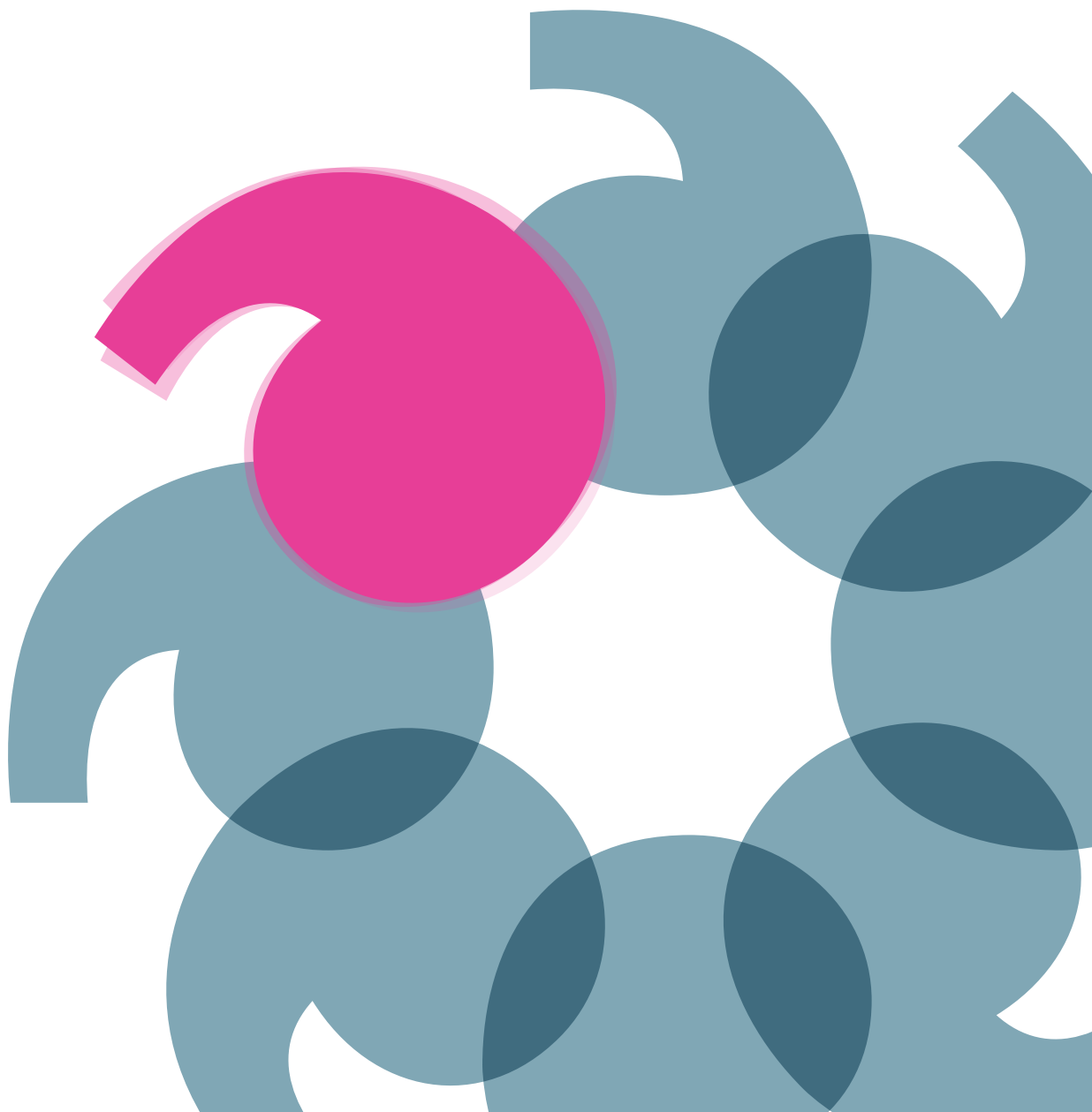


Community Services

Talking to patients using health centres in Islington



Healthwatch Islington

Healthwatch Islington is an independent organisation led by volunteers from the local community. It is part of a national network of Healthwatch organisations that involve people of all ages and all sections of the community.

Healthwatch Islington gathers local people's views on the health and social care services that they use. We make sure those views are taken into account when decisions are taken on how services will look in the future, and how they can be improved.

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Introduction

Each year, Healthwatch Islington provides volunteering opportunities for degree students from London Metropolitan University undertaking courses in Public Health, Community Development and Leadership, and Health and Social Care. This gives us the opportunity to engage with a diverse group of future health and social care professionals.

This year we worked with these volunteers to develop and deliver a research project looking at the community services provided by Whittington Health. These services are run out of a number of health centres across the borough.

We were primarily interested in:

- ▶ Patients' experience of getting and cancelling appointments,
- ▶ The accessibility of information and communication provided by the services,
- ▶ The experiences of those patients using hospital transport to travel to their appointments.

The health centres the students visited were as follows:

Bingfield Primary Care Centre, Highbury Grange Health Centre, Holloway Community Health Centre, Hornsey Rise Health Centre, River Place Health Centre, Goodinge Health Centre.

These centres usually share a building with a GP practice, or other primary care services.

We spoke to 82 patients over the course of seven visits. 72 patients were from Islington, the others were from Haringey and Camden. Our findings are shared in the pages that follow.

Who we spoke to

We visited each of the six health centres at least once over a three week period in October and November 2018 to talk to patients while they were waiting for their appointments.

Number of patients we spoke to at each clinic

Bingfield Primary Care Centre	9
Goodinge Health Centre	3
Highbury Grange Health Centre	3

Holloway Community Health Centre	45
Hornsey Rise Health Centre	5
River Place Health Centre	17

Number of patients, of those we spoke to, accessing each community service

Podiatry	43
Physiotherapy	12
Phlebotomy	9
Leg Ulcer Clinic	7

Dentistry	6
COPD/ Lung groups	3
Nutrition and Dietetics	2
Bladder and Bowel Service	2

Sex of patients

Female	Male	No answer	Total
55	21	11	82

Ages of patients

Under 16	16-24	25-44	45-64	65-79	80+	No answer	Total
3	1	15	17	19	18	9	82

Ethnicity

Asian/ Asian British	4
Black/ Black British	9
Greek/ Greek Cypriot	3
Turkish/ Turkish Cypriot	3
White British	36

White Irish	6
Other White	9
Other	4
No answer	8
Total	82

Did patient identify as disabled?

Yes	No	No answer	Total
29	42	11	82

What patients told us

19 of the patients we spoke to were having their first appointment with the service they were using. 63 patients had had previous appointments with the service.

Booking an appointment

We noticed that appointments seem to be booked differently for each service:

- ▶ Patients accessing the leg ulcer clinic and the dental service told us that they were given the time and date of their next appointment by the practitioner who was treating them. The details are written on an appointment card they can take away with them.
- ▶ Patients using the physiotherapy service told us that they go to the health centre reception after their appointment has finished to book the next one.
- ▶ Patients using the podiatry service told us that they are often given an indication of when they should next expect to be seen (patients may be seen from once every six weeks to once every six months depending on need) and then they have to wait for a letter to be sent to them by the Central Bookings service with the time and date of their appointment.

One podiatry patient told us they had booked their appointment by coming into the health centre and booking it at reception and another told us they had booked their first appointment online.

For podiatry patients in particular, it was felt that the appointment booking system could be improved. Patients told us that the appointment letter often arrives less than two weeks before the appointment. If it is necessary to change an appointment that has been received at short notice, patients need to call up Central Bookings to rearrange it. Patients also said that sometimes the appointment letter doesn't arrive at all. In those cases patients often end up waiting even longer, then need to call up Central Bookings to arrange the appointment again. A number of the podiatry patients we spoke to reported waiting longer than they wanted to for their appointment.

'I want the appointment to be sooner, because the GP told me I can't cut her toenails and she's in real discomfort and can hardly walk.'

[Carer of podiatry patient at Bingfield Primary Care Centre]

'I think it was in April, when I was last seen. I don't really know why I have to wait. A lot of people I've spoken to are having the same problem of longer waiting...I think they physio works better than the podiatrist. They make appointments straight away unlike podiatry. The consistency is very poor!'

[Podiatry patient at Holloway Community Health Centre]

Cancelling appointments

Of the 82 respondents, 54 had never needed to cancel an appointment. 15 said that they had needed to cancel an appointment. Examples of the reasons given included needing to cancel if their child was sick, or if the appointment clashed with another hospital appointment. 5 patients said that the service had cancelled their appointment but that this had then been rearranged. 8 patients didn't answer the question.

To cancel or change an appointment patients told us that they can call the Central Bookings line, but that sometimes the rearranged appointment would not be for several weeks.

Discharge

Patients felt that the service too easily discharges patients, especially when it's an emergency or not their fault.

'This is my first appointment since September 2017. Last September I was in hospital for 10 days and I was discharged on the day of my podiatry appointment and I obviously missed it. So they discharged me from this service. There is no understanding!'

[Podiatry patient at Hornsey Rise Health Centre]

'I missed the first appointment because I wasn't aware of it, so had to go through the process again.'

[Podiatry patient at Hornsey Rise Health Centre]

Accessing the service

Did you self-refer to this service, or were you referred by a GP or other healthcare professional?

Self-referral	GP referral	Dentist referral	Hospital referral	Other	Don't know	No answer	Total
9	46	5	5	11	4	2	82

Some patients were unsure whether they had been referred by their GP or self-referred because they had gone to their GP for a referral, and were then told to complete a self-referral form. Nine patients self-referred, with five of those reporting that they had done so on their GP's instruction.

67 patients told us they were referred into the service, with 46 of those specifying that it was their GP who had referred them. Dentists and hospitals were responsible for 10 of the other referrals. Other services identified as providing the patient referral were district nurses, diabetic nurses, and community services such as podiatry, rheumatology and the lymph clinic.

Patients at a number of centres explained that when they were first referred into the service they were using, they were sent a letter telling them to call Central Bookings within seven days to book the initial appointment. However, in several cases, this letter arrived after the seven days had expired, so when the patient called to try and book the initial appointment they were discharged and had to start the process again.

'I got a letter that said to ring to book, but it came after the seven day cut off window to book the appointment. So I rang on the ninth day after the letter was dated, but the person was very rude and said I had to re-refer and wouldn't let me book an appointment even though it wasn't my fault!'

[Podiatry patient at Hornsey Rise Health Centre]

'So when they send me a letter they asked you to confirm within seven days and if you have not received the letter until the seven days are nearly over this is a pain and this happens all the time! I go to miss my appointment which I have to rebook again. It is a rubbish system of communicating.'

[Nutrition and Dietetics patient at Holloway Community Health Centre]

A couple of patients told us that they had had trouble locating the venue. One patient mentioned that providing a map with the appointment letter would help.

'It's interesting with all the Hornseys around they don't provide you with a map.'

[Respondent had come in error to Holloway Community Health Centre in Hornsey Street, instead of Hornsey Rise Health Centre]

Communication

Patients felt that the service didn't always communicate using the most appropriate or accessible method of communication. For example, one patient who is registered blind told us that they still receive appointment letters which they rely on someone having to read to them. Another patient told us that they receive two copies of their appointment letter each time.

Patients told us that appointment letters were received too close to the time of the appointment.

'Initially they say they'll send an appointment for six to eight weeks, but it only arrives two weeks before the appointment. I don't know the correct procedure or who to contact. Today I'll make an appointment at reception after I've been seen.'

[Podiatry patient at Holloway Community Health Centre]

'The letters, they need to be improved on! Because you don't receive the letter on time then you have to ring to confirm.'

[Podiatry patient at Holloway Community Health Centre]

Some patients told us that they received a reminder text for their appointment. Patients found this helpful, but texting didn't seem consistent across the services. Patients didn't know whether they had opted in for this text reminder service or not.

For the podiatry service in particular patients told us that they often had very long waits between appointments and there was no communication from the service about this. Many podiatry patients ended up calling the Central Bookings line to book their next appointment because they felt they had waited too long with no communication from the service.

Patients also told us that it is frustrating that the only contact details they have is for the Central Bookings line and not for the centre or practitioner they have their appointments with.

'After surgery on my toe I was given a letter that said "if you have any signs of infection call the Central Bookings line"! Why couldn't I call someone who would be able to help? The phone line is only open between 10 and 4pm so I ended up calling NHS 111, visiting my local pharmacy and seeing my GP before coming back for my follow up appointment.'

[Podiatry patient at Holloway Community Health Centre]

However, some services did provide direct contact points for the convenience of their patients. One patient visiting the leg ulcer clinic told us that they were able to ring the specialist ulcer nurse if they needed more information between appointments.

Transport

Only five of the patients we spoke to had used hospital transport to attend their appointment. Patients told us that they are told to be ready two hours before their appointment time and to wait. Patients found this to be quite a long time. These patients often had to wait at the health centre before or after their appointment as well. Patients did comment that if they are late for their appointment, they are always seen.

'Hospital transport ring you and ask you to come down - we book a wheelchair and they sometimes come up to the flat to help her down, but more often than not they expect her to make her way downstairs to them.'

[Carer at Bingfield Primary Care Centre]

One patient and carer we spoke to told us that the carer can ride with patient in the hospital transport if organised in advance. Some patients told us they wanted to be seen at a community health centre that was closer to home.

'Wish they could do this at Pine Street, its closer to where I live. I have friends who are seen by the podiatrist there, and I know elderly people who also have to travel. It's not right!'

[Patient at Holloway Community Health Centre]

Seeing a clinician

Patients only had positive things to say about their experience of seeing a clinician. Patients felt that they were given time and treated with care and respect.

'The district nurse was ever so nice, couldn't have been nicer, she spent time.'

[Bladder and Bowel patient at River Place Health Centre]

'Very good services from the NHS. I couldn't have asked for any more.'

[Phlebotomy patient at River Place Health Centre]

'Very impressed, everything is very efficient.'

[Physiotherapy patient at Holloway Community Health Centre]

'Once I see the podiatrist, I'm happy!'

[Patient at Holloway Community Health Centre]

Summary of feedback

- ▶ Patients were satisfied with the treatment and care they received from clinicians
- ▶ Patients using the podiatry service in particular spoke about difficulties and inefficiencies in the appointment booking process, and how this negatively impacted their health and wellbeing.
- ▶ Patients would find it helpful if Whittington Health provided a guide to the appointment booking process, with advice on what action to take when things go wrong. This would help patients have greater confidence in the service and not contact Central Bookings unnecessarily.
- ▶ There seemed to be a lot of confusion around the self-referral pathway.
- ▶ It would be worthwhile for Whittington Health to address the accessibility and consistency of communication amongst these services. For example, appointment notifications need to be provided to patients in an appropriate form, in line with the Accessible Information Standard. And all patients who wish to receive reminder texts for their appointments should be sent them. This is especially important when one missed appointment can result in being discharged from the service.

Recommendations

We recommend that Whittington Health take the following actions:

1	Provide a guide to the referral and appointment booking process that outlines the service and what patients can expect.
2	Consistently use reminder texts and ensure that patients know whether they need to opt in for this service.
3	Ensure appointment letters and other communication are in an accessible format in line with the Accessible Information Standard.
4	Provide a map of the centre location on appointment letters.
5	Ensure that letters are received by patients in good time so that they avoid missing appointments, or being discharged from the service.

Acknowledgements

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