

# **GP Access Hub Appointments in Brent**

**A report on patient experience of making appointments in GP Access Hubs and knowledge of self-care and alternatives to GP appointments**



**January 2020**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Healthwatch Brent (HWB) conducted a survey in all the five GP Access Hubs in Brent to explore the main issues from a previous survey at Kingsbury and Willesden Locality GP practices, namely:

- i. patient experience of making appointments.
- ii. patient preference of health professional they wish to see and
- iii. patient knowledge of self-care and alternatives to GP appointments.
- iv. to gauge progress and help to improve the learning feedback loop between the CCG and patients.

This survey was conducted in all the 5 GP access Hubs in Brent and in the evenings and weekends time slots were covered. The survey was completed by 97 patients.

A summary of the findings in this report, are a snapshot and are as follows:

- 73% of patients interviewed were of working age.
- 36% of the appointments at the GP Access Hubs were made by telephone while 39% of appointments were made via the patients GP.
- 78% of patients found the booking process easy, whilst 17% found booking process difficult.
- 85% of appointments were provided within one week, 13% of patients had to wait over 1 week for an appointment.
- 55% of patients said they know about self-care.
- There was better awareness of what NHS 111 offers compared to the previous survey. However, 33% of patients had unclear understanding of the NHS 111 offer.
- 66% of patients were aware of pharmacy services.
- 66% of patients were aware that they were attending a GP Access Hub appointment, Surprisingly, a quarter (26%) of patients were unaware that their appointments were a GP Access Hub appointment.

As a result, HWB suggests the following recommendations for both **CCG and GP practices**:

- To raise awareness on the alternative services available to patients other than GP appointments.
- To provide patients with more detailed information on the GP Access Hub appointments.
- The need to share more information about self-care, pharmacy and 111 services, as was also shown in another HWB recent report on “*Attitudes to Self-care in Brent*”
- CCG to consider reviewing the number of GP Access Hubs or Hub appointments available in Brent as there are still patients that are waiting over a week for a GP appointment.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Healthwatch Brent thanks the GP Access Hub practice and Locality staff who provided access to their service, The Healthwatch Brent volunteers who made the survey possible, and especially to those patients who provided their responses.

This project had the support of Brent CCG and the Director at Greenbrook Healthcare.

## INTRODUCTION

Healthwatch Brent (HWB) made a public commitment to work with the Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to improve communication with patients, at the Health and Wellbeing Board in July 2018.

In March 2019, Healthwatch Brent studied patient experience of General Practice (GP) appointments in 25 practices in the Brent CCG Kingsbury and Willesden locality. 120 Brent residents from Kingsbury and Willesden Locality had taken part in that survey.

The three main issues explored then were (i) patient experience of making appointments; (ii) patient preference of health professional they wish to see and (iii) patient knowledge of self-care and alternatives to GP appointments. The reported <sup>1</sup>findings from that snapshot survey indicated that:

- over 80% of patients did see a GP within a few days or up to a week, but that there is still more work to do to reduce the number of patients who had to wait over 2 weeks for an appointment.
- There was general and widespread lack of awareness among patients about the GP Access Hub appointments and the other alternatives to GP appointments.
- 75% of patients did not know about GP Access Hub appointments, while only 3.3% of patient had either been offered these appointments or used them.

Having identified the issues detailed in the full report, Healthwatch Brent shared the report and its recommendations Brent CCG.

That report was based on one locality only and patients attending their own GP surgery were interviewed. Healthwatch Brent did not visit any of the GP Access Hubs. Therefore, HWB conducted this follow up survey in 6-12 months' time with all the GP Access Hubs in Brent to gauge progress and to determine the improvements of patient experience and their awareness of alternatives to GP appointments.

## BACKGROUND

### GP Access Hub provision

Brent has 62 GP practice locations serving a registered population of 371,405 people - growth of approximately 7.4% in the last 4 years<sup>2</sup>. The Brent Health and

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<sup>1</sup>

[https://www.healthwatchbrent.co.uk/sites/default/files/u223/gp\\_appointments\\_in\\_brent\\_march\\_2019.pdf](https://www.healthwatchbrent.co.uk/sites/default/files/u223/gp_appointments_in_brent_march_2019.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>

<http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s63473/Improving%20the%20GP%20Extended%20Access%20Offer%20in%20Brent.pdf>

Wellbeing board paper *“Improving the GP Extended Access Offer in Brent”* went on to say that “With demographic growth and local regeneration and housing projects the population needing primary care services, will continue to grow.

Extended access became a national priority in 2015 when the Prime Ministers Challenge Fund (PMCF) was put in place to improve access to general practice. This sought to provide additional hours of GP appointment time, improve patient and staff satisfaction with access to general practice, reduce demand elsewhere in the system and make use of emerging ‘at scale’ delivery models (partnership working between GP providers) to ensure extended access appointments were shared, staffed and managed.

The model delivered locally (and seen nationally) is the Hub model; these generally take two forms - ‘top up hubs’ (a practice that provides a combination of routine core services and opens in the evenings and weekends) or through ‘standalone hubs’ (designated sites) which offer additional pre-bookable GP appointments 8am- 8pm, 7 days a week

Brent had two types of extended access service: GP Access Hubs or GP Access Centre (‘walk-in service’). There were initially 9 Hubs available in Brent in 2015 that operated on different days/hours and were only open to patients whose practice is a member of the Network that runs that hub. There was no single GP Federation and these services were commissioned through 5 separate contracts, The Hubs and the GP Access Centre (walk in service) contracts expired 31st March 2018.”

The service was reviewed by the Brent CCG which resulted in the current position of shortened appointments at a smaller number of sites at times when many people need them such as after-school/early evening. There are currently 5 GP Access Hubs in Brent, (see list under Methodology on page 8).

### **The purpose of this report**

As mentioned before, in March 2019 Healthwatch Brent had conducted a survey at 20 GP practices in the Kingsbury and Willesden locality. The survey was completed by 120 patients and the report of our finding were shared with Brent CCG. This report is a follow up the previous report to include the 5 GP Access Hubs in Brent.

Harrow CCG Urgent Care Commissioning team were conducting a survey at the UCC at Northwick Park Hospital - the survey site preferred by HWB and Brent CCG Primary Care Commissioning team in order to gain insights from patients who were not attending an appointment at their GP practice. So HWB decided to re-conduct the survey in GP Access Hubs to explore the three main issues as in the earlier survey, such as patient experience of making appointments; patient preference of health professional they wish to see and patient knowledge of self-care and alternatives to GP appointments.

Previously, there was a general and widespread lack of awareness among patients about the GP Access Hub appointments that demonstrated the need for more

information to be displayed in a prominent place in GP practices and in other public places in Brent. Brent CCG responded to the report, and planned to re-circulate published materials listed below; making sure material is available in different formats and languages where a need is identified; and adherence to the requirements set out in the Accessible Information Standard (AIS) with regards to communications and materials

This will enable us to gauge progress and help to improve the learning feedback loop between the CCG and patients.

## METHODOLOGY

A short survey (Appendix 1), like that used previously, was designed to cause no disruption to service provision. HWB staff and volunteers asked patients in GP Access Hub waiting rooms to complete the questionnaire.

Also, a self-care information sheet (Appendix 2) was given to respondents after completion of the questionnaire, comprising information taken from Brent CCG website and NHSE. This required the agreement of practices to allow access, for around 1 hour<sup>3</sup>.

Some hubs were open in the evenings and weekends all time slots were covered for the following GP Access Hubs in Brent:

	Name of the Hub	Weekdays opening times	Weekend opening times
1	Willesden Centre for Health Care Hub at the Roundwood Park Medical Centre	Monday to Friday 16:00-20:00	Saturday 12:00-16:00
2	Central Middlesex Hospital Hub, Park Royal Medical Practice in CMH	Monday to Friday 16:00-20:00	Saturday 10:00-14:00
3	Kingsbury Hub at Jai Medical Centre	Monday to Friday 16:00-20:00	closed
4	Kilburn Hub at the Staverton Surgery	Monday to Friday 16:00-20:00	Saturday 10:00-14:00
5	GP Extended Access Hub in the Wembley Centre for Health & Care	Monday to Friday 08:00 - 20:00	Saturday to Sunday 08:00 - 20:00

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<sup>3</sup> Although, Healthwatch Brent has the right and duty to visit publicly funded health providers as laid out in the Health and Social Care Act 2012, services are not legally required to agree to our visit. However, service providers are expected to provide access, and previously only one Brent provider has ever denied us access. HWB is required to publicise all visits and all denied requests. All 5 GP Access Hub practices agreed to our visit.

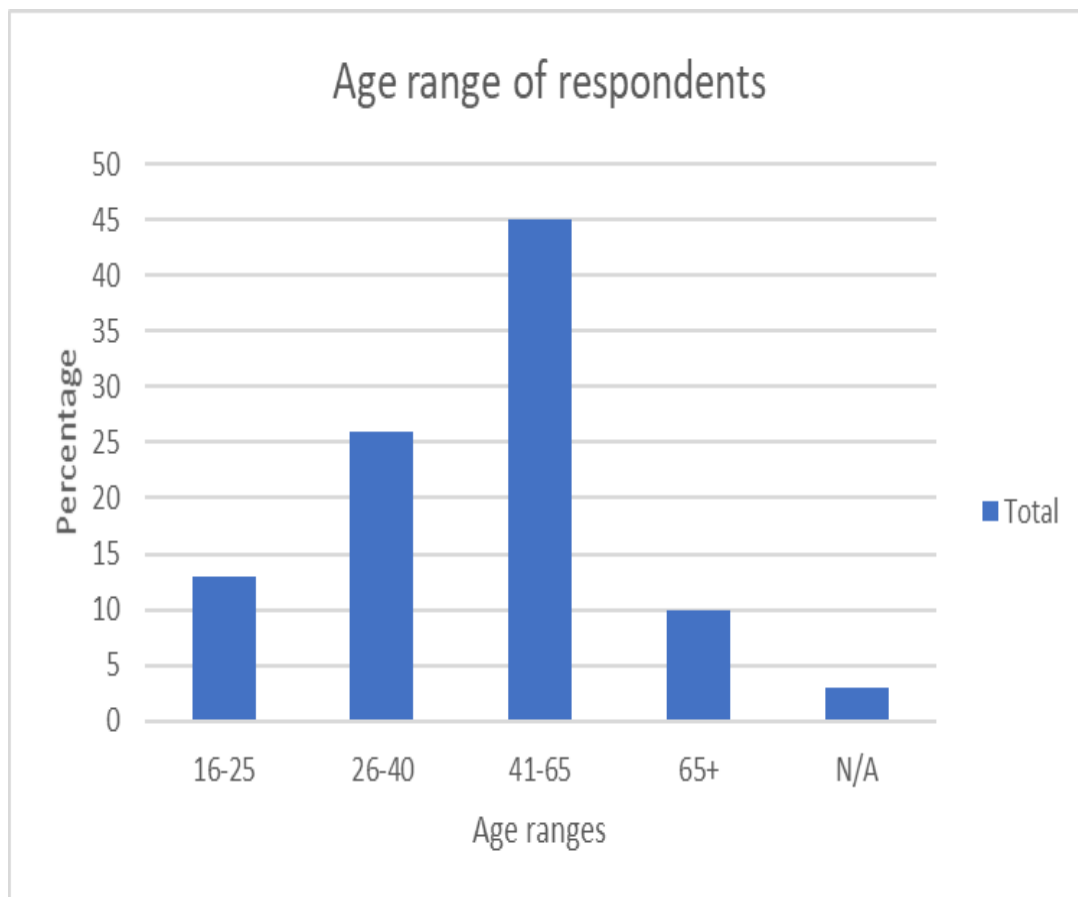


## FINDINGS

### 4.1 Age of respondents

The chart below shows the age range of the respondents to this survey.

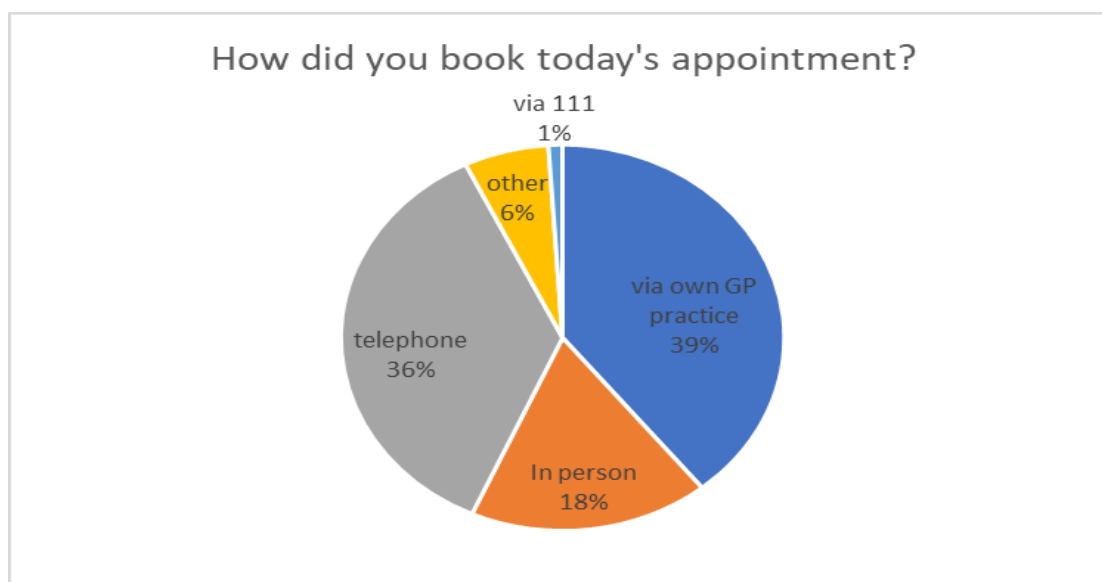
13% of patients (13 patients) were 16-25, while 27% of patients (26 patients) were 26-40 years old; 45 patients (46% of the patients) were between the ages of 41-65, and 10% of patients (10 patients) were over 65. Three patients did not answer the question.



This is the age profile of patients attending the GP Access Hubs and is similar to the findings of the previous survey conducted in March 2019. The majority of patients were working age, 26 to 65-year-old and accounted for 73% of patients. The percentage of 16-25-year-old patients were slightly higher and the over 65-year-old patients were slightly lower compared to the GP survey carried out in March.

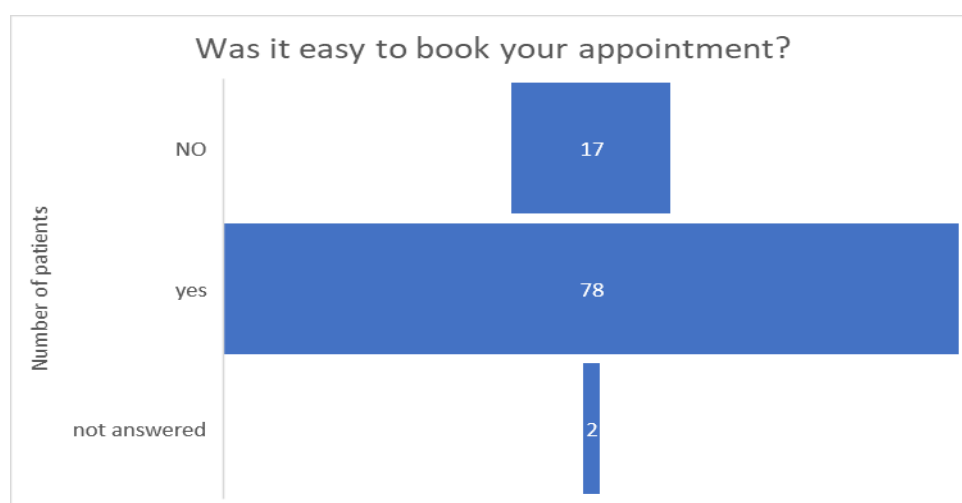
## 4.2. Patient experience of making appointments

When asked how the patients had made their appointment for the day. Most patients obtained their appointments at the GP Access Hub via telephoning their own GPs (39%) or 36% telephoned the Hubs to make an appointment. While 18% of patients made the appointment in person and only 1% was made via the NHS111 service. The others were patients brought in for treatment from the nursing homes. See the chart below.



## 4.3. Ease of making an appointment

Of the patients with a booked appointment 80% (78 patients) found it easy to book the appointment. This was mainly due the helpfulness of the staff and their requests were addressed in a speedy manner.



#### 4.4 Waiting time for appointments

The respondents were also asked how long they had to wait to get the appointment at the practice. We did not distinguish whether any difference in the waiting time depending was dependent on whom the patient was waiting to see.

The results are shown in the chart below. Most patients were able to get an appointment at the Hub within a week, 29 patients (30% of patients) were seen on the same day and 34 patients (30% of patients) had waited 1 to 2 days while 20 patients (21% of patients) waited 3-6 days for an appointment.

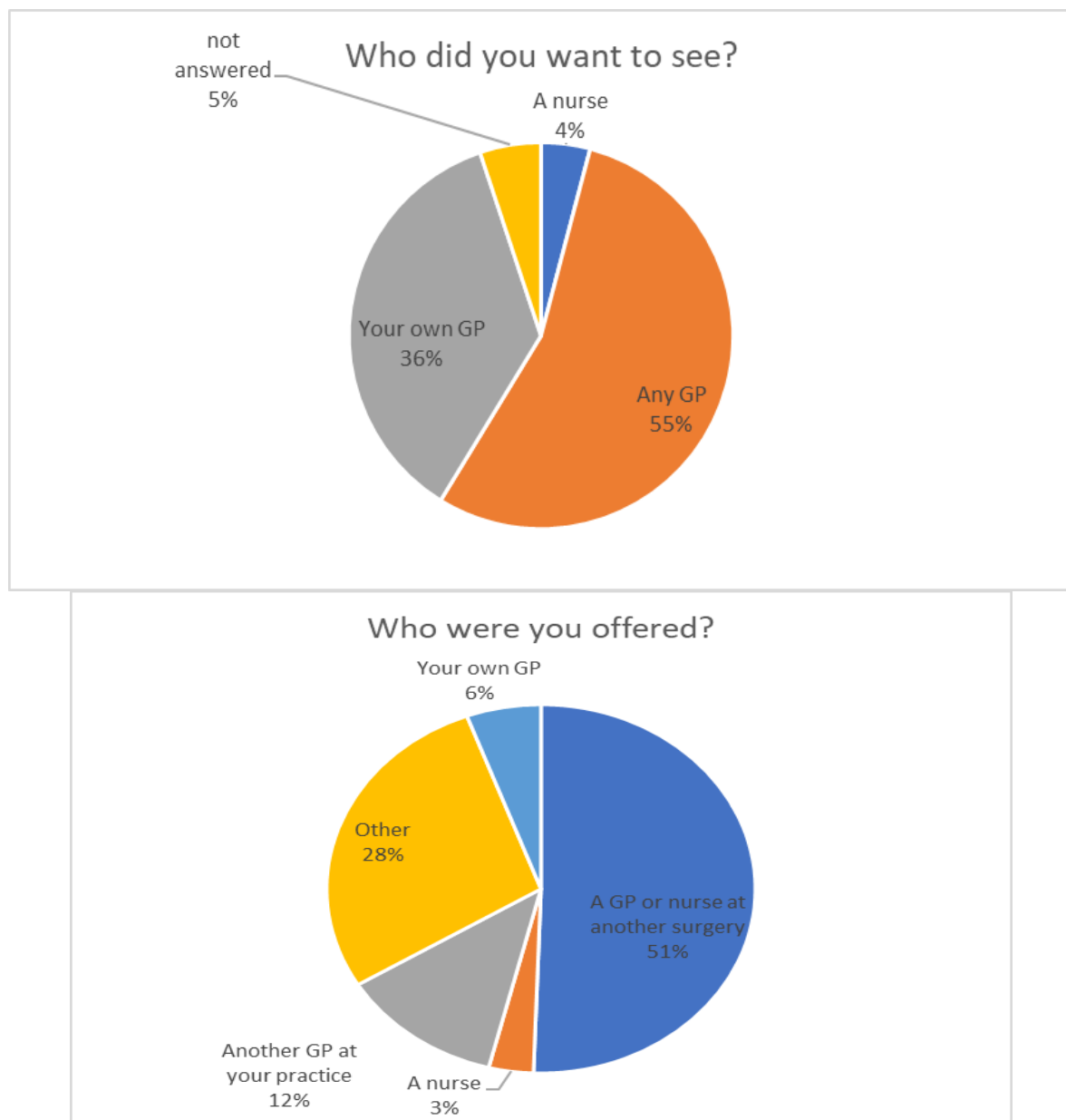
However, there were still some 13 patients that longer waits of over 1 week for an appointment, 11 patients (12% of patients) had waited 1-2 weeks and 2 patients had waited more than 2 weeks for an appointment.



#### 4.5 Patient preference of which health professional they want to see

To assess whether patients had a preference to see their own GP and whether their preference were satisfied, the patients were asked who they wanted to see, and who they were offered. If they expressed a preference they were also asked for their reason for their preference.

The charts below show the proportion of healthcare professional the patients preferred to be seen by compared to which healthcare professional was offered to them.



36% of patients had expressed a wish to see their own GPs. As with the previous survey, main reason cited by most patients that had expressed a wish to see their own GP was familiarity and continuity of care. The majority were prepared to see any GP.

Surprisingly, 6% were able to see their own GP. This feedback was from some patients who said that they were unable to see their own GP at their own practice so the GP / GP reception had made an appointment at the Hub when the GP they wished to see would be there.

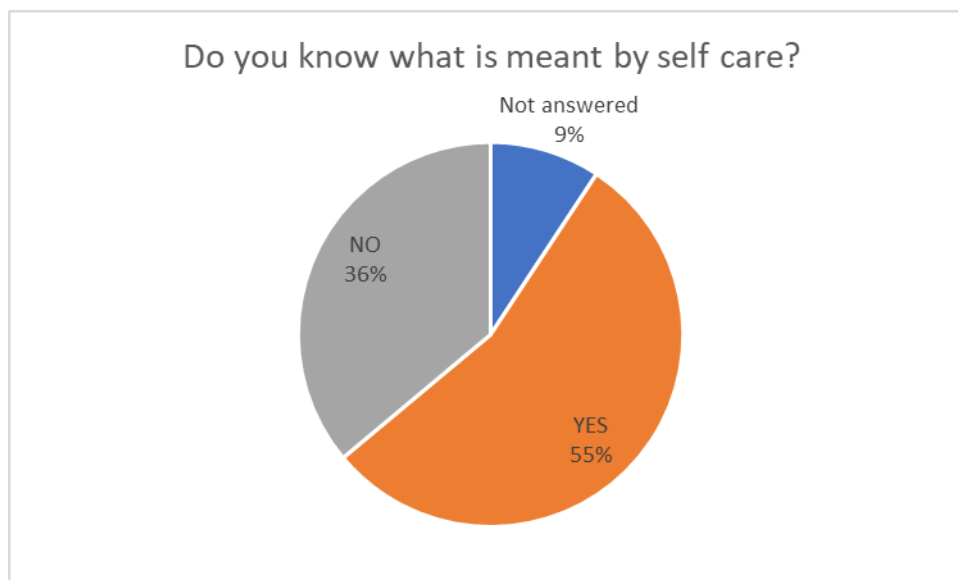
A further 12% were able to see another GP from their own practice if their practice was in the same location as a GP Access Hub.

#### 4.6 Patient knowledge of self-care and alternatives to GP appointments.

To evaluate patient's awareness of self-care and the other alternatives to accessing primary care via GPs. We asked them if they were aware of the alternatives to GP appointments and what they knew about each of them as well as whether they had used the services. The findings from the comments on each of the alternatives surveyed were as follows:

##### 4.6.1 Self-care

The graph below shows that of the 88 patients that responded to the question that asked "what is meant by Self-care. 36% of patients did not know what was meant by the term self-care, while 55% of patients said they knew what is meant by self-care.



The usual explanations given by half of the patients who said they knew what was meant by self-care were as follows:

“Looking after yourself”

“Taking care of myself”

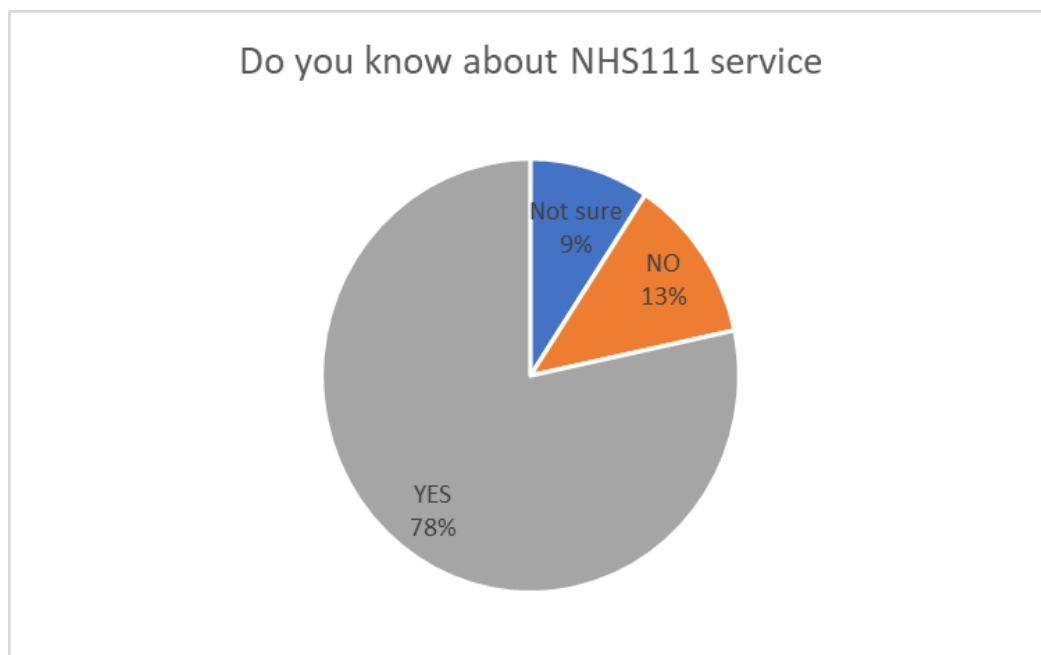
“to live with my conditions and take more care”

Although many respondents said they knew what is meant by self-care, not every one of them gave an explanation or an example.

#### 4.6.2 NHS 111 service

The findings in the chart below show the responses of 88 patients that answered the question 78% of patients (76patients) said they knew about the NHS111 service. 13% of patients (12 patients) did not know about the NHS 111 service and 9% were unsure about what the service offers.

This is a considerably higher level of awareness compared the previous surveyed at GP practices.



When asked to explain ‘What can NHS 111 offer you?’ Not all the patient were able to explain what the service offered. The 40 patients who went on to explain their understanding usually said.

“Advice and can get ambulance for you”

“Advice over the phone”

However, 6 of the 40 patients (33% of these patients) who said they knew what the NHS 111 service was, had an unclear understanding of the NHS 111 service, They thought that the NHS 111 number was called for emergencies:

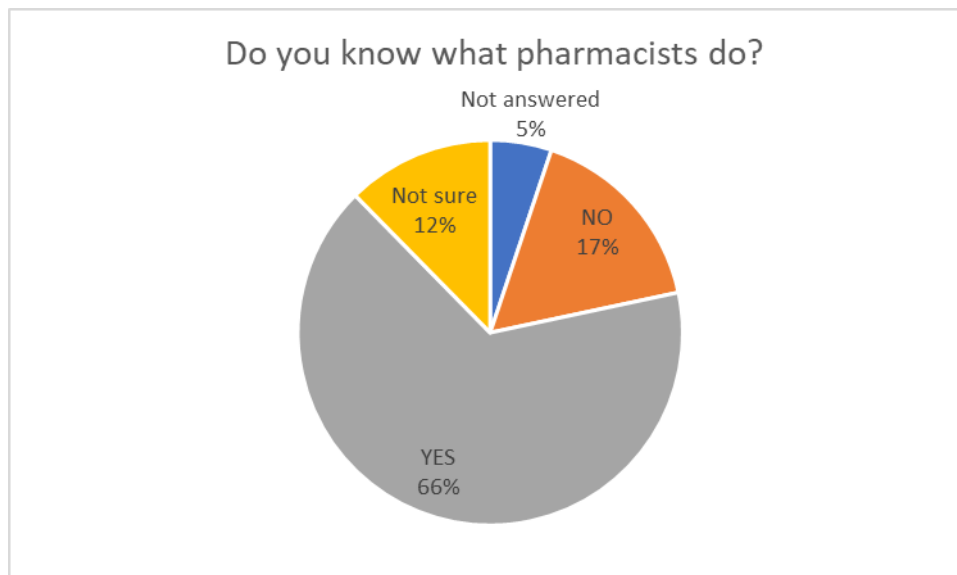
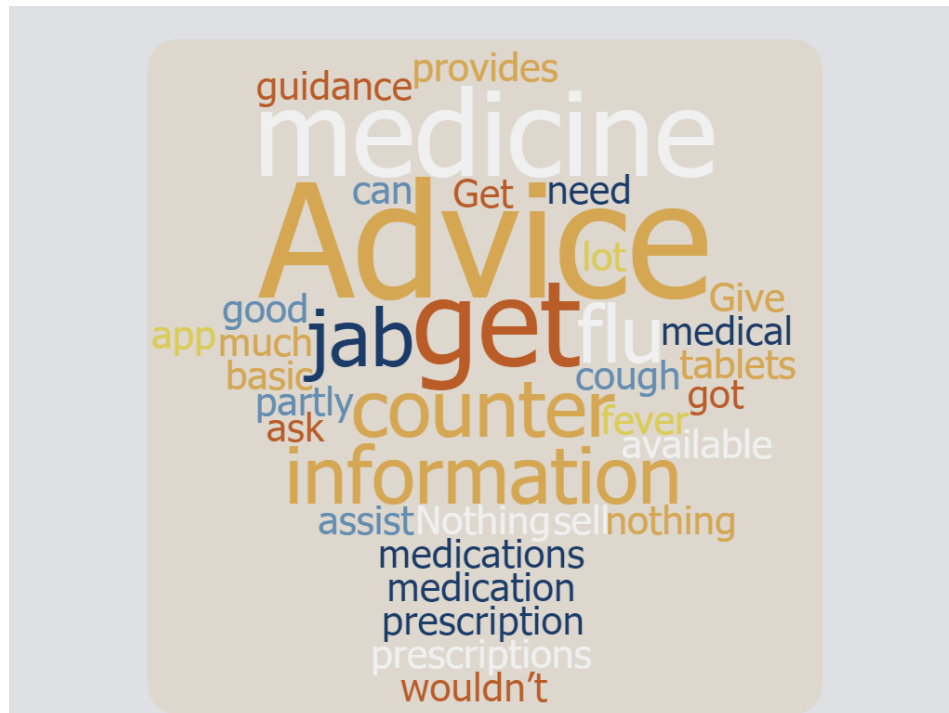
“When not feeling well you can call them, call for an ambulance”

Or

“For emergency purposes”

### 3.5.3 Pharmacists

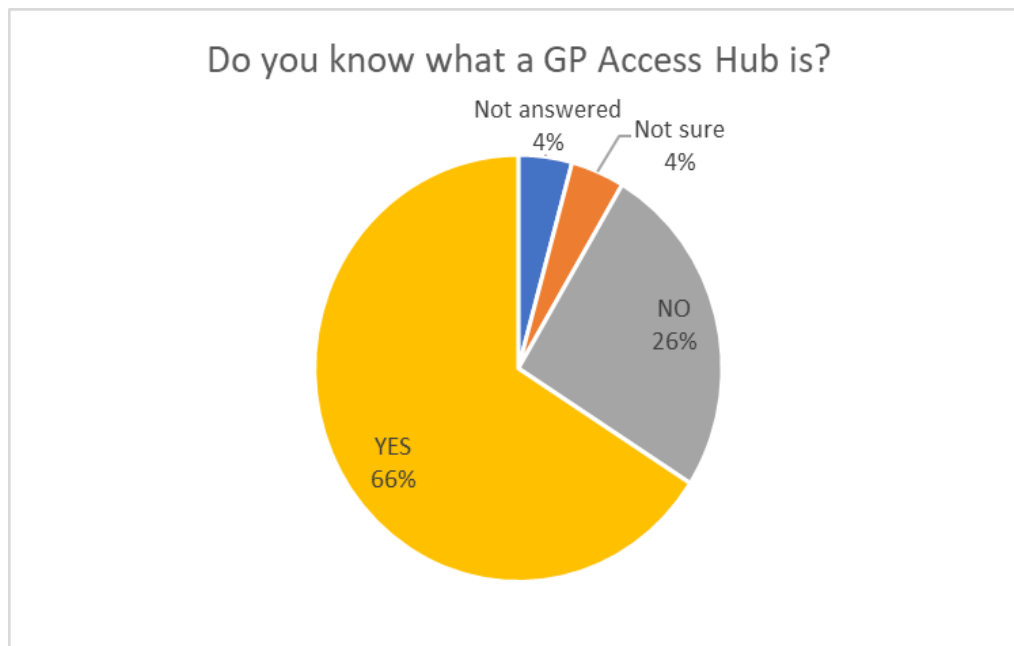
General comments when patients were asked ‘what a pharmacist can do to help me?’ are indicated in the word cloud below. These are words used by patients in their comments, the more commonly used words the larger the size of the word, see below.



Most patients (66%) of patients who knew what pharmacists do said pharmacists gave advice, or information on medication. As well as a place to obtain prescriptions and get the flu immunisation. However, 29% of patients were unaware of a pharmacist's role.

### 3.5.4 GP access hub appointments

When the patients were asked “what is a GP Access Hub appointment?” the chart below shows that generally (66% of patients) there was more awareness about these appointments. It is interesting to note, that although they were attending an GP Access Hub appointment 26% of patients were unaware that their appointments were a GP Access Hub appointment.



Some patients mistakenly thought that the term GP Access Hub referred to on-line consultations. Generally, the explanations given about any GP Hub appointments were as follows:

“when they run out of GP appointments”

“used it today, easier than waiting for days for my own GP”

“Like walk-in Centre”



## CONCLUSIONS

This survey at the 5 GP Access Hub practices in Brent is a snapshot. The survey was completed by 97 patients, averaging 8-10 patients in each practice, at evening and weekend openings.

We found that

- Most of the patients surveyed were working age, 21 to 65 years old
- most of them had same day emergency/ urgent appointments, made via telephoning their GP practice.
- The urgent appointments accounted for the 30 % (29 patients) of same day appointments.
- However, 14% of patients had to wait over 1 weeks for an appointment at the GP Access Hub.

The results show that not everyone was able to see a GP within a week and that the GP Access Hubs are no longer underutilised as suggested in “Improving the GP Extended Access Offer in Brent” paper in January 2018. Therefore, the decision to reduce the number of GP Access Hubs in Brent might need to be reconsidered.

### Patient experience of making appointments

Most patients (78% of patients) found it much easier to make a GP Access Hub appointment. The ease of getting an appointment was mainly because they found the staff in the reception helpful and the practice answered the telephone calls quickly. At least a 17% of patients did not find it easy to book an appointment. As previously, the long wait on the phone and rude or unhelpful staff were cited as the cause of difficulty in accessing the service.

### Patient preference

Most patients (55% of patients) expressed no preference and were happy to see any GP.

The 36% of patients who wished to see their own GP, unsurprisingly stated that continuity of care and familiarity with the doctor were the main reasons for seeking an appointment with their own GP.

### Patient knowledge of self-care and alternatives to GP appointments

#### Self-care:

##### Definition

“Self-care is about keeping fit and healthy, understanding when you can look after yourself, when a pharmacist can help, and when to get advice from your GP or another health professional. If you have a long-term condition, self-care is about understanding that condition and how to live with it.”

Of the 88 patients who responded to this question, over half the patients surveyed, 55% did know what was meant by the term and suggested that it meant taking care of yourself. While 36% of patients did not know what was meant by self-care.

#### NHS 111 service:

##### Definition

“When it’s not a life-threatening emergency to access the NHS service, dial 111. Dial 999 for a life-threatening emergency. The NHS 111 service should be used if you urgently need medical help or advice but it’s not a life-threatening situation. The NHS 111 service is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by a team of fully trained advisers, see annex 2, for more information.”

Of the 88 patients who answered this question, and 21 patients did not know about the NHS 111 service or were unsure about what the service offers. The 76 patients that did know about the 111 service 34 had either used the service or understood what the NHS111 service did.

There is still some confusion about the use and benefits of the 111 service. 33% of those patients that said they knew about the NHS11 service incorrectly thought it was for emergencies.

#### Pharmacy services:

##### Definition

“Pharmacists are experts in medicines who can help with minor health concerns. As qualified healthcare professionals, they can offer clinical advice and over-the-counter medicines for a range of minor illnesses, such as coughs, colds, sore throats, tummy trouble and aches and pains.

If symptoms suggest it's something more serious, pharmacists have the right training to make sure patients get the help they need. Many pharmacists are open until late and at weekends. You don't need an appointment- you can just walk in.”

Seventeen patients surveyed did not know about the services that pharmacists offer and twelve patients were unsure of their role. Most patients (64 patients) were aware that pharmacists can give some medical advice and/or dispense medicines and prescriptions.

#### GP Access Hub appointment

##### Definition

“A GP access hub is a GP practice that offers evening and weekend appointments for patients registered with other practices in the area. Evening and weekend appointments are available with GPs in Brent via GP access hubs. If patients are unable to get an appointment with their practice, they can ask for a GP Access Hub appointment.” See Annex 3.

Most patients attending (66 %of patients (62 patients) their GP Access Hub appointment did know about GP Access Hub appointments. Surprisingly 26% of patients did not know these were Access Hub appointments and thought they were attending another GP practice in the area. There was some confusion on the use of the term “Access Hub” among a third of the patients.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The continuing lack of awareness among patients about the GP Access Hub appointments demonstrates the need to provide more information to patients about their appointments.
2. Notice boards in the waiting room display clear and organised and ordered information about self-care and alternatives to GP appointments.
3. There is still more work for CCG and GP practices to raise awareness among patients on the different service available as an alternative to GP appointments. Healthwatch have co-designed comms postcard that all Healthwatch can use and has been shared with the national NHSE Team (see Appendix 4)
4. CCG to consider reviewing the number of GP Access Hubs or Hub appointments available in Brent as there are still patients that are waiting over a week for a GP appointment.

We presented this this report to Brent CCG Primary Care for their formal response.

However, due to their priorities in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic they were unable to provide a response at this time.

## ABOUT HEALTHWATCH

Healthwatch Brent is part of a national network led by Healthwatch England, which was established through the Health and Social Care Act in 2012, to give service users of health and social care services a powerful voice both locally and nationally. We are the independent voice for people's views on Brent services, both good and bad. We listen to local people and feedback patient experience and liaise with local commissioners and decision makers, in order to improve services.

Healthwatch Brent can provide a 'snapshot' of patient experience to add value to the work of the local health and social care economy.

Healthwatch Brent does not have the resources to conduct a 'root and branch' analysis of any service area.

## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1 - Questionnaire for GP Access Hub Survey in Brent

Name of GP Hub:  
am/pm/eve

Date

Time:

We would be grateful if you could help us with our research by answering a few questions.

Your GP Practice Name:	Your age range: 16-25 [_] 26-40[_] 41- 65[_] 65+[_]
<b>Your experience</b>  How did you book today's appointment?	Telephone
	In person
	Other (e.g. via own GP practice/ via 111)
How many days did you have to wait for this appointment?	
Was it easy to book your appointment?	Yes
	No
What made it easy or difficult to book your appointment?	
<b>Your preference</b>  Who did you want to see?	Your own GP
	Any GP
	A nurse
	Other
Why did you want to see this person?	
Who were you offered?	Your own GP
	Another GP in your practice
	A nurse
	A GP or nurse at another surgery
	Other
Your knowledge- Do you know what is meant by Self Care?	

Do you know what NHS 111 can offer you?	
Do you know what can your pharmacist do to help?	
<p>Do you know what is a GP Access Hub appointment?</p> <p>[Please Note if the patient understands this as an appointment at a sister practice/ Or at another GP- not own GP practice]</p>	

## Appendix 2 - Information sheet

Self-care is about keeping fit and healthy, understanding when you can look after yourself, when a pharmacist can help, and when to get advice from your GP or another health professional. If you have a long-term condition, self-care is about understanding that condition and how to live with it.

### For example - How to treat colds and flu yourself

To help you get better more quickly:

- rest and sleep
- keep warm
- take paracetamol or ibuprofen to lower your temperature and treat aches and pains
- drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration (your pee should be light yellow or clear)



### A pharmacist can help with cold and flu

- A pharmacist can give treatment advice and recommend cold and flu remedies.
- Be careful not to use flu remedies if you're taking paracetamol and ibuprofen tablets as it's easy to take more than the recommended dose.
- Speak to a pharmacist before giving medicines to children.
- GPs don't recommend antibiotics for flu because they won't relieve your symptoms or speed up your recovery.



### How does NHS 111 work?

The NHS 111 service is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by a team of fully trained advisers. They will ask questions to assess your symptoms and, depending on the situation, will then:

- give you self-care advice
- connect you to a nurse, emergency dentist or GP
- book you a face-to-face appointment
- send an ambulance directly, if necessary
- direct you to the local service that can help you best with your concern



Call NHS 111 or see your GP if:

- you're worried about your baby's or child's symptoms
- you're 65 or over
- you're pregnant
- you have a long-term medical condition - for example, diabetes or a heart, lung, kidney or neurological disease
- you have a weakened immune system - for example, because of chemotherapy or HIV
- **Or if your symptoms of colds and flu don't improve after 7 days Call NHS 111 or see your GP**



**Need a quicker appointment?** - If there are no appointments with your practice, you can ask the receptionist for a **GP Access Hub appointment**. This is an appointment with another GP in Brent.



## Appendix 3 - Information of GP Access Hub Appointments



# Improved access to GP appointments

GP Access Hubs offer **EVENING** and **WEEKEND** **APPOINTMENTS** at **FIVE** sites across **Brent**

Hub Locations	Opening times
<b>Wembley Hub</b> Wembley Centre for Health and Care 116 Chaplin Road, Wembley, HA04UZ	Monday to Sunday - 8am to 8pm
<b>Willesden Hub</b> Roundwood Park Medical Centre Robson Avenue, London NW10 3RY	Monday to Friday - 4pm to 8pm Saturday - 12pm to 4pm
<b>Temporary Northern Hub</b> The Stag-Hollyrood Practice 82 Stag Lane, Edgware, Middlesex, HA8 5LP	Monday to Friday - 4pm to 8pm
<b>Kilburn Hub</b> Staverton Surgery 51 Staverton Rd, London NW2 5HA	Monday to Friday - 4pm to 8pm Saturday - 10am to 2pm
<b>Central Middlesex Hub</b> Park Royal Medical Practice Acton Lane, London, NW107NS	Monday to Friday - 4pm to 8pm Saturday – 10am to 2pm

## How to book an appointment at one of the hubs

If you cannot get an appointment at your own GP practice, ask for a GP Access Hub appointment.

- Your GP Practice will book the appointment for you.
- You can also phone NHS111.

**GP Access Hubs have access to your medical records** where needed

## Appendix 4



Pharmacy 111 999 Graphic 55mm x 85mm v2.indd 1

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Pharmacy 111 999 Graphic 55mm x 85mm v2.indd 2

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