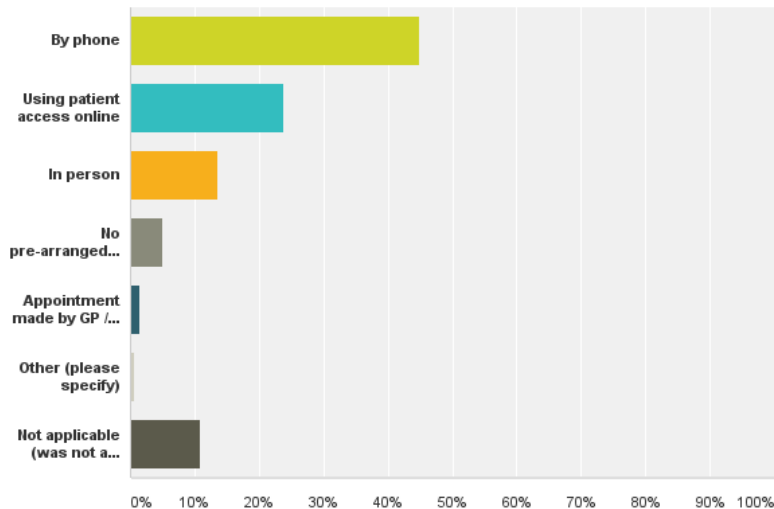
“Consultation form is incredibly difficult to use, especially for those of us without regular access to a computer”.

“Using the online prebookable system, I was able to see the GP of my choice.”

“New system seems unnecessarily complicated for straightforward consultations - and it's annoying not to be able to book an appointment outside working hours”

Q5 How did you usually make your appointments before the change?

Answered: 772 Skipped: 10



There were 113 comments for this question, with most being explanations for their preference, or problems with some means of booking. Comments included:

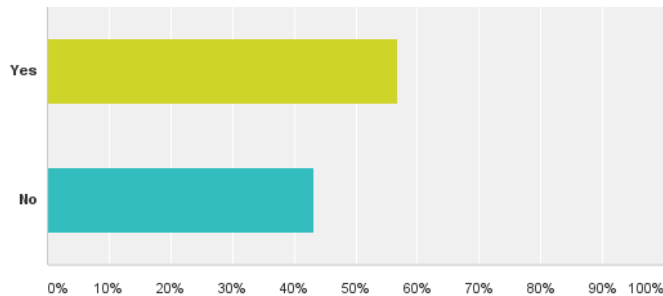
“This worked really well.....excellent service! My fear with the new system is that potentially serious medical problems may be missed as it discourages contact with medical professionals rather than encourage contact”

“I study abroad and am only back home at specific times, I need to be able to explain my situation and be able to book an appointment accordingly. I cannot be assigned appointments randomly.”

“(Stay and wait) Very ineffective, as someone who is ill at the time is required to stand outside in an open area in cold weather from around 7:30 to 8:30 to guarantee a spot that day (as doctor available times offer minimum to nearly no options)”

Q6 Have you used the new online consultation system?

Answered: 741 Skipped: 41



Q7 then asked for comments about their experiences. There were 531 responses. The main themes were:

- Confusion as to whether this system is the right one for all types of appointments
- Concern over confidentiality
- Problems with the form itself – too long, too many questions, lack of options around mental health, difficult to complete when unwell
- Need for quicker route for routine prescriptions (and lack of awareness this can still be completed through Patient Access online)
- Some very positive experiences

“I found it a bit difficult because I was trying to arrange a repeat appointment. I got a bit confused as to whether it was the system I should use.”

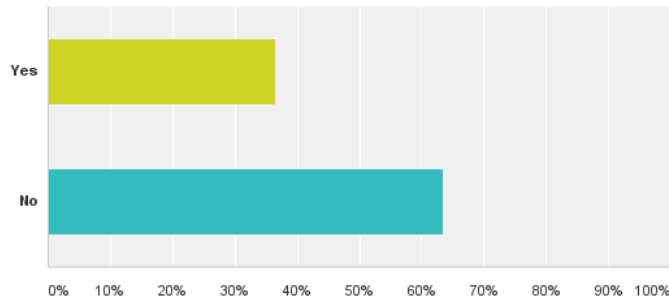
“I am concerned about confidentiality. Why should I need to explain to someone I don't know, with no medical qualifications why I need to see Doctor.”

“I had a migraine so found it painful and took a long time, then had to ring surgery, as each time I put my symptoms in it told me to go to A&E, as migraines have similar symptoms to meningitis.”

“Excellent Service. Received a call from a GP within two hours of sending my request”

Q8 Do you feel confident you would be able to complete the online form in all circumstances?

Answered: 719 Skipped: 64



There were 237 comments made about this question. The themes were:

- Problems with internet access
- Lack of confidence in using IT
- Concern about being too ill to complete the form, especially related to mental ill health
- Issues with the form itself
- Questions on its suitability for disabled people, including people with dyslexia and other learning difficulties, arthritis, or other conditions affecting hands

“I work full time, and am not allowed to use the internet at work for personal reasons. The online form is only available during hours when I am normally working, so I will *never* be able to fill the form in unless I am not at work for some reason.”

“Forms cause a significant anxiety response for me and the first time I attempted to complete it I had to give up because I started panicking.”

“Not very computer literate and really struggle to work things out”

“It is good that 'complex' patients are not required to go this route”

“When completing the form for the 1st time, I was confronted by the question of whether there was any particular treatment I would like to try now. I didn't know (a common response I would imagine) but there was no don't know option. I tried to leave it blank as options yes/no were both

inaccurate, but I couldn't proceed without completing this question. I was not prepared to answer inaccurately, so I gave up.”

Q9 – What would you do if you were unable to complete the form?

There were 506 responses to this question. The main themes were:

- Call or walk into surgery instead
- Try NHS 111 or A&E
- Change practice
- Ask a friend to complete it
- Go without medical treatment
- Don't know
- Lie

“Ring up or walk in to the surgery so I can speak to a real person.”

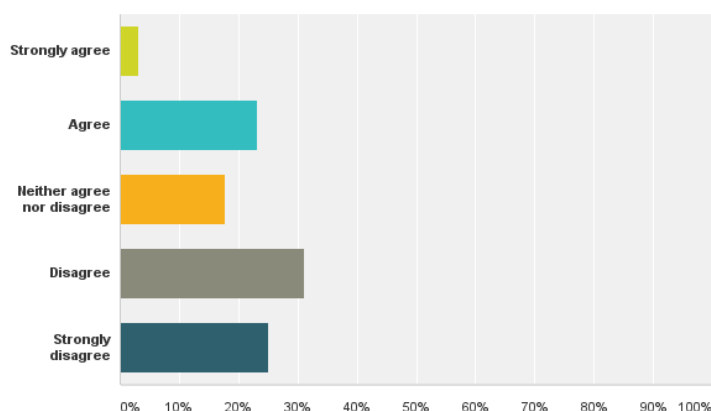
“Go to hospital drop in or A & E. Change practice.”

“Depends on severity of problem. Either try and last until the problem got better or call 111 if serious.”

“Lie. E.g. when I had stomach pain I filled in a form about period pain since stomach pain wasn't an option.”

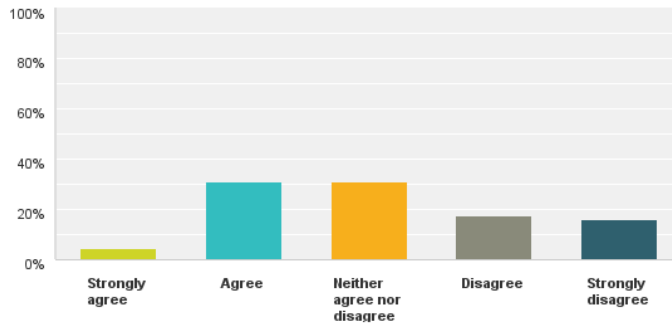
Q10 Please read the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with them.
I can get appointments with my GP when I want them

Answered: 719 Skipped: 64



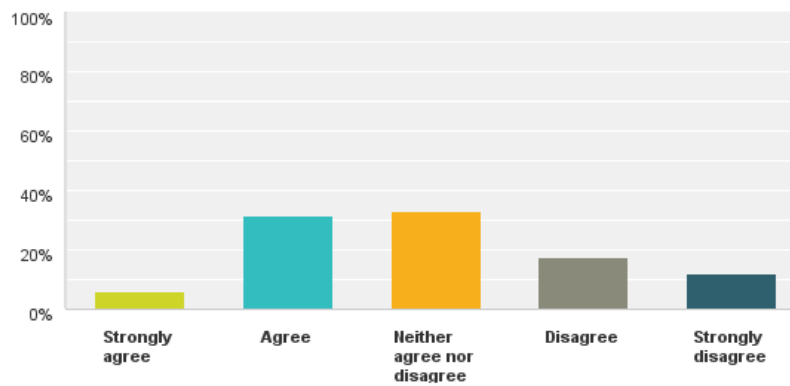
Q11 My surgery offers a a good range of early morning, evening and weekend appointment options

Answered: 711 Skipped: 72



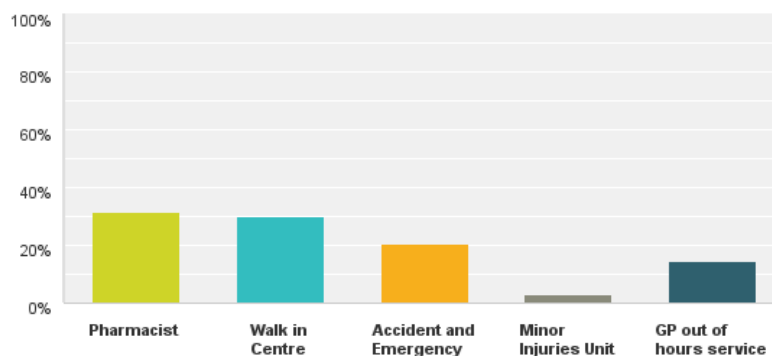
Q12 I can choose which doctor I want to see

Answered: 711 Skipped: 72



Q13 Following the change in booking system, would you consider using any of the following services instead of your GP?

Answered: 511 Skipped: 272



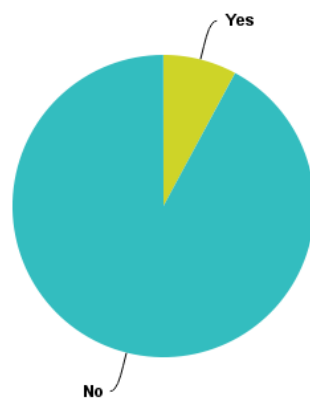
There were a number of themes within the comments:

Many commented that they already use alternatives where possible. There were a number of comments about York not having a walk-in centre, and lack of awareness about the minor injuries unit. Many people are unsure as to whether there is a minor injuries unit in York. Some people would consider going to A&E instead of using their GP whereas others worry about the pressures that they would be putting on A&E. Many also commented that they only contact a GP when they need a GP.

- “Is there a minor injuries unit in York? Good idea.”
- “All services - we do consult our pharmacy, have used walk-in centres and A&E in an emergency. We are reasonable people and realise that the national health service is compromised. We only use our surgery when we need to.”
- “No - none of those services offer what I need”
- “No, I am happy with the service at Unity.”
- “I use the above when I can anyway - when I call the doctor it’s because I need a doctor”

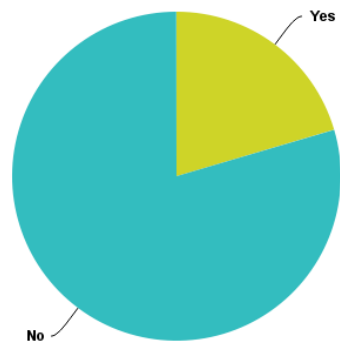
Q14 Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?

Answered: 711 Skipped: 72

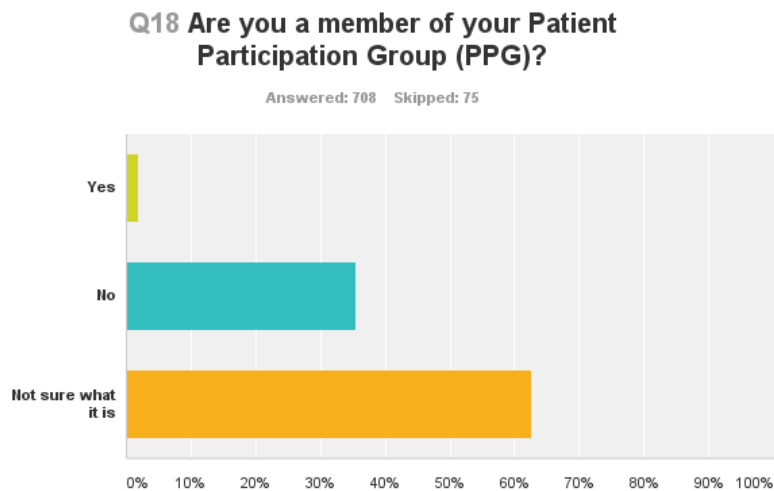


Q16 Do you consider yourself to have a mental health condition?

Answered: 709 Skipped: 74



Patient Participation Groups



There was limited awareness of the Patient Participant Group. The majority of respondents were unsure what it is. Many would like to be asked to join. There is a clear need to raise awareness of PPGs and their function.

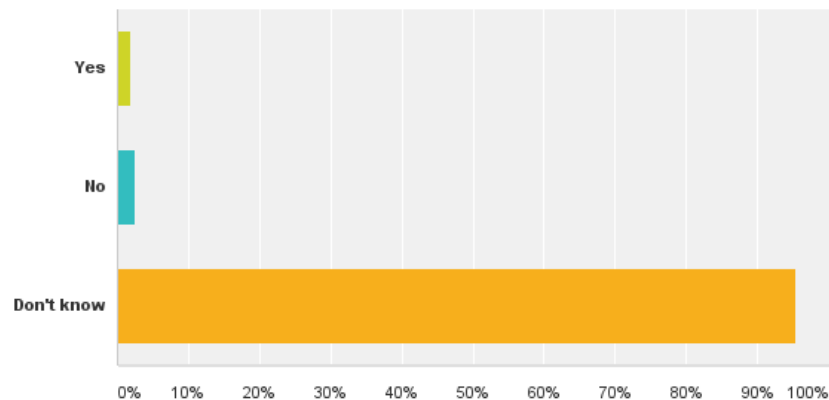
Q19 asked if not a member, why not

Answers fell into themes including:

- Unable to get to Wenlock Terrace / times of meetings inconvenient
- Never heard of it
- Never been invited
- I don't have time to be involved

Q20 If yes, is your Patient Participation Group effective?

Answered: 308 Skipped: 475



309 people answered the “effectiveness question”, with 6 saying yes, 8 no, and 294 don’t know. There were 13 comments including:

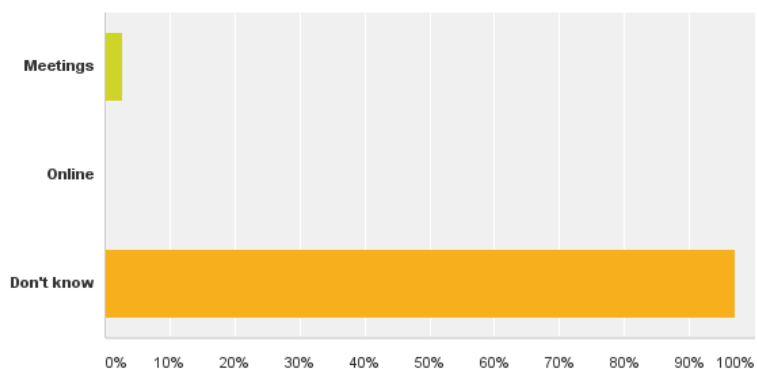
“At least it is an opportunity for residents and students to make their sides of the story heard. I believe the management do listen.”

“They listen and give us space to talk.”

“Never heard of it”

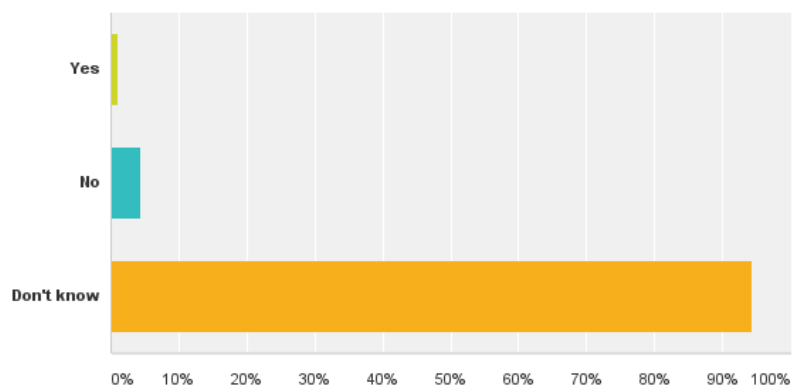
Q21 Does your Patient Participation Group have meetings or is it online?

Answered: 450 Skipped: 333



Q22 Do you think it is representative of the practice population?

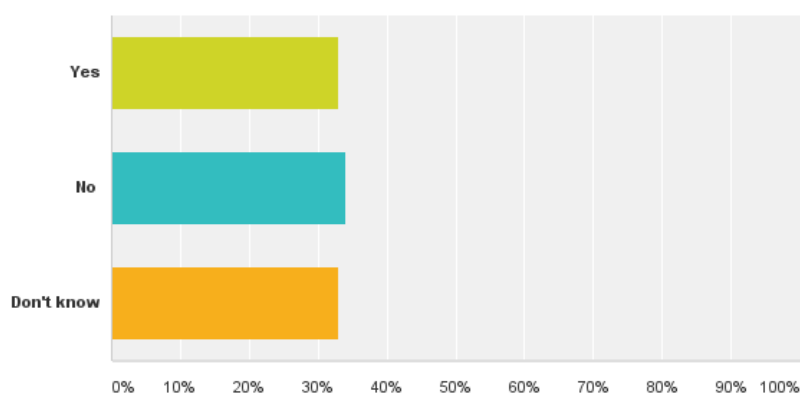
Answered: 469 Skipped: 314



Flu Jabs

Q23 Are you entitled to a flu jab?

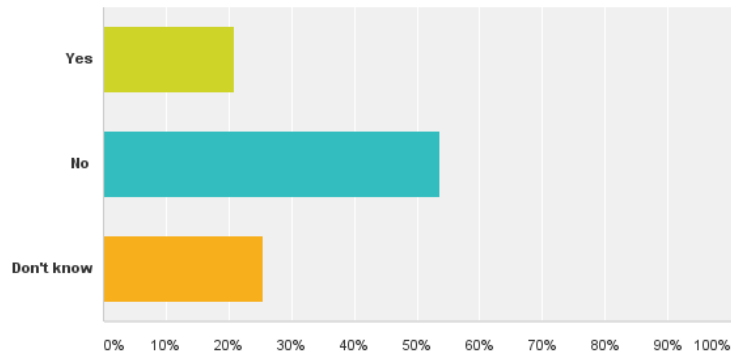
Answered: 705 Skipped: 78



Approximately 30% of people taking part in the survey were unsure as to whether they are entitled to a flu jab.

Q24 If yes, have you received a reminder to have your flu jab this year?

Answered: 428 Skipped: 355



Further information

Q25 Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your GP practice?

256 responses received. There was very varied feedback, from support to “keep improving” to requests to remove the new booking system. These included:

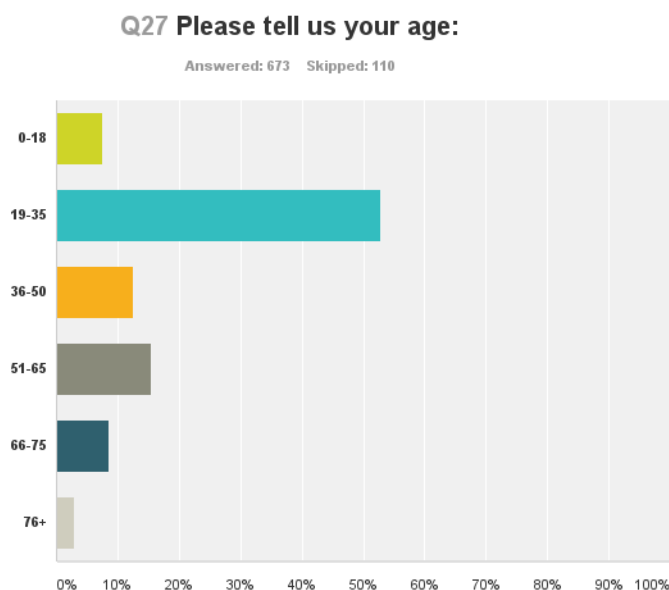
“A good practice and I am more than happy with my GP. The new 'booking system' is unhelpful, obstructive and a waste of everyone's time.”

“Very friendly staff and always try to help when they can but are always overbooked because of high demand”

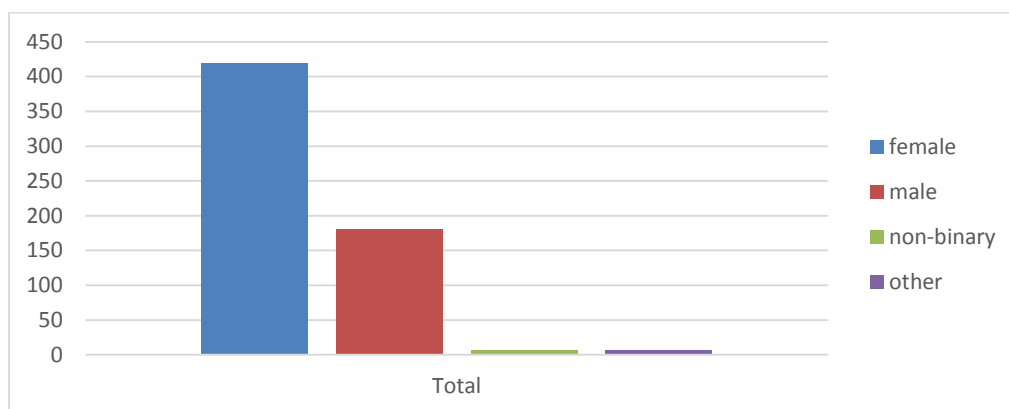
“Just want it to work for everyone. I want to be able to feel I could see someone if I needed to, and I don't feel like that at the moment I don't feel I could.”

“Please bring back the option of calling in for appointments.”

Monitoring Information



Q28 – How would you describe your gender?



613 respondents, 419 female, 180 male, 7 non-binary, 7 other.

Student Specific feedback channelled through YUSU

With thanks to Millie, Student Union President, for collating 60 comments received.

Concern the form is too long, and feels impersonal if you are talking about a sensitive issue. Concern about the parameters of the form in sending to A&E. Feels it is too sensitive. Maybe need some way to say “I do not think A&E is the right option as I’m not that poorly.” Though may need some safety valves to make sure system doesn’t prevent A&E direction where needed.

Lots of comments about wanting human contact / a human voice if unwell, not a form.

Gap in awareness of the system and routes to meet needs. E.g. People trying to complete the form through patient access to book appointments. Systems are separate. Currently not that many patients using patient access, but lots of really useful info, including your medical records, ability to request repeat prescriptions.

Discussed preferences about being called into an appointment. Some students would prefer anonymity, with a number based system.

Idea of being able to select times when calls will be made, to accommodate lectures.

Challenges of using form with pre-existing conditions or unrelated conditions. So for example some minor ailments might be more serious for people with asthma or diabetes. Need to be able to make this clear. People with pre-existing conditions know their condition well, and know what they need. One student talked about using the system to get an appointment with the nurse so they would realise a GP appointment is needed. Issues around how we facilitate GP access in these circumstances. Appointments for medication check-ups. How would these be enabled? Must maintain ability to take routine medication. Family history section is time consuming if your family have lots of conditions. Need to look at ways of saving this information rather than filling it in every time.

Concerns about access to contraception. Request for drop in clinics. Unity Health confirmed they are looking at running a turn up contraceptive clinic. Also will look at other specific areas where this might work. Also suggested a Fresher's Flu clinic – Unity agree this could be very useful.

Stay and wait – do people want them back? 16 Facebook likes, enjoy being able to get an appointment on the day. Others, no – 8am queue not great.

One person feels they had a very negative experience where they filled in the form, then got worse the following day, but waited 6 days. Unity confirmed this happened due to a period of staff absence.

Timeframes – need to build in systems that notify of progress. Work with developers to introduce notices – e.g. has been triaged, will be contacted within x hours.

Concern about weekend coverage – availability of the form. Could it be made available over the weekend, even if not 24/7?

Comment on phone – always engaged, or just rings out. Current system has limited functionality. Unity aware of this, phone system is being redone, but no indication of when this will happen. Tied in to improvements across all GP practices in York. In the meantime, need to highlight alternatives. E.g. Email, secure messaging through Patient Access.

Some comments about giving Unity Health additional resources to enable them to offer more appointments.

A number of positive comments received. These include:

Found the new system very helpful – used the system twice, got both appointments within a week, far far quicker than the system back home.

Overall, I have been impressed by Unity Health.

Found the online system helpful and good. I filled in the form and someone got back to me quickly.

Other / general issues

Issues around visiting the GP when you are registered elsewhere. Unity will pick these up direct with surgery staff to make sure access is being facilitated.

The address being wrong on prescriptions. Not clear addresses have always been updated. Need to keep exploring ways of data sharing between Uni and Unity. Needs to be clear to students they are separate organisations, but also unless students opt out, would be helpful to share this data across.

Issues with clinicians missing appointments, and impact on students. Acknowledgement that students nowadays pay a lot for their University experience, which can increase the feeling that their time is precious and delays unacceptable. Receptionists should be making it clear to students where a doctor has been called out unavoidably that appointments can be rebooked, and need to be apologetic. Useful to be transparent about reasons for delays. Remembering both parties are human beings!

Conclusion

Unity Health are the first practice in our area to try an online solution to the appointment challenge. However, given the current demands on GP practices, this is the beginning of a change process, not the end. The GP Five Year Forward View encourages GP practices to explore online systems to help manage demand.

It is important as unprecedented change begins across our health and social care system that we continue to monitor the impact of new initiatives on our population.

Unity Health have already taken action to address some of the concerns raised. We will be re-running the survey in June to understand how this system has bedded in.

Actions taken since the survey was completed

Unity Health have confirmed that since the initial survey was conducted they have put a number of actions in place. Unity Health have:

1. Established a fortnightly meeting in the Practice to review and monitor the access model performance alongside patient and staff feedback. This meeting is led by Louise Johnston, Managing Partner, and attended by two GP Partners, Nurse Manager and Reception Team Leader.
2. Extended the portal opening to 07.00 – 17.30. At this stage the Partners feel clinically that they are not yet ready to open the portal later. This will be reviewed.
3. Engaged ActPR to improve communication between the Practice and patients. This includes ActPR utilising the Practice Twitter and Facebook accounts.
4. Employed a Pharmacist who is part of the triage team. Her role is to carry out medication reviews, answer patient queries, support long term condition management and, with training, respond to minor ailment e-consultations.
5. Provided iPads in each surgery
6. Made sure that the reception team are trained in taking patient information over the phone when the patient is unable to access e-consultations.
7. Trained a group of reception staff to be care navigators. Because 87% of patient contact with the surgery is now via e-consultation, the reduced volume in telephone calls has given the space to train and undertake this role. This provides a focus on further enhancing the patient experience via expert sign posting and access to local services and developing social prescribing.
8. Provided patients deemed by the GP to have complex health needs with a direct phone number to the nurse triage team. This has happened despite NHSE removing the funding for this. By managing capacity in practice, they are looking to be able to offer this group of patients a double GP appointment as standard.

9. Seen a reduction in GP Did Not Attends (DNAs). DNAs for Jan – Mar 2017 averaged weekly 3.5% compared to 7% weekly average in the same period in 2016 – they've halved the number of GP DNA's. This equates to approximately 28 GP appointments being made available each week.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Recommended to
Extend the hours of operation of the online booking form, for example from 7am to 7pm	Unity Health (and any other adopting practice)
Make sure patient information is clear, and provides alternatives for those without the internet. Highlight that patients can still use Patient Access for reviewing their medical records and ordering repeat prescriptions. Communicate changes to online booking through: University screens In surgeries via poster On the website Via email including through the magazine	Unity Health (and any other adopting practice)
Where GPs instruct patients they need a repeat appointment, GPs to make sure they have issued a pink chit (this enables patients to book as they leave)	Unity Health (and any other adopting practice)
Consider what training may be needed for receptionists to be able to talk patients through the form via telephone	Unity Health (and any other adopting practice)
Consider different ways of raising awareness and involvement through Patient Participation Groups	Unity Health (and all York practices)
Run an information campaign about how to use the online form and patient access to get the best from your GP. Communicate	Unity Health / York Uni
Arrange a session between developers and students with an interest in the mental health options within the form to look at ways to improve the system, including sending an acknowledgement when you submit your form.	Unity Health & the developers
For future developments of the system, consider ways of linking the form with medical history, reducing the number of questions each time.	Unity Health & the developers
Consider ways of promoting patient privacy.	Unity Health
Rerun the survey through June to check whether things have improved.	Healthwatch York & Unity Health

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Survey questions

Making appointments at Unity Health

1. Which Unity Health surgery do you go to?
☐ Hull Road ☐ Wenlock Terrace ☐ York Campus
2. Were you with Unity Health before 19th September 2016?
☐ Yes ☐ No
3. If yes, did you hear about Unity Health's proposed changes to the appointment system before they came into effect on 19th September 2016
☐ Yes ☐ No

Prior to this date you could book appointments by phone, in person, or through Patient Access online. Unity also provided a stay and wait clinic every morning from 8am for same day appointments. Since the 19th September 2016, all appointments are made via an online consultation. You will then be contacted by the end of the next working day.

4. How would you prefer to make appointments?
☐ Appointment system as it was before 19th September – stay and wait daily clinic, prebookable GP appointments
☐ New online consultation form
☐ Other (please give details below)

Comments

5. How did you usually make your appointments before the change?

- ☐ By Phone ☐ Using patient access online
- ☐ In person appointment/walked in ☐ No pre-arranged
- ☐ Appointment made by GP/nurse/other health professional
- ☐ Other (please specify) ☐ not applicable

The new system

6. Have you used the new online consultation system?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

7. If yes, what did you think of it? If no, why not?

8. Do you feel confident you would be able to complete the online form in all circumstances?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments

9. If for any reason you found it difficult to complete the form, what would you do?

Your Experience

Please read the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with them.

10. I can get appointments with my GP when I want them:

- ☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither agree or disagree
☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

Comments

11. My surgery offers a good range of early morning, evening and weekend appointment options

- ☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither agree or disagree
☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

Comments

12. I can choose which doctor I want to see

☐ Strongly agree
disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Neither agree or

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

Comments

13. Following the change in booking system, would you consider using any of the following services instead of your GP?

☐ Pharmacist

☐ Walk-in Centre

☐ Accident and Emergency

☐ Minor injuries unit

☐ GP out of hours service

Comments

Access and Attitudes

14. Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?

☐ Yes ☐ No

15. If yes, how accessible do you find the new booking system?
Please explain your answer.

16. Do you consider yourself to have a mental health condition?

☐ Yes ☐ No

17. If yes, how accessible do you find the new booking system?
Please explain your answer.

Patient Participation Groups

18. Are you a member of your Patient Participation Group (PPG)?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure what it is

Comments

19. If no, why not?

Comments

20. If yes, is your Patient Participation Group effective?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

Comments

21. Does your Patient Participation Group have face to face meetings or is it online?

- ☐ Meetings ☐ Online ☐ Don't know

22. Do you think it is representative of the practice population?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

Comments

23. Are you entitled to a flu jab?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

24. If yes, have you received a reminder to have your flu jab this year?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

25. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Comments

About you – Monitoring information

You do not need to answer any of the following questions, but it helps us if you do.

23. Please tell us the first half of your postcode:

24. Please tell us your age: ☐ 0-18 ☐ 19-35 ☐ 36-50

☐ 51-65 ☐ 66-75 ☐ 76+

25. How would you describe your gender?

26. How would you describe your ethnicity?

27. How would you describe your sexual orientation?

28. How would you describe your religious beliefs?

29. How did you hear about this survey?

30. Are you happy for us to use your comments anonymously within our report?

31. Would you like to be kept informed about Healthwatch York news and activities through our quarterly magazine? If yes, please leave your preferred contact details – either email or postal address:

Please return this survey to

Healthwatch York (Unity)
Freepost RTEG-BLES-RRYJ
15 Priory Street
York
YO1 6ET

Thank you!

Acknowledgements

Thanks to our student volunteer, who first brought this issue to our attention. We hope through working with Unity Health these concerns are being addressed.

Thanks to Millie, YUSU President, for spending time gathering the views and concerns of University of York students, and sharing them with us.

Thanks also to the members of Unity Health's Patient Participation Group for spending time with us, feeding back on our draft report.

Finally, our thanks to Unity Health, and especially Practice Manager Louise Johnston. We know how challenging it can be for providers when we highlight concerns with them. You all positively embraced this as a chance to learn more about what does and does not work for your patients. Through your support, we reached more people than any of our surveys has before. We know general practice has to change to deal with the demands it is facing. We appreciate the challenges you are dealing with to make sure your services remain viable and accessible to those who most need them. We hope this report helps you continue to improve your booking systems and keep meeting that need. It has been a pleasure working with you, and we look forward to doing so again.

Contact us:

Post: Freepost RTEG-BLES-RRYJ
Healthwatch York
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York CVS

Healthwatch York is a project at York CVS. York CVS works with voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations in York. York CVS aims to help these groups do their best for their communities, and people who take part in their activities or use their services.

This report

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