



news

healthwatch
Islington

One small step for foot health

When we spoke to service users about community podiatry services we got a very clear message back: Great service, but I have to wait far too long and I don't always get the appointment letters they're supposed to send me.

Whittington Health, who run the service, have responded to [our report](#). They are producing a leaflet to explain how the appointment booking system works. That's a good thing. If there is clarity about the system, patients will be better placed to see when it's not been working. However, it doesn't solve the problem of letters not arriving, or being sent out too late in the first place. That's why we especially welcome the news that the Whittington are considering email as another option when sending letters to podiatry patients.

Now email won't be appropriate for everyone. But when we see a hospital becoming more responsive in their communications by utilising newer technologies we think it's a good thing. A patient at Hornsey Rise Health Centre praised the fact that they were sent a text reminder

ahead of their podiatry appointment, so that they didn't forget. That's good practice. We'd like to see it become standard practice, and not just for podiatry.

Podiatry service users are often elderly, and less mobile. If they are more than ten minutes late for their appointment it will be cancelled. That's fair enough. However, these late-coming patients are currently referred back to the central booking system. This means that they get sent home without knowing when their rescheduled appointment will be. We asked Whittington Health why reception staff couldn't make the booking instead, while the patient was still at the health centre. Latecomers could then go away knowing when they'd get seen, rather than having to wait on a letter all over again.

Whittington Health have told us they are going to review the process, to see whether it's possible for reception staff to book podiatry appointments for patients that require a follow up in less than three weeks. We say that's an encouraging first step. Thanks to everyone who talked to us about feet.

Spotlight on **Children's Health**



Let's say you are number ten in the queue at the doctors - you have to wait. But at River Place Health Centre, when they see that my child is autistic, I jump the queue. But not all GPs are the same, and it's hard to wait. At the GP there are no toys or fish like there are at the Whittington.

Participant in our Autism focus group at Centre 404, October 2016

We'd like to hear from parents, carers, grandparents, and relatives about your experiences of local health and care services for children.

In October we met with parents of children with autism to hear about their experiences of accessing services. We learnt how hard parents had to fight to get certain services for their children. Access was described as inconsistent, both between services 'some services are easy to access but some are very difficult' and between service users, 'the way another parent has accessed a service could be completely different'.

Services such as occupational therapy are offered in short six week blocks. When those six weeks are over, parents have to battle again to reaccess that service. 'There's no self referral which makes things harder'. In addition, where these services rely on establishing a rapport with the child, staff changes can compound problems with access. 'Staff at occupational therapy (and language staff) change too much. It's hard for my child to get used to another person. It wastes time.'

Autistic children can find it difficult to wait to be seen, particularly in an unfamiliar environment. Parents told us that health and care providers needed to do more to make it comfortable for

autistic children to spend time in their buildings. 'He is a person. He has the same rights as another person, but he's got autism. Some people need a wheelchair, so you try to provide one. My child needs a separate room whilst waiting in hospital, so why not provide it?'

A related issue concerned difficulties in accessing medicines. Parents asked for easier ways to get prescriptions in cases where the treatment needed was already known.

'My son has blepharitis a recurring eye condition that comes on quite quickly and has to be dealt with straight away. The GP can't give you anything strong enough so you have to go to A&E at Moorfields and wait for three hours [very difficult for a child with autism] and then you can get the treatment which is a Spanish antibiotic cream you can only get at the hospital pharmacy.'

'Yes, even for smaller conditions such as constipation getting repeat prescriptions can still be a huge process. It would be good to skip all the fuss and just get the medicine.'

Access has also emerged as the key theme from work we began in the summer, gathering views on children's services more broadly. Although half of the 22 parents and carers we've spoken to so far were pleased with the accessibility of children's

Between July and September we visited four children's centres and two community centres during 'Stay and Play' sessions. Listening to parents, we found that most criticisms were about difficulties accessing services for their children, not the services themselves. We heard the same message at the autism focus group in October.



services ['no problem with GP...I have been seen straight away a couple of times', 'she is always seen same-day if she has a fever'], the other half felt that access was poor.

It is well known that it can be difficult to get a timely appointment at the GP. Adding the needs of a sick child into that particular equation makes it harder still, 'I had to stand in line at 8am... leaving my son with my husband', 'you have to call at 8am, no one picks up, and if they do all the appointments are gone'. On five occasions parents or carers told us they had to take their child to A&E because they could not get a same-day appointment.

There were also complaints about the length of time it took to be referred to specialist services. 'My son was referred to the Ear Nose and Throat hospital. It took ages - nearly a year. When we finally saw them they said they couldn't do anything.' Two children had hypermobility conditions, and their parents struggled because 'diagnosis at the GP took six months...I had to call two to three times a week' and 'there was a long wait to see the paediatrician...they said if I cancelled the appointment it would take longer.'

A number of people spoke in glowing terms about the Health Visiting service in particular. This - on the service based at Hanley Road: 'I can't fault the Health Visitor. They were supportive and phone up to check how things are. There is also a great, accessible clinic; the year 1 weaning and

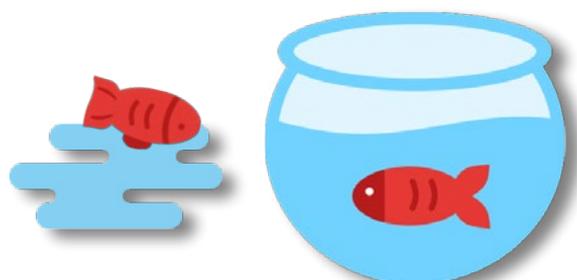
sleeping workshops were good, and the 2 year check was efficient', 'the Healthcare Visitor was so accommodating - took her time and answered all questions. 100% service. Where else in the country would you get such good service?'

One respondent did feel that the service could be more accessible, 'Always a long wait to see a Health Visitor at Hanley Road, even when we arrive early. The clinic needs more space and more staff.'

We'll be speaking to more people about children's health services in the coming months. If you've an opinion to share please [get in touch](#) and help us build a fuller picture.

Paediatricians, health visitors, baby clinics, hospitals, children's mental health services, GPs, occupational therapy, nursing and physio, opticians, pharmacy, children's social care...

Share your views on children's services before 14 December and you could win an iPad Mini. Visit healthwatchislington.co.uk or call 020 7832 5814.



Volunteering update

Healthwatch volunteers win praise

Congratulations to Rose McDonald (main) and Faiza Al-Abri (inset). Their work to improve health and social care services for the local community was recognised at the Islington Volunteer of the Year Awards at the beginning of November. Rose, who sits on our board of directors, was shortlisted for the main award. She's been leading our work visiting local hospitals to see how well they support patients with additional communication requirements. Faiza, who won the Young Volunteer award, has been gathering feedback on mental health services for young adults, and on the IHUB service (the new extended hours GP service).

Thanks to all our volunteers for all their great work.

Healthwatch steering group meeting

The next meeting of the steering group is on 21 February from 6 till 8pm at Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, N7 6PA.

We'll be considering our work plan for the year ahead. This meeting is open to the public. Please let us know if you intend to come along.

Hanging on the telephone

Islington residents who use social care services have told Healthwatch that it can be difficult to get hold of your social worker on the phone. Not only that, you can't always leave a message for them if they're not answering. We've also heard that if you call the Access and Advice Team at the council, you can be waiting in the queue for ages before anyone picks up. Our mystery shopping volunteers have been investigating.

Islington Council gave us a list of everyone in the social worker teams. Our shoppers rang all the numbers and made a record of what happened with each call. The social work teams had been forewarned that the exercise was due to take place. We plan a follow up exercise in the new year. We've also been advising the council on the best ways to monitor the quality of the information and support being provided by the Access and Advice Team.



If you have an experience of using either service that you'd like to share with Healthwatch, please get in touch.

Our contact details

You can visit our website to give feedback on any health and social care services you use, and get information about other services that are available. If computers aren't for you, you can call us, or write a letter. You won't need a stamp.

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