



Mystery Shopping - Pharmacy Project

Between November 2015 and January 2016 Healthwatch Northumberland's young volunteers participated in some 'mystery shopping' activities to gain an overall snapshot of young people's experiences of pharmacies across Northumberland, by telephone and in person.

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Introduction

More and more patients are encouraged to “Think Pharmacy First”. This involves seeking advice/support from a local pharmacist for a range of common health concerns and making better use of the existing services offered here. For this to be successful, it is important that these services are promoted effectively and that people’s experiences of this health service are positive.

This project was developed in response to Healthwatch Northumberland’s “Young People’s Health Survey” report which explored how 200+ young people feel about the health services, support and information available to them in Northumberland. This piece of online consultation work identified that young people do not know what pharmacists are qualified to help with and are unaware about the full range of services offered in pharmacies. However, a high proportion of young people said they *would* use pharmacies for a range of health-related services. In addition, young people raised concerns about confidentiality (i.e. being overheard by other customers when speaking to staff) and were unaware that they could speak to a pharmacist in private.

Healthwatch Northumberland decided to explore these findings in more detail, with the help of some young volunteers and support from Public Health (Northumberland County Council). Mystery shopping is one of many methods used to gather feedback about health and social care services and can be useful in terms of exploring a service’s strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, through ‘expression of interest’ forms returned by prospective young volunteers, it was identified that mystery shopping is an appealing activity which they were keen to get involved with.

Aims of the project

The aim of this project was to build upon the findings of the “Young People’s Health Survey” by obtaining an overall snapshot of young people’s experiences of pharmacies across Northumberland through mystery shopping activities as well as identifying examples of good and poor practice.

Method

Project Development

Initial enquiries were made to assess the current provision of services within pharmacies across Northumberland. With help from Public Health, the Local Pharmaceutical Committee and Northumberland Sexual Health Service, Healthwatch Northumberland collated information about the 75 community pharmacies in Northumberland to identify which ones:

- are C-Card outlets for registration and reissuing (6) or for re-issuing only (3)
- offer free Emergency Hormonal Contraception (EHC) (69)
- are Healthy Living Pharmacy (HLP) accredited (30)

Public Health were key partners for this project as they currently commission some of the services delivered in pharmacies (e.g. Emergency Hormonal Contraception and C-Card) and also manage the Healthy Living Pharmacy scheme. We worked with them to develop the project brief and materials so that it would be a mutually beneficial piece of work.

Relevant leads at NHS England and the Local Pharmaceutical Committee were informed about the project in advance to promote transparency; however, this was done in such a way which would not invalidate the project (e.g. by not specifying the scenarios to be used or timeframe).

Volunteer Recruitment and Training

Our existing young volunteers (including those from the Children and Young People's Reference Group) and our Young Supporters were invited to participate in the project. High schools and youth groups from across the county were also contacted and given the opportunity to get involved.

Before carrying out the mystery shopping activities, young volunteers were required to attend a comprehensive training session. In total, 37 young volunteers attended one of several training sessions which were arranged across the county in locations to suit interest demands (Blyth, Alnwick, Widdrington, Prudhoe and Hexham). The training sessions were designed to equip young people 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 then had the opportunity to go through the questionnaires, practice completing them and ask any questions. Following this, volunteers could decide whether they wished to take part in the project or not.

Mystery Shopping Activities:

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

Telephone Calls

There were 5 possible scenarios that could have been allocated to the young mystery shoppers:

1. The C-Card scheme - Re-issuing
2. The C-Card scheme - Registration
3. Emergency hormonal contraception
4. The use of a private consultation room (e.g. to discuss medication, being more healthy or a health concern)
5. Health improvement advice (e.g. for stopping smoking, feeling stressed, managing your weight better or drugs and alcohol)

The young volunteers were given scenario cards which acted as guidance for the calls (e.g. you have just moved to the area and would like to know if you can use your C-Card here). They were also provided with some information about each of the services for their own knowledge.

Visits

The visits involved looking out for certain information (posters, leaflets, signs etc), making a small purchase (the cost of which was reimbursed) and taking in general appearance and feel of the pharmacy. Young volunteers were advised to act as a typical customer and were not required to request any information whilst in the pharmacy.

Pharmacy Allocation

Due to some young people deciding they no longer wished to participate in the project, 24 out of the 37 young people who attended the training session went on to be allocated mystery shopping activities (equating to a 35% drop out rate).

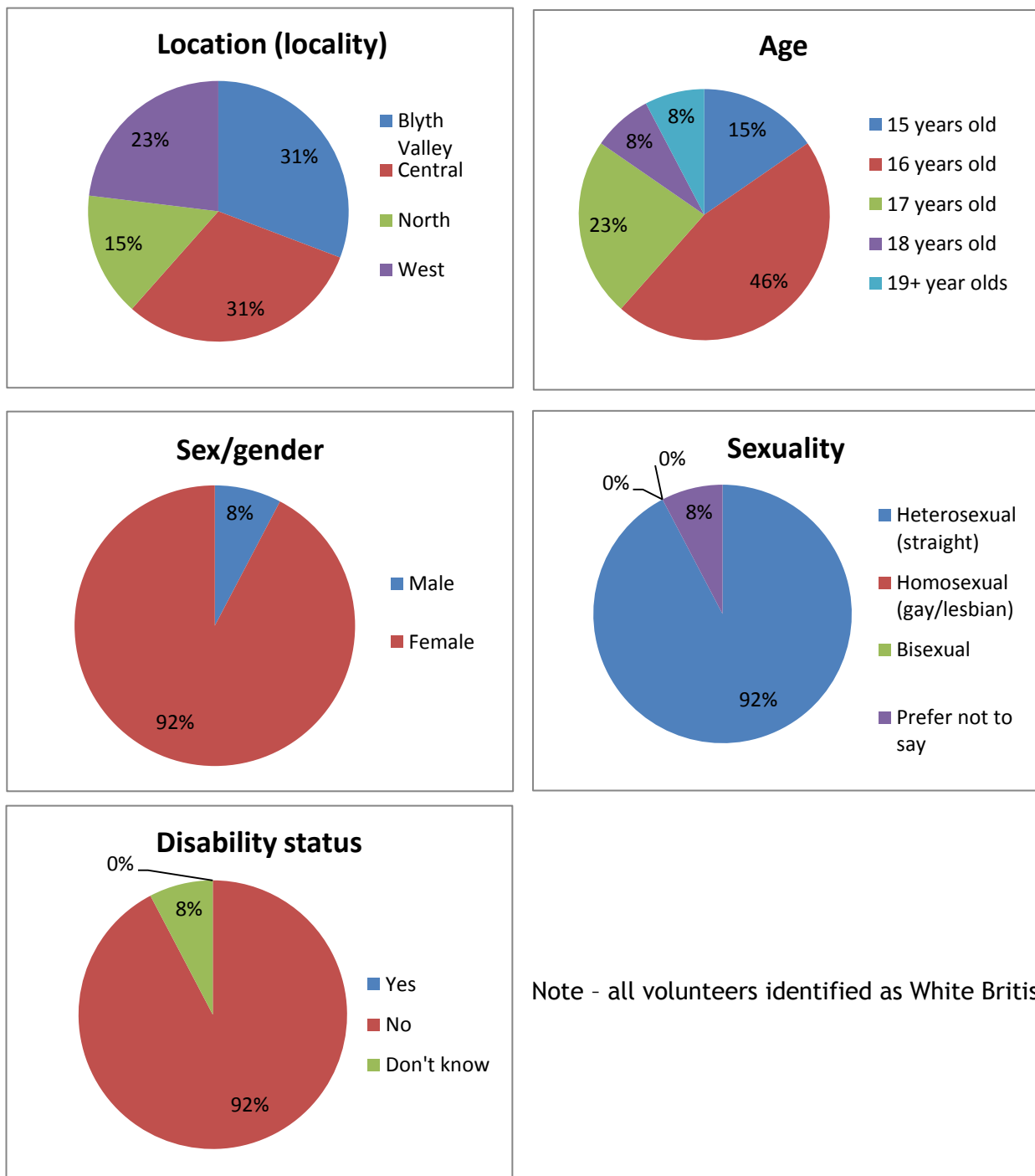
The telephone calls were randomly allocated to the young people (unless they indicated that they did not feel comfortable with certain scenarios). With regards to the visits, although we aimed to maximise geographical coverage, the young people were allocated pharmacies in their local area for ease of accessibility. The number of calls and visits allocated to each volunteer thus varied due to their location and the number of other volunteers in that area.

Questionnaire Return and Demographic Information

Following completion of the above activities, the mystery shoppers completed questionnaires detailing the quality of their experience with the pharmacy (over the phone/in person) and returned them using freepost envelopes. Each volunteer also completed a questionnaire to obtain some basic demographic information. Any travel expenses (for training and visits), purchases (up to value of £2) and phone call costs were reimbursed.

Unfortunately, the initial deadline for questionnaire returns (mid-December) was not met by several young people, many of whom (a further 11) chose to discontinue participation; some activities were therefore reallocated to other willing volunteers resulting in further delays. For this reason, the mystery shopping activities were carried out over a longer period (between November 2015 and January 2016) by a total of 13 young volunteers.

Demographic information about the young volunteers is presented below:



Note - all volunteers identified as White British.

After completing the mystery shopping activities, volunteers were sent a certificate of participation, a thank you letter and an evaluation form. The evaluation form feedback is presented in Appendix 1.

Out of the 37 young people who attended the training, 13 went on to fully participate in the project and completed either some telephone calls, visits or both - this represents a retention rate of 35%.

We identified an issue associated with recruiting young volunteers from some schools and youth groups in that it seemed some young people had been strongly encouraged/coerced into participating in the project rather than it being promoted as an entirely voluntary opportunity, thus some young people were less enthusiastic than others. Other reasons for drop-outs mainly related to the young people's additional commitments (e.g. school work, part-time employment) or temporary ill health.

Whilst the preparation for and delivery of several training sessions was quite resource intensive (in terms of time, materials and travel etc), it was important the young people had a clear understanding of the mystery shopping process and what was expected of them, from which they could then decide whether this matched their expectations of the project and subsequently if they wished to continue.

Findings

Findings - Telephone Calls

A total of 67 calls were made by 11 young mystery shoppers. Of these:

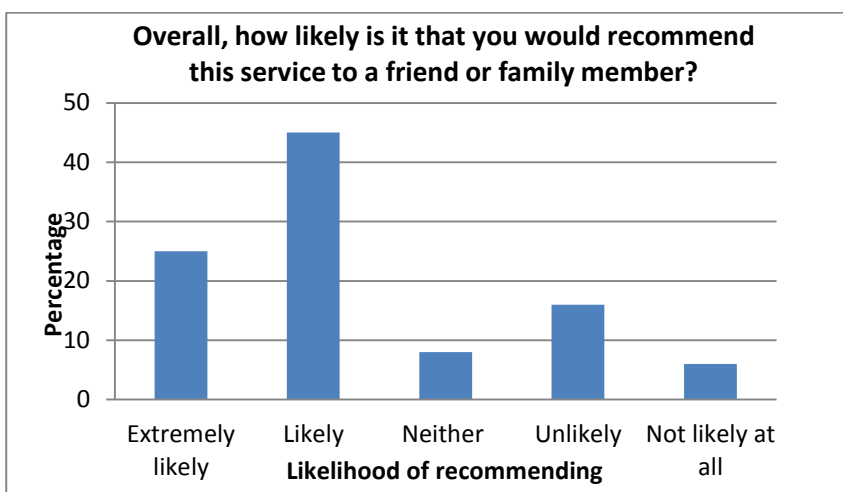
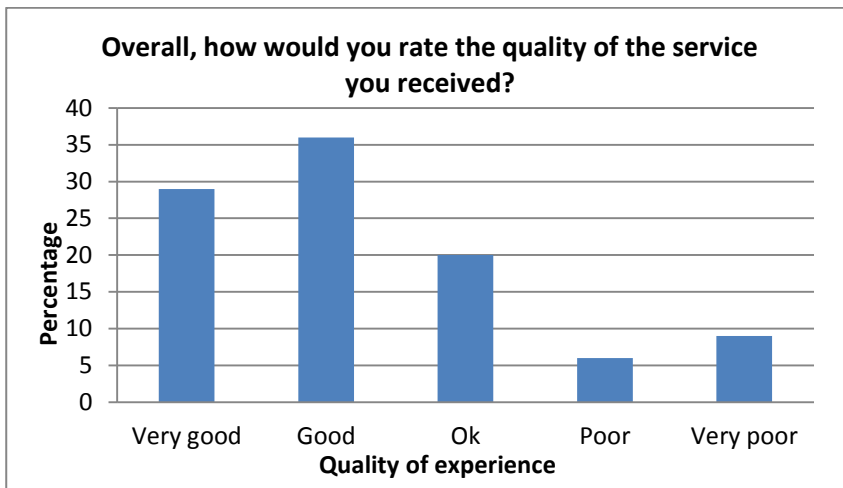
- 14 calls were to pharmacies in North Northumberland, 14 were in West Northumberland, 22 were in Central Northumberland and 17 were in Blyth Valley.
- 26 had the Healthy Living Pharmacy accreditation, 62 offered free Emergency Hormonal Contraception and 8 offered the C-Card scheme (5 did registration and reissuing and 3 just did re-issuing).

The following scenarios were mystery shopped:

- The C-Card scheme
 - Re-issuing (x 13)
 - Registration (x 15)
- Emergency contraception (x 13)
- The use of a private consultation room (to discuss...) (x12)
 - Medication (x 1) / Being more healthy (x 6) / A health concern (x 5)
- Health improvement advice (x14)
 - Stopping smoking (x 10) / Feeling stressed (x 2) / Managing your weight better (x 2) / Drugs and alcohol (x 0)

Overall Experience:

- The ratings of the overall mystery shopping telephone experience were quite mixed. 29% of the volunteers rated their telephone experience as “very good” and 36% rated it as “good”. In contrast, 20% rated their experience as “ok”, 6% as “poor” and 9% as “very poor”.
- A quarter of the mystery shoppers said it was “likely” (25%) that they would recommend the pharmacy to a friend or family member based on that visit and 45% said it would be “extremely likely”. In contrast, 7% of mystery shoppers said it was neither likely nor unlikely that they would recommend the service, 16% said it would be “unlikely” and 6% said it would be “not likely at all”.



Pharmacy Welcome

- 84% of calls were answered first time.
- The average time for waiting for the call to be answered was 32 seconds, but this ranged from a couple of seconds to approximately 2 minutes.
- 94% of mystery shoppers felt they were greeted politely

Dealing with the Enquiry

The quality of the mystery shoppers' experience was not consistently positive:

- During less than half of the calls (43%), the member of staff summarised back their understanding of the situation/query to the mystery shopper.
- Just over a quarter of the mystery shoppers (27%) said they were asked questions to clarify why they were calling. When questions were asked, they were typically used to assess the suitability of that service for the young person and to determine whether another service may be more appropriate (e.g. *how long ago was it since she had unprotected sex, how long have you smoked for, how old are you?*).
- When asked whether they felt their query was handled quickly and efficiently, 66% answered "yes, absolutely", 25% said "somewhat" and 7% said "no, not at all".
- When asked whether they felt that the response they received was clear and understandable, 82% said "yes, absolutely", 11% said "somewhat" and 8% said "no, not at all".
- When asked whether they felt that their query was fully answered, 60% said "yes, absolutely", 26% said "somewhat" and 14% said "no, not at all".

- During 57% of the calls the member of staff checked whether the mystery shopper was happy with the information provided.

Query Responses

The mystery shoppers were asked to note down the member of staff's response to their query, including whether they were signposted to other health services and given their contact details. Responses to each scenario are discussed separately below based on the information recalled/recorded by the young volunteers.

1.) C-Card Scenarios

a.) Registration

Whilst none of the pharmacies that were mystery shopped actually did C-Card registration, there was a clear lack of consistency with regards to how these enquiries were handled. For many of these enquiries (9/15), the young person was signposted to another other services such as their GP, Blyth Sexual Health Clinic, Northumbria Sexual Health Service (01670 515151), their school or another pharmacy. However, others were just told they do not offer that service and/or gave the impression they were unaware of the scheme. The young people thus had mixed feelings about their experiences with regards to this scenario:

- *I felt she should have known whether they do the C-Card without having to ask.*
- *Very abrupt - all she said was "no we don't do them here anymore, bye". Rude!*
- *She didn't re-direct me ... if this was urgent, I would be stuck and not know what to do.*
- *She apologised that they couldn't help but said she'd try find out who does them in Blyth.*
- *Said they don't think they do it*
- *The member of staff did not know if they still had C-Cards and so went to ask. The pharmacy did not. The member of staff did not direct me to where I could get one.*
- *He said that you could not sign up for a c-card at this pharmacy and asked if I would like him to find out where the nearest place was where I could. He then directed me to call 'Northumbria' and they would be able to help (515151).*
- *She said that they didn't take part in this scheme any more but she recommended speaking to school or going to the GP.*
- *Seems like a running theme for Boots to be rather abrupt and do not recommend other services.*

b.) Re-issuing

Similar findings were obtained for the "re-issuing" scenario. Only 2 of the pharmacies called did C-Card re-issuing (i.e. dispensing condoms); one said that the young person could come in at any time to use their C-Card whereas the other one did not have any in stock (though they did signpost the young person to their GP). Approximately half of the pharmacies (7/13) referred the young person to an alternative service including GPs or other pharmacies:

- *As they weren't sure they went to ask the pharmacist.*
- *We don't do C-cards, it's the pharmacy next door.*
- *We don't have any at the moment, but if you go to the doctor's clinic they should do it.*

However, in some cases, the young people were left without knowing where else to go to use the C-Card:

- *Told me to look online*
- *They didn't give me any advice on other places I could access it.*
- *Not sure if the information was correct!*

Furthermore, some of the mystery shoppers who were referred to an alternative service (for both the registration and reissuing scenario) questioned the accuracy of information provided. They commented that the pharmacy's "signposting" attempts often seemed more like suggestions of somewhere which *might* offer the service, rather than places that definitely do the scheme (e.g. "*she spoke to a colleague who said Asda might do it but not definitive answer*", "*the doctor's clinic should do it*"). Reflecting this, some mystery shoppers felt that some members of staff did not have confidence in their response to their query or had to ask another member of staff for more information, which meant they were waiting a while on the phone for a while for information.

2.) Emergency Hormonal Contraception (EHC) Scenario

Again, for this scenario the mystery shoppers reported mixed experiences in terms of the quality of responses from staff and how they felt their query was handled:

- *The woman spoke fast and didn't give me any places to go, just ideas. I didn't like being hung up on.*
- *Lady was unsure so asked 2 other workers there before she gave me an answer.*
- *He told me 'my friends' options.*
- *She was very patient...and was friendly and professional*
- *She was very good and answered my query fully. I was impressed with how she handled the call and she put me at ease.*
- *She offered good information about what the service is and what I would have to do.*
- *I thought she was very patient and professional and even went to check that they had some of the medication in stock.*

Whilst 11 of the 13 pharmacies mystery shopped for this scenario are signed up to offer free emergency hormonal contraception, the immediate availability of this service seemed to vary between pharmacies. However, in most cases, if they were unable to offer it, the young person was signposted to another suitable service:

- *Said there was no pharmacist available qualified to give her [friend] contraception under a free scheme. However, they explained how much it would cost and told me where I could get it for free - was referred to a different pharmacy.*
- *She was very helpful and offered me the times and dates for the next couple of days the pharmacist was in, which was very kind.*
- *She was extremely helpful. She told me what getting contraception involved and was patient. She double checked the days the pharmacist was in for me and gave me a list of other pharmacies that might do it.*
- *Don't do the morning after pill but "down the road" do.*
- *We don't have any in, we'd have to order some so they'd be here about half 3 today.*

Interestingly, only one of the mystery shoppers commented on the cost of EHC and none of them recorded anything about being offered free chlamydia screening.

With regards to signposting, of the 13 pharmacies called, 9 directed the young person to alternative services including GPs, sexual health clinics and other pharmacies. Please note that many of these pharmacies did offer the service themselves but suggested other places in addition; this increase in signposting compared to the other scenarios could perhaps be attributed towards the seriousness/greater level of urgency associated with this type of query. It is also noteworthy, however, that no pharmacy offered to call an alternative service to check the availability of EHC in advance before directing the young person to them.

3.) Health Improvement Scenario

These scenarios involved asking for some health improvement advice relating to weight management, smoking cessation or feeling stressed. Whilst we'd expect that pharmacies with Healthy Living Pharmacy (HLP) status would offer more thorough advice and support, the quality of responses from all pharmacies was very mixed.

For this scenario, 8 out of 14 pharmacies contacted signposted the young person to other services, including GPs (x5), Northumberland's Stop Smoking Service (x2) and another pharmacy (x1).

a.) Weight management

- One mystery shopper was given advice over the phone but said it was *"very vague - count calories, balanced diet, 5 a day"*.
- Another was told that they *"didn't do any services which would help with this matter"* but *"directed me to another service"* (GP). [HLP accredited].

b.) Smoking cessation

Even though many pharmacies said they could not offer the young person a smoking cessation service, the mystery shoppers reported some positive responses to this query:

- *When asked whether they give advice on stopping smoking, she gave me the information on the service they do, what times would be best to come in and that they have a private room. She gave me lots of information.*
- *They gave me the information about the service and what it includes.*
- *Advised about products sold in the shop*
- *Advised me to purchase patches*
- *Told to visit the store and talk about my father's options - e-cigs, patches etc.*
- *Referred to pharmacist, offered counselling service and offered products over the counter.*
- *Gave me number to call (Northumberland Stop Smoking Service).*
- *She sounded well-informed, she was knowledgeable of the service*
- *Although she said she couldn't offer the services, she did offer to give me advice on the products [HLP accredited].*

However, some responses were disappointing:

- *Didn't offer any information about the service or what it includes.*
- *We don't have the services any more. The woman doesn't come so visit your doctor.*
- *When asked if they offer any advice and services for stopping smoking they said they do not offer this service [HLP accredited]. She did give me a number and address to the nearest pharmacy though.*
- *Although she gave me all the information and was friendly, she didn't say any greeting to make me feel comfortable to start talking.*
- *I felt they could have given me more information, especially when I mentioned it was my first time asking about this service.*

c.) Feeling stressed

- Both of the young people who opted to ask about 'feeling stressed' were directed towards their GP for support.

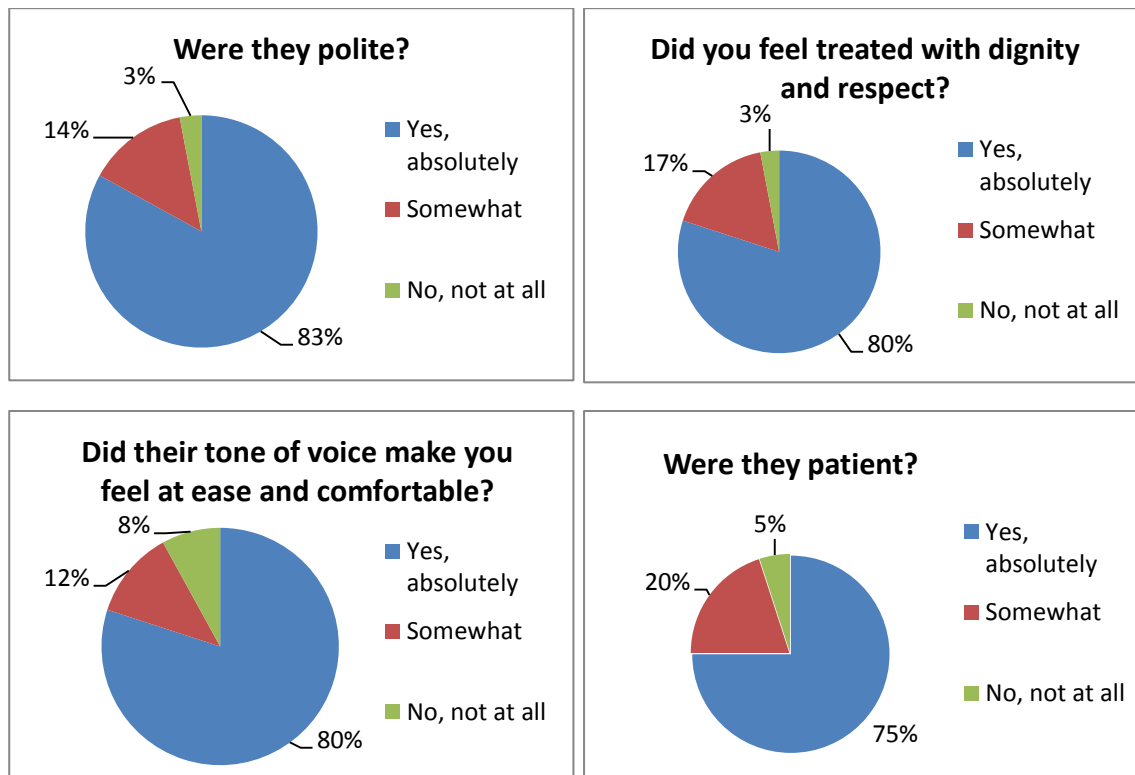
4.) Private Consultation Room Scenario

For this scenario, 7 of the 12 pharmacies explicitly mentioned that they have a private room available that the young person could use to discuss their concerns (e.g. *they answered my question straight away by saying that they have a private consultation room*).

Others were told that they don't offer the service they mentioned (e.g. smoking cessation advice) and therefore did not offer the use of the private room; however, 4 calls did involve signposting to other services including a nearby walk-in centre, GP or another pharmacy. Additionally some responses were dependent on whether the mystery shopper was a patient of theirs or not. For example, some said they needed to be registered with the pharmacy before getting a patient assessment or that they "couldn't give me any stop smoking advice if I wasn't a patient of theirs". Whilst this was not anticipated in advance, fortunately the training session covered 'exit strategies' which the young volunteers could adopt.

Staff Skills and Attitudes

- When asked about staff skills and attitudes, the majority of young people said the staff were patient and polite. Likewise most young people felt like they were treated with dignity and respect on the phone and that the staff member's tone of voice made them feel at ease and comfortable - see graphs below.



Any other comments

Lastly, young people were given the opportunity to share any other comments about their experience at the pharmacy. Positive comments tended to relate to how the member of staff handled the call and made the young person feel as well as dealing with their query efficiently:

- She was friendly and patient while I tried to explain what I wanted.
- They were very polite and quick.
- They gave me the information about the service and what it includes.
- She gave me lots of information
- She was extremely helpful. They spoke slowly and calmly. Were really nice about it. Passed me on to the pharmacist
- She apologised that they couldn't help but said she'd try find out who does them in Blyth. She was very polite and lovely. Would definitely recommend this service to anyone.
- They were very professional and answered my question straight away.
- She offered good information about what the service is and what I would have to do.
- She sounded well-informed, she was knowledgeable of the service

- *She was very good and answered my query fully.*
- *I was impressed with how she handled the call and she put me at ease.*

Negative comments tended to relate to a lack of information provision, poor staff knowledge/confidence and unpleasant staff attitudes:

- *They didn't give me any advice on other places I could access it.*
- *She didn't re-direct me to the place I would of needed to go or if this was urgent, I would be stuck and not know what to do.*
- *The woman spoke fast and didn't give me any places to go, just ideas.*
- *Very abrupt tone of voice.*
- *Not confident*
- *The call handler did not have the information*
- *Did not put me on hold so I could hear another conversation about morphine tablets*
- *The phone call was quick but not sure if the information was correct!*
- *Didn't offer any information about the service or what it includes.*
- *Didn't really give any relevant info.*
- *Didn't tell me where, just made a suggestion to try.*
- *They didn't give details*
- *Just told me to go online.*
- *I didn't like being hung up on.*
- *It was liked they were rushed.*
- *Took about 5 minutes to get further information.*
- *The woman spoke fast and wanted me off the phone.*
- *He was shaky and wasn't sure*
- *Blunt*

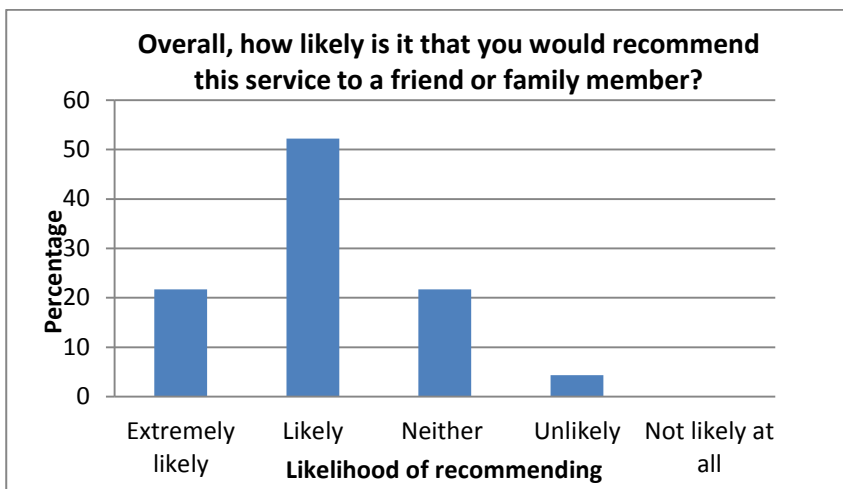
Findings - The Visits

A total of 23 visits were carried out by 11 young mystery shoppers. Of these:

- 3 visits took place in North Northumberland, 6 were in West Northumberland, 8 were in Central Northumberland and 6 were in Blyth Valley.
- 9 pharmacies had the Healthy Living Pharmacy accreditation, 21 offered free Emergency Hormonal Contraception and only 1 offered the C-Card scheme (registration and re-issuing).

Overall Experience:

- Overall, the mystery shoppers reported that the visits to pharmacies were fairly positive with just over a quarter of visits rated as “very good” (26%) and more than half of them rated as “good” (52%). Whilst none were rated as “poor” or “very poor”, approximately one in 5 visits (22%) were described as “ok”.
- Similarly, more than half of the mystery shoppers said it was “likely” (52%%) that they would recommend the pharmacy to a friend or family member based on that visit, and 22% said it would be “extremely likely”. In contrast, 22% of mystery shoppers said it was neither likely nor unlikely that they would recommend the service, and 4% said it would be unlikely. No mystery shoppers said it would be “not likely at all”.



Pharmacy Welcome and Appearance

- 56% of mystery shoppers were greeted politely
- 95% felt the overall appearance of the store was clean and tidy
- 78% felt the overall appearance of the store was welcoming to young people

Signage and Information

We found evidence to suggest that some young people struggled with this aspect of the visit in terms of the breadth of the brief/amount of things they were asked to look for. This may have impacted upon the accuracy of this section of the questionnaire. We identified discrepancies between services offered and advertised, for example, some young people noted that pharmacies without the Healthy Living Pharmacy accreditation displayed the sticker/certificate, and vice versa. Some pharmacies were thus revisited by staff (and volunteers). These second visits highlighted that some information had been inaccurately recorded and demonstrated how difficult it was to look for different information posters/leaflets etc and to then accurately recall what was observed, particularly in smaller pharmacies and those with fewer customers. Some mystery shoppers raised concerns about showing giveaway signs and acting suspiciously/not like a typical customer. This is demonstrated by anecdotal evidence, evaluation form comments and comments left on the questionnaire by young people:

- *When I entered the pharmacy it was quite small and there wasn't a lot of room to move around unnoticed.*
- *The information didn't seem to be obvious on the shop floor...I couldn't notice them without raising suspicion*

- *There seemed to be a small waiting area which might have had some leaflets but it didn't seem to be accessible to everyone.*
- *Some posters were displayed to the side of the counter but were obscured by a customer waiting*
- *The information was scattered around and it was difficult to locate certain posters*
- *There was a chair in front of the leaflet stand so not all of them were visible*
- *You feel watched when you read it*
- *[Pharmacy name] had loads of different things all over...there's lots of little stickers, one of them could maybe be that?*
- *Additionally, some questions were left blank/with question marks, with comments like "I didn't see any", "I think it looked like this" and "I didn't notice either".*
- *In some cases I did feel under pressure to find a lot of information (visit). Also some small environments meant it wasn't easy to look for the signs without being noticed. In some cases I felt I was being obvious when trying to look out for things and there was quite a lot to look for.*

As a result, findings from questions about specific pieces of information have been excluded from this report due to concerns over accuracy. Responses to more general questions have been included though and are as follows:

- 96% said the pharmacy was easy to find and recognise
- All of the mystery shoppers stated that the opening hours were clearly displayed
- 73% of the mystery shoppers said that overall the information was "young people friendly". Reasons for this included:
 - *The range of leaflets enables young people to access information themselves without embarrassment of asking.*
 - *Information was discreet*
 - *Easy to read and appeals to our age group*
 - *Easy to understand*
 - *Not full of jargon words*

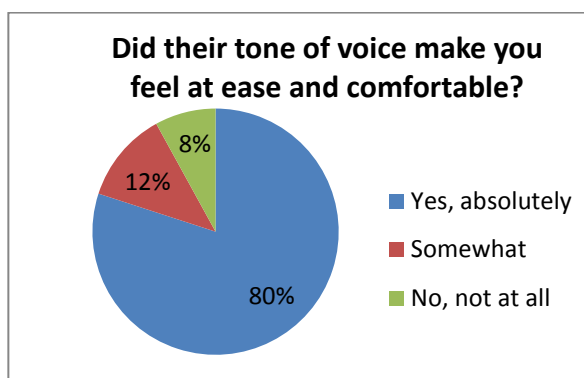
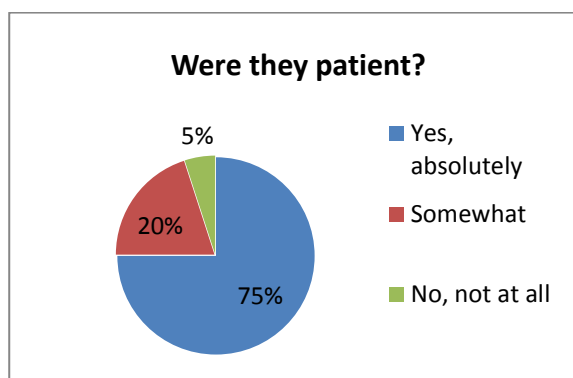
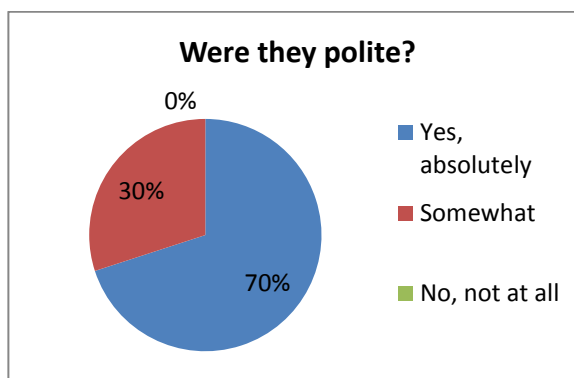
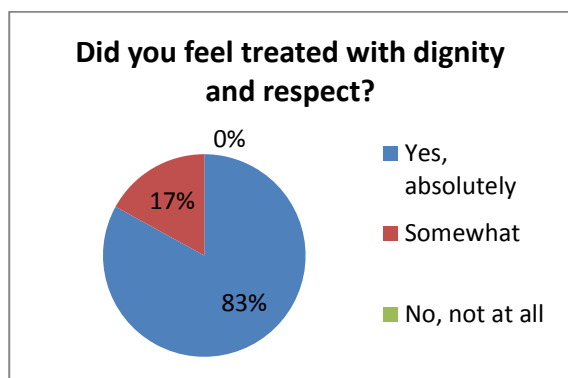
Reasons for why they believed information was not young people friendly included:

- *The information was scattered around.*
- *Was close to all the adults, you feel watched when you read it*
- *All of the posters and leaflets were very plain and has lots of writing on. This makes it look less appealing for young people.*
- *Mainly aimed at older people*
- *Limited posters. Seemed to be a faded pregnancy sticker and also a smoking sticker but they weren't prominent and were old.*
- 43% of the mystery shoppers felt there was a good range of leaflets available without request. However, only 26% of the mystery shoppers said this was easy to find and only 35% of them felt the information was young people friendly.

Making a Purchase/Staff Skills and Attitudes

- Approximately half of the mystery shoppers (48%) said they were asked if they needed any help compared to 52% who reported that other people were asked if they needed help.
- While at the counter, 91% of the mystery shoppers felt that their conversation could be easily overheard.
- Approximately half (52%) of the mystery shoppers were asked if there was anything (else) they could help with/if they found everything you were looking for.
- When asked about staff skills and attitudes while they made a purchase, the majority of young people said the staff were patient and polite. Likewise most young people felt like they were

treated with dignity and respect and that the staff member's tone of voice made them feel at ease and comfortable - see graphs below.



Any other comments

Young people were given the opportunity to share any other comments about their experience at the pharmacy. These comments varied in their positivity but tended to focus on the helpfulness, efficiency and friendliness of staff, store cleanliness and information provision and positioning:

Examples of positive comments include:

- *I was very impressed with the layout and cleanliness of the pharmacy.*
- *Young staff (female) which make me feel more comfortable.*
- *They asked me if I needed anything else from the shop*
- *On entering the shop, I was greeted and asked if I needed any help*
- *The staff were pleasant and helpful.*
- *Lots of information placed around the store.*
- *The member of staff serving me was pleasant.*
- *The staff were very friendly and were willing to have a conversation with you, even when people were behind me.*
- *I was very impressed with the layout and cleanliness of the pharmacy.*
- *The store had quite a lot to attract customers*

Examples of negative comments include:

- *I was ignored as they continued what they were doing.*
- *There was a chair in front of the leaflet stand so not all of them were visible.*
- *Not very private as consultation room is right next to the till.*
- *Mainly aimed at older people.*
- *There was a large queue and only one member of staff serving making the wait long*
- *There is a private room but not obvious to people who aren't familiar with the store.*
- *There seemed to be a small waiting area which might have held some leaflets but didn't seem to be accessible to everyone unless you had an appointment with the pharmacist.*

- Some posters were displayed to the side of the counter but were obscured by customers waiting.
- The staff I spoke to seemed to be in a rush.
- The woman who was meant to serve me left so I had to wait, the next woman was nice though
- It was quite small and there wasn't a lot of room to move around unnoticed.
- A little overpriced.
- Seems like more of a shop than a pharmacy.

Limitations and Lessons Learnt

Overall, this project has been valuable in that it has led to some interesting findings and the young volunteers found it satisfying to be able to help identify where services could be improved for other young people. However, we have identified some limitations, which together with evaluation feedback (Appendix 1), will be considered when planning future work:

- Whilst mystery shopping was identified as a desirable activity to become involved with, there was a fairly high drop-out rate which caused subsequent delays in gathering and analysing the feedback. In future, it will be stressed even more to schools and youth groups etc that this must be clearly promoted as an *entirely* voluntary activity. During training there will also be greater emphasis on the fact that it is fine to decide to discontinue with the project if they feel the opportunity is not for them and that they should not feel obliged in any way to complete any activities they feel uncomfortable with.
- There was evidence to suggest that some of the young people struggled with the breadth of the brief for the visits. In the future, a narrower brief may help build confidence within the mystery shopping role as well as enabling information to be more accurately recalled and recorded for the entire questionnaire. Similarly, this may help the mystery shopper feel less nervous about displaying 'giveaway' signs and acting suspiciously.
- Due to the nature of the telephone scenarios and services we were interested in, they could not easily or safely be tested in person (e.g. requesting emergency contraception). It is therefore noteworthy that queries made within a pharmacy in person may have differed.
- It must be remembered that mystery shopping provides a 'snapshot' of a service and must be considered in relation to other sources of consumer feedback. Other methods of obtaining information (e.g. about posters/leaflets displayed) should be considered in the future, for example, visiting services overtly as a 'researcher volunteer'.

Conclusions

Almost a third of pharmacies in Northumberland were visited and almost 90% were telephoned for this project. We are confident this was a representative sample with regards to location, size and services offered.

Telephone Calls

Based on the information reported by the young mystery shoppers following the calls, a number of observations can be made. Firstly, the experiences of the young people were often very mixed in terms of quality. A lack of consistency has been identified with regards to staff members' accurate knowledge of the services offered *within* their pharmacy. Likewise, knowledge of other local services was not consistent across pharmacies and thus the use of *appropriate* signposting and the level of accurate information provided varied considerably.

In some cases, where young people were 'signposted' to other services, these were more like suggestions/potential places to try; the mystery shoppers therefore sometimes did not have confidence in the staff member's response. This is supported by the fact that when checked, in a few cases, young people were signposted to places which did not offer the service in question (e.g. C-Card). Further to this, young people were often signposted back to their GP which contradicts the aim of the national Think Pharmacy First campaign.

However, in most cases, the young people commented that the staff attitudes were positive and there are some clear examples of good practice from which we can learn (e.g. in terms of making the young person feel at ease, offering them lots of information and/or signposting them to another service, where appropriate).

Conclusions - Visits

Largely, young people's experiences of staff attitudes were positive, although this was not consistent. With regards to information provision, some young people felt it was not always easy to find information and sometimes it was not young people friendly. Furthermore, due to the positioning of the information, some felt it was difficult to discreetly look for certain leaflets (e.g. without moving furniture, or people!) and in some instances there was a lack of privacy (e.g. information was right by the counter or seating area). Some young volunteers also identified that there was a lack of privacy at the counter.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from both the telephone calls and visits made to pharmacies, the following recommendations are made to service providers and commissioners to improve the quality of community pharmacy services in Northumberland:

- Pharmacy staff should be aware of services offered within their pharmacy and continue to promote "Think Pharmacy First". Equally, they should be aware of other services offered locally to assist with appropriate and accurate signposting, where necessary.
- The above could also be supported by information leaflets/posters etc displayed within the pharmacy - a balance should be achieved with regards to information positioning in that it is easy to find whilst also allowing for some privacy at the same time.
- Although staff attitudes were only an issue in the minority of cases, it is still important for young people to feel at ease and respected when using their service and to be treated the same as any other customer.
- Pharmacies should make use of existing support and schemes (such as "You're Welcome") to make their service more young people friendly - this would also pose benefits to wider community.

Healthwatch Northumberland will also consider the following recommendations/actions:

- Healthwatch Northumberland will take account evaluation feedback/learning when developing future mystery shopping exercises and also consider the use of alternative methods (e.g. 'research' visits).
- Healthwatch Northumberland will share the findings of this report with the appropriate service providers and commissioners so they can better understand what services young people feel are working well, and where improvements are required. Furthermore, we will report back examples of "You Said, We Did" to the public through our Newsletters and website.

- Healthwatch Northumberland will also continue to engage with children and young people to identify ongoing and newly emerging themes with regards to health and social care services.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Evaluation Feedback

In order to learn what the young volunteers felt worked well and where improvements could be made, they were asked to complete an optional anonymous evaluation form at the end of the project. Of the 13 volunteers who completed some mystery shopping activities (telephone calls, visits or both), 8 returned the evaluation forms (62% response rate). Overall, the findings from this were very positive:

- **Activities completed?**
6 did both calls and visits, and 2 opted to do just telephone calls.
- **Following the training session you attended, do you feel you understood your role as a 'mystery shopper'?**
Overall, the mystery shoppers appeared to understand their role; 7 out of the 8 young people who returned the evaluation form answered "yes, absolutely" and 1 answered "yes, to a certain extent".
- **Did you feel comfortable in your role as a mystery shopper? If you answered "no", please explain why not?**
Again, the majority of young people who returned the evaluation form indicated that they felt comfortable in their role; 3 answered "yes, absolutely" and 5 answered "yes, to a certain extent".
- **Do you feel you had sufficient support in your role as a mystery shopper throughout the process? If not, please explain why?**
On the whole, the young people who returned the evaluation form indicated that they had received sufficient support throughout the project; 7 answered "yes, absolutely" and 1 answered "yes, to a certain extent".
- **How easy was the TELEPHONE CALL questionnaire to understand and complete? If you answered difficult, please explain why.**
With regards to how easy the telephone call questionnaire was to understand and complete, 4 described it as "very easy" and 4 described it as "quite easy".
- **How easy was the VISIT questionnaire to understand and complete? If you answered difficult, please explain why.**
With regards to how easy the visit questionnaire was to understand and complete, 4 described it as "very easy", 1 described it as "quite easy" and 1 found it "neither easy nor difficult". This question was not applicable to the other 2 respondents.
- **How easy were the scenarios to follow? If you answered difficult, please explain why.**
Largely, the young people who returned the evaluation form found the scenarios easy to follow; 4 described them as "very easy" to follow and 4 described them as "quite easy" to follow.
- **What did you enjoy about being involved in the mystery shopping project?**
Several young people commented that they enjoyed being able to make a difference and learning more about pharmacies:
 - *Shaping the way they deal with children*
 - *I think it is important so the services can improve*
 - *Feeling like I was helping to improve the customer service in pharmacies*
 - *The sense of helping young people in Northumberland*

- Helen was very helpful and remained in contact for the duration in case I had any queries - eye opening and learn about pharmacies
- It was interesting to see how people handled different things and also I liked seeing/hearing different answers and how people are
- Being part of young people's health
- It was a new experience and I learnt about requirements in health care and the approach pharmacies should take.

• **What did you not enjoy about being involved in the mystery shopping project?**

Some young people indicated they felt nervous or embarrassed at times, felt like there was too much to remember or felt bad about 'lying' to pharmacies; however, one young person was pleasantly surprised and one enjoyed all aspects of the project.

- Embarrassing scenarios
- The visit took longer due to travel
- Visiting the pharmacies because it was hard to remember what to look out for
- The visit - I was nervous for it
- I couldn't name anything!
- For some of the telephone scenarios I felt like that the person on the other end wouldn't be as polite towards the 'issues' I got given, but they were!
- Felt bad lying to pharmacists
- In some cases I did feel under pressure to find a lot of information (visit). Also some small environments meant it wasn't easy to look for the signs without being noticed. In some cases I felt I was being obvious when trying to look out for things and there was quite a lot to look for.

On a scale of 1-10, how likely is it that you would participate in other mystery shopping or volunteering projects with Healthwatch Northumberland in the future?

The majority of young people indicated they would be keen to volunteer with Healthwatch Northumberland in the future.

1 Definitely would not	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Definitely would
0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	4

• **Any other comments?**

- I really enjoyed participating and would gladly do it again
- Lovely team of people, I would love to do more with Healthwatch!