

Healthwatch Croydon GP Experience Workshop

Wednesday 5th October 2016, Community Space

On Wednesday 5th October 2016, Healthwatch Croydon hosted its Annual Event. Attended by around 100 residents, carers and professionals, this year's theme was the experience of local GP services.

At the event, we launched our report 'Our GPs - The shape of services today, and in the future' which found that while patients are broadly satisfied with customer service, there are concerns over telephone access, receptionists making 'clinical' judgements, and waits of weeks for routine appointments. Patients are less likely now to see a GP of choice, or a GP at all (the rise of the telephone triage) and a number of patients do not know who their GP is. Whether this matters to patients or not, care is becoming less personal over time.

To build further on the report's findings, we asked delegates to share their views and experiences on accessibility, customer service, and the ability to 'find the right service'.

Below we have summarised key findings - all comments may be found in Annex 1.

Table Discussions - Accessibility

Does contacting your doctor over phone or email work for you and do you get an appointment when needed?

- Getting through on the phone is problematic, with many delegates experiencing 'long waits'. Queuing systems are useful, however not all practices have them.
- The potential of online alternatives has not been fully realised, as most systems offer limited choice. Not everybody is able to use, or comfortable with technology.
- What is a reasonable wait for a routine appointment? Some felt that 3 weeks is too long, especially for 'routine monitoring' such as blood pressure tests.
- Timing is important for workers, parents and carers.
- Could more doctors be available online? Organisations in other parts of London, such as the Hurley Group, offer 'online consultations'.

Is it important that you see a specific doctor?

- Delegates expressed difficulty in seeing a GP of choice, and while it is not important for some, it is for others.
- A clinician noted that seeing a different doctor occasionally 'may be beneficial'.

How easy is it to get registered at a GP and what happens when you cannot register?

- Most delegates found it easy to register, however concerns were raised for those that could find it difficult, such as the homeless and asylum seekers.
- Registration is a two-way commitment, and practices are entitled to remove persistent non-attenders.

Table Discussions - Customer Service

What has been your experience of staff?

- Delegates felt that their experience is good overall, but communication could be improved, for example letting patients know if doctors are running late.
- Some delegates have experienced 'rude, unfriendly and fed-up' receptionists - is this linked with working conditions and morale?
- Receptionists do not always take responsibility when mistakes are made.
- The carers present felt that GPs 'do not recognise their needs'.

What role do you think receptionists should have in triage and how can patients have confidence in sharing details with receptionists or getting prescriptions renewed?

- Some delegates were 'not happy' with receptionists giving test results.
- On triage, delegates said that receptionists should have a 'very small and limited role', as they are not clinicians, and may 'make assumptions'. Some felt that receptionists are 'protecting GPs from appointments' and others felt that some questions are obtrusive and do not respect privacy.
- It was acknowledged that we may have to 'redefine roles to release clinical time', but whatever their responsibilities, receptionists should be fully trained.
- The ability to renew prescriptions online is a good development.

How easily can you get referrals to other health providers? How effective is your GP in linking up with hospitals, pharmacies and social services?

- Delegates said holistic care is important. While patients may want 'a quick fix' such as medication, longer term alternatives should not be discounted.
- In the experience of some, referrals 'can take months', especially for mental health services, and communication with hospitals and social services 'can be poor', with integration lacking.

Table Discussions - Finding the Right Service

What confidence do you have in your pharmacy or calling NHS 111, rather than seeing a GP?

- Most delegates were confident with their pharmacists, but urged closer working relationships with GPs. Those that had used NHS 111 were satisfied.

Do you get the information you need on health services to decide where to go when you have a specific condition or concern?

- It was noted that GP practices are good sources of information, through posters, leaflets and personal advice. However, we need to increase awareness of NHS 111.

What services would you like to see move away from GPs and which services should GPs take on?

- It was felt that routine health checks (for example blood pressure) could be provided at community venues such as supermarkets.