



Experiences of accessing Primary Care Services in Shropshire

Engagement Report

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About Healthwatch Shropshire



Healthwatch Shropshire is the independent health and social care champion for local people

We work to make your voice count when it comes to shaping and improving services. We use a variety of methods to find out what people like about services, and what could be improved and we share these views with those with the power to make change happen. Our reports go to:

- the organisations who provide services
- the commissioners who pay for services (e.g. Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Shropshire Council)
- service regulators (the Care Quality Commission, NHS England)
- our national body Healthwatch England to let them know how services are working in Shropshire



We are not experts in health and social care and Hot Topics are just one of the methods we use to put a spotlight on services and ask people to share their views with us. Hot Topics are publicised and promoted through our engagement activities (e.g. talks and stands at events) for 1-2 months. To gather more information we might also do surveys and focus groups.

Please note

Hot Topics are not time limited and so while we have targeted our engagement on access to Primary Care Services during September to November 2019 we continue to want to hear from people who are willing to share their experiences with us and we will share them with the providers, commissioners and regulators.

The context

Covid-19

All of the patient experience, practice visits, survey data and website review took place before the current pandemic and does not reflect the current patient experience. Practices who were subject to Enter & View visits received their individual reports prior to publication and changes may have occurred. [Individual reports can be found on our website.](#)

In Shropshire there are 40 General Practices serving their communities, they range in size from serving over 17,000 patients to under 2,000 patients. In 2015¹ Healthwatch Shropshire, along with other local Healthwatch in the region, carried out a piece of research that showed patients lacked an understanding of how GP appointment systems worked and we are still hearing that message. Now practices are offering Extended Access appointments, where patients can book to see a GP until 8pm on weekdays and at times over the weekend, and can book appointments online we wanted to know how the patient experience has been affected.

The NHS recommends that people with fevers, stomach upset, aches and pains or headaches contact their local pharmacist instead of their GP so if people are using pharmacies we also wanted to know how they found the experience.

The latest GP Patient Survey² showed that there was a wide range of patient satisfaction rates for availability of appointments at GP practices. Across Shropshire it varies from 34% satisfied to 95% satisfied. We wanted to hear about the reality behind the statistics.

We asked NHS Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group (SCCG), who are responsible for organising NHS services in Shropshire, to give some context to the questions around access to primary care:

- NHS England's national annual GP Patient Survey demonstrates that nationally, patients are finding it increasingly difficult to get an appointment at their GP Practice. Across Shropshire access to GP services is seen to be better than the national average. Although there are no specific timescales that practices have to meet when offering appointments, NHS England states that surgeries

¹ <https://www.healthwatchshropshire.co.uk/report/2015-09-29/access-gp-appointments>

² <https://www.gp-patient.co.uk/>

should be able to offer patients an appointment to see a GP or other healthcare professional quickly, if necessary, and provide services that meet the reasonable needs of its registered patients. The NHS General Practice Forward View (GPFV), published in April 2016 set out plans to enable clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) to commission and fund additional capacity across England to ensure that by 2020, everyone has improved access to GP Services. From 1st October 2018, 100% of Shropshire patients have had access to pre-bookable and on-the-day appointments with a GP or other clinician, from 8.00am to 8.00pm on weekdays, and at agreed hours on weekends. This is aligned with the national target set by NHS England for the GPFV Extended Access Service and was increased further with the introduction of Primary Care Networks³ in July 2019 to a total of 60 minutes of routine appointments per 1,000 patients, per week. These additional appointments are mainly for patients who, due to commitments such as work, find it difficult to attend their GP surgery during normal, contracted hours however the appointments are available to all registered patients.

There are also several digital solutions that support access and capacity in general practice. From April 2021, all patients will have the right to digital-first primary care including online and video consultations. Similarly, practices now offer repeat prescriptions electronically and patients will have access to their full medical records from 2020 too.

Some access schemes have involved closer working with other providers of care to ensure patients receive the right care, from the right professional. By April 2020, practices will be required to make available 1 appointment per 3,000 patients per day for NHS 111 to book directly into practice appointments; offering an alternative route in to the practice for patients that need to be seen. Since July 2019, all practices have made at least 25% of their appointments available for online booking. These can be a mix of GP or other health care professional appointments and don't necessarily need to be face to face. They are not new or additional appointments but do allow a patient to book an appointment without having to call the practice.

Each GP Practice decides how many appointments it offers to meet the care needs of patients, and who the most suitable person to see each patient is. Practices must also be assured that staff can demonstrate the appropriate level

³ A list of the Primary Care Networks and the practices within each is listed in Appendix A

of competency for patients they provide care and treatment for, including whether an urgent or routine appointment is required. Patients should be able to view their practice's Appointment Policy on the practice website, in the surgery, or upon request. - Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group (SCCG)

What we did

In order to find out about people's experiences in Shropshire we decided to focus our engagement for the months of October and November 2019 on access to Primary Care, in particular services provided by General Practices and Pharmacies. This report does include relevant experiences we received in the months from June 2019 leading up to the period of focused engagement and the experiences we have received after it up to 21 January 2020.



At the end of September we put a call out through our media, stakeholders and community contacts across Shropshire asking people to contact us and share their experiences.

General Engagement

Through face to face conversations (outside of the Enter & View visits), contacts with patients over the phone, by email and through our website we received 149 comments giving feedback about access to General Practice services and 24 comments giving feedback about community pharmacy services.

Important note

If people share their views with us in writing or via our website it is not possible for us to ask for further information, e.g. name of service, date of experience. Therefore some comments might describe experiences from some time ago and services/practice might have changed.

This report gives an overview of the experiences we have been told about, the individual comments and the feedback they raise will be shared anonymously with the individual practices so they can be used to inform future service developments.

Enter & View visits

To gain some further information our Enter and View (E&V) Authorised Representatives visited seven GP surgeries across Shropshire during December 2019 and January 2020 to discuss appointments and see how they are offering Extended Access appointments, if they are advertising them in the surgery and if they are making patients aware of them when they ask. The volunteers used a crib sheet and a patient questionnaire to ensure consistency across the 7 visits, please see Appendix B & C. We spoke to staff and patients on our visits and wrote individual reports for each GP surgery which are available on our website [here](#).

The GP practices we visited varied in size, based on the number of patients they have, and were in in locations across Shropshire:

Enter & View visit	Patients spoken to	Staff spoken to	Representative of Patient Participant group spoken to	Online Practice Questionnaire Completed
Cambrian Medical Centre, Oswestry	10	2	No	Yes
Highley Medical Centre, Highley	2	4	No	Yes
Mytton Oak Medical Practice, Shrewsbury	10	3	No	No
Pontesbury Medical Practice, Pontesbury	7	4	No	No
Prescott Surgery, Baschurch	10	3	Yes	Yes
Shifnal and Priorslee Medical Practice, Shifnal Surgery	14	3	Yes	Yes
Station Drive Surgery, Ludlow	5	3	Yes	Yes

Please note

The findings from the Enter & View visits reflect what we found on the day of our visit and services may change over time.

General Practice Questionnaire

To provide some background to the experiences of patients we sent a questionnaire to all 40 General Practices in Shropshire asking questions about how

they arrange their services to meet the needs of their patients. Twenty six (65%) of the practices completed the questionnaire.

General Practice website review

At the same time we carried out a review of the websites of all 40 general practices to understand how they were communicating with their patients about access to services.

Summary of findings

Booking Appointments

- We spoke to 58 patients during our Enter & View visits to 7 practices; 41 patients (71%) told us it was ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ to get an appointment at their surgery. Twelve people (21%) told us that they had difficulty getting through to their surgery on the telephone. However the experiences of the process of booking appointments shared with us by patients through our general engagement and not as part of the E&V visits were predominantly negative, 69% (37) were negative and 26% (14) were positive. This feedback covered experiences at 18 practices, negative experiences were encountered at 12 practices.

Online access to appointments

- Shropshire CCG told us “Since July 2019, all practices have made at least 25% of their appointments available for online booking.”
- Experiences of online booking of appointments was mixed. Three patients who we spoke to during Enter & View visits to practices had been able to get appointments in reasonable time but the feedback we received from 11 people through our general engagement about online booking was entirely negative.
- Percentages of Doctor appointments made available by practices for booking online vary from 10% to 100%. Four of the 26 practices that responded to our questionnaire told us they offer less than 25% of doctor’s appointments online.
- The availability of appointments with clinicians other than doctors varies across practices. Ten practices (38% of those who responded to our questionnaire) offer access to nurse appointments, eight (30%) offer access to clinic staff appointments and five (19%) offer access to Advanced Clinical Practitioners (ACP).

Access to routine appointments

- 59% of people who told us about accessing routine appointments reported a negative experience. The feedback covered experiences at 29 practices, negative experiences were encountered at 18 practices. Ten practices told us they reserve routine appointments for patients who contact them on the day. Two practices reported that they offer a 'sit and wait' service for patients seeking a routine appointment on the day.
- At one surgery we visited seven patients told us it is only possible to book an appointment on the day you call.

Access to urgent appointments

- 83% of people who told us about accessing urgent appointments reported a positive experience. Twenty four of the 26 practices we heard from reserve appointments for patients seeking an urgent appointment. All practices except one offer a same day telephone consultation service.

Extended access appointments

- Eleven people contacted us about the Extended Access Scheme, nine of these were negative experiences. During our Enter & View visits we directly asked 38 patients about Extended Access appointments, 11 (29%) had heard of the scheme, the sentiment of feedback was mixed.
- At one surgery we were told that there is an extended hours cervical smear clinic which has had good attendance and the Practice Manager told us that this has resulted in an increase in uptake of smear tests.
- 38 out of the 40 GP practices in Shropshire had information about the Extended Access Scheme on their website. 11 practices (29%) who have information on their website did not have the information linked to their appointments page or their opening hours pages. 17 practices (45%) were giving either incorrect or incomplete information or both.
- A range of approaches was taken to how Extended Access appointments were offered by staff:
 - Including them in opening hours and routine appointments (this practice was a hub)
 - Offering them only when patients could not get an appointment during normal surgery opening hours
 - Not routinely offering evening and weekend appointments as patients are able to get an appointment at a suitable time at the surgery

Continuity of care

- We heard from 14 patients about their experiences of being able to see the same member of staff for their appointments, 13 (93%) were negative and 1 (7%) was positive.
- At six of the seven GP Practices we visited we were told that there could be a long wait for an appointment with a named GP. Wait times were quoted as being between two and three weeks

Pharmacy and General Practice Liaison

- Thirteen people shared their experiences of liaison between General Practices and Pharmacies, 9 (69%) positive experiences and four (31%) negative.

Pharmacy service experience

- Twenty four people shared their experiences of using Community Pharmacies, 17 (71%) were positive, three (12%) negative and four (17%) neutral.
- There seems to be no method of sharing records of advice given in community pharmacies with the patient's GP. It is unclear if records are routinely kept by the pharmacies.

General Practice Opening Hours

- Shropshire CCG told us that "From 1st October 2018, 100% of Shropshire patients have had access to pre-bookable and on-the-day appointments with a GP or other clinician, from 8.00am to 8.00pm on weekdays, and at agreed hours on weekends."
- When we looked at the opening hours advertised on the Practice websites we found that total opening hours for GP practices vary from 36 per week to 60 per week. Ten practices (25%) advertise as being open at 8am or earlier every day during the week. It was unclear how the patients at the other 30 practices access appointments from 8.00am on weekdays.

Appointment reminders and 'Did not attend' rates

- Twenty four, of the 26 practices who responded to our questionnaire, send reminders via text message, one does not and one left the question blank. The practice which does not use the text message reminder system reported a 'did not attend' rate of 5%. Along with six other practices this is the highest rate reported.

Recommendations

In order to improve the experience of people we would suggest that:

- Practices advertise and offer Extended Access appointments to all patients at each point of contact
 - Information about the Extended Access Scheme is clearly outlined where patients will look for it on practice websites, suggested web pages would be those containing appointment or opening hours information.
 - Practices communicate their policy for making appointments available online with patients, what proportion are made available and for which members of staff.
 - Practices help patients to understand the types of medical conditions which require an urgent appointment and which do not.
 - Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group continues to work to develop the records reporting between community pharmacies and GP practices
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What we found out

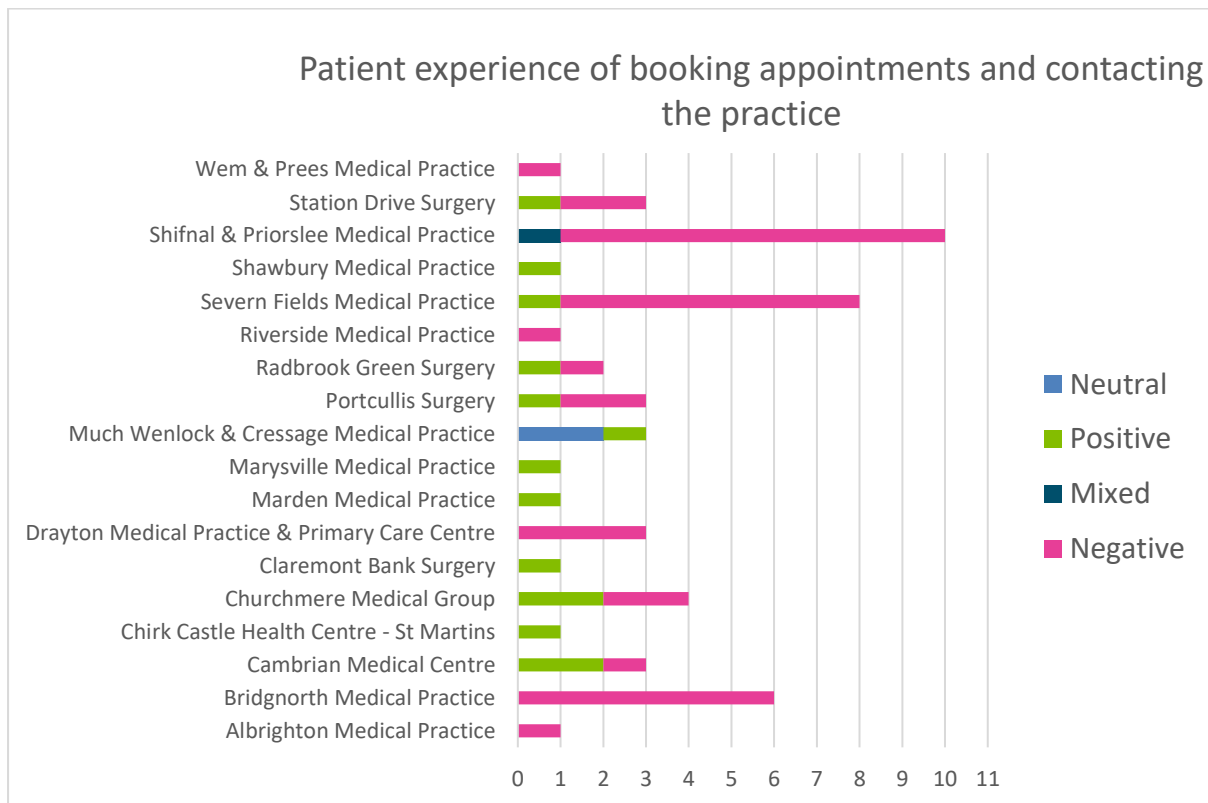
Overview of the sentiment of feedback about access to General Practice Services



General Practice Patient experience

Booking appointments

Fifty three people’s experiences included feedback about the process of booking an appointment, 68% (36) were negative and 26% (14) were positive. The feedback covered experiences at 18 practices, negative experiences were encountered at 12 practices.



A selection of the feedback we received:

- 📞 Tried to call the practice on Thursday to chase up and sat on the phone several times for over 30 minutes with no response and no indication of where I was in the queue.
- 📞 I have had trouble getting an appointment ... I have tried waiting in the surgery, told to go home and call at 2pm. On phone waiting for 40-50 minutes and then no appointments.
- 📞 You should be able to make an appointment other than 'ring on the day'. The phone is constantly engaged and you can redial over 100 times, only to be told there are no appointments left when you do get through. 'Ring back tomorrow'
- 📞 Getting through to make appointments works well.

On our Enter and View visits we spoke to a total of 58 patients across seven GP practices about booking appointments. We asked them ‘how easy is it to get an appointment?’ :

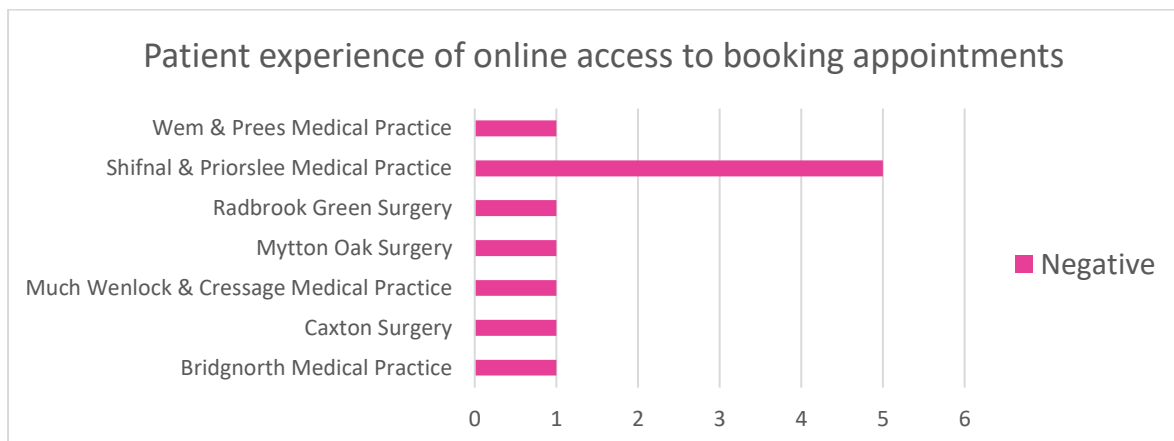
- 41 patients we spoke to (71%) told us it was ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ to get an appointment at their surgery
- 12 people (21%) told us that they had difficulty getting through to their surgery on the telephone

Online Access

General Practices are now required to make some appointments available to book via online systems such as the Patient Access App (<https://www.patientaccess.com/>).



Eleven patients shared experience of online access, this was all negative.



- I have no access to the internet and because of that, cannot access the GP appointment system. I was going on holiday and wanted to see the GP before that but had to wait one month for my appointment, one of my friends who has internet told me that online there were two earlier appointments available but could not book one for her as only patient can do it. It is discrimination.
- There is usually a two weeks wait when you book online but you get in quicker if you call.
- A new patient asked about online access to records and appointments and was told that they would not be able to have access for six months because the practice has a large transient population.

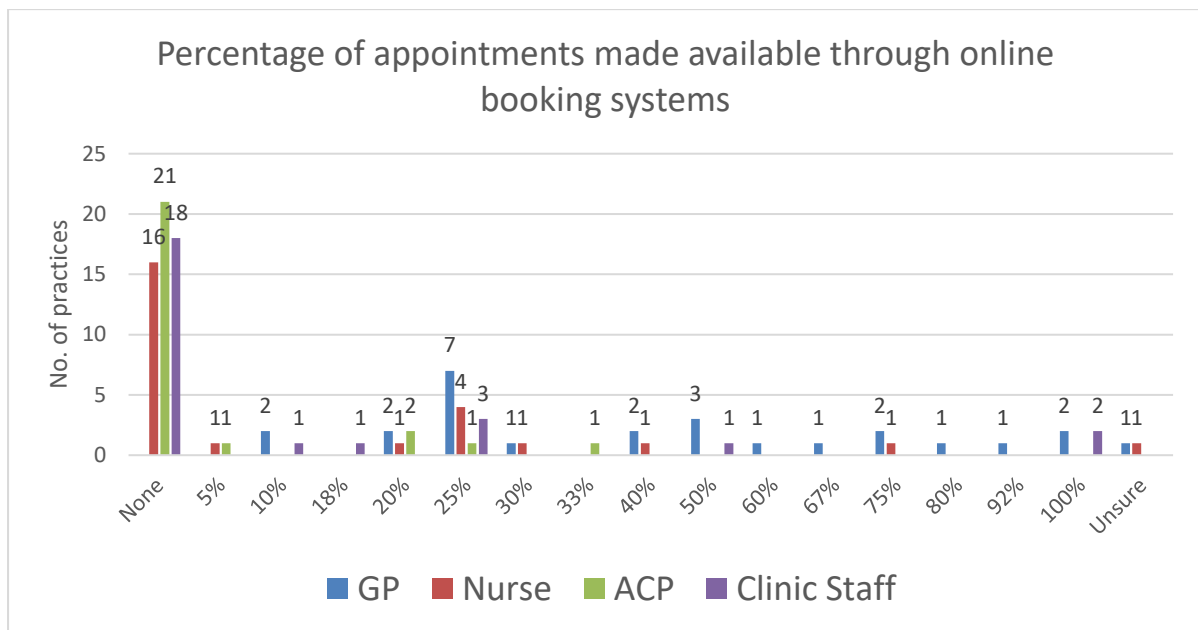
On our Enter and View visits some patients told us of their experiences with online access. We were told:

- At one practice three people told us they used the website to make an appointment and they found they were able to get an appointment in a reasonable time. One said the only way to get an appointment on a day in the future is to use the website.
- At two practices we were told there was a limited take up of their online booking facility.

Who can you book online to see?

All practices who responded to the questionnaire offer access to GP appointments through online services. Ten practices (38%) offer access to nurse appointments, eight (30%) offer access to clinic staff appointments and five (19%) offer access to Advanced Clinical Practitioners (ACP).

The proportion of appointments made available varies widely from practice to practice.



Most commonly for each staff group 25% of appointments are made available for online booking. All seven practices we visited reserve some appointments for online booking ranging from 25% - 100%. Four of the 26 practices that responded to our questionnaire told us they offer less than 25% of doctor’s appointments online.

Several practices pointed out the problems they face in offering online access to clinical staff apart from GPs:

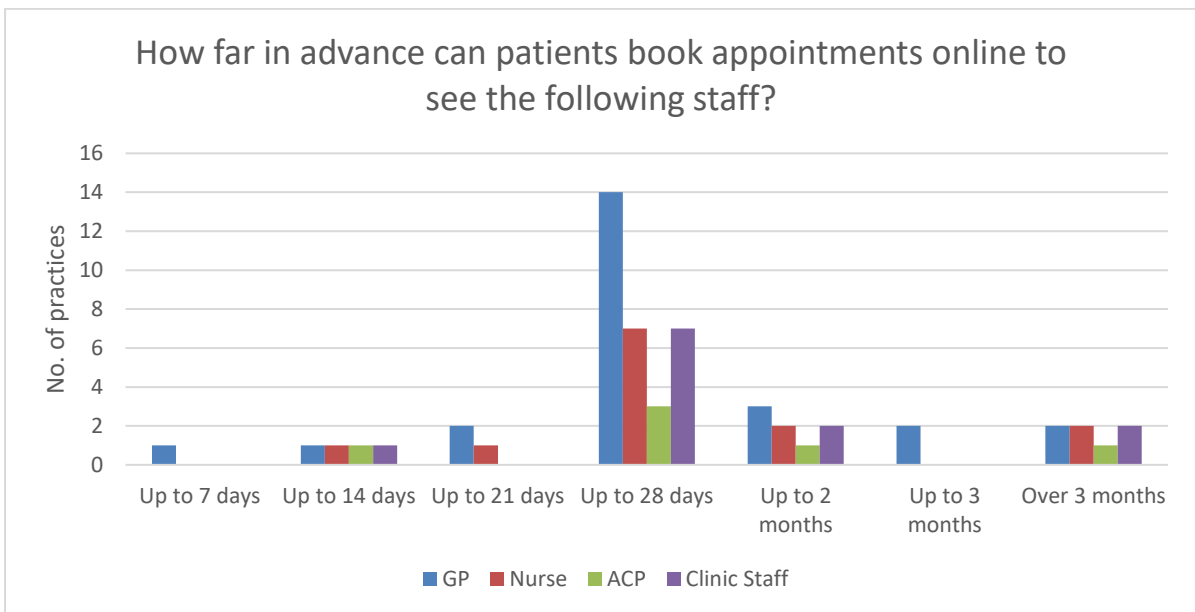
- We currently do not offer nurse appointments on line as nurse appointment durations vary according to procedure needed.
- We have difficulty in making online nurses appointments available to patients as despite writing 'cervical screening - female only' on the

bookable slot, we get males booking the slots. Or a five minute blood test appointment being booked by someone wanting a 20 minute asthma review. We were 'wasting' appointments so only offer online access to GP appointments. If we could find a way of ensuring slots are booked appropriately, we would be more than happy to offer online.

Another practice explained why they offer no more than 20% of appointments via the online booking system:

- As a practice we are working hard to signpost patients to the most appropriate service and therefore do not offer a greater percentage of online appointments as this works against what we are trying to do to ensure patients see the right person for the right condition.

The release of the appointments to the online systems also varies widely between practices.



Many practices allow different advance booking periods for the different staff groups, often allowing a narrower time period for GP appointments.

E-Consult

Two of the practices we visited had introduced the E-Consult service which allows patients to email the surgery to ask questions where they don't feel an appointment is necessary. The service involves patients filling in a form which is sent to the surgery and they receive a response within 48 hours. Both surgeries which had introduced the service told us it was popular with their patients.

- A representative from a Patient Group told us ‘the E-consult service is popular with patients and more people are beginning to use this as they like the service’.

Dr Julian Povey, Chair for NHS Shropshire CCG, said:

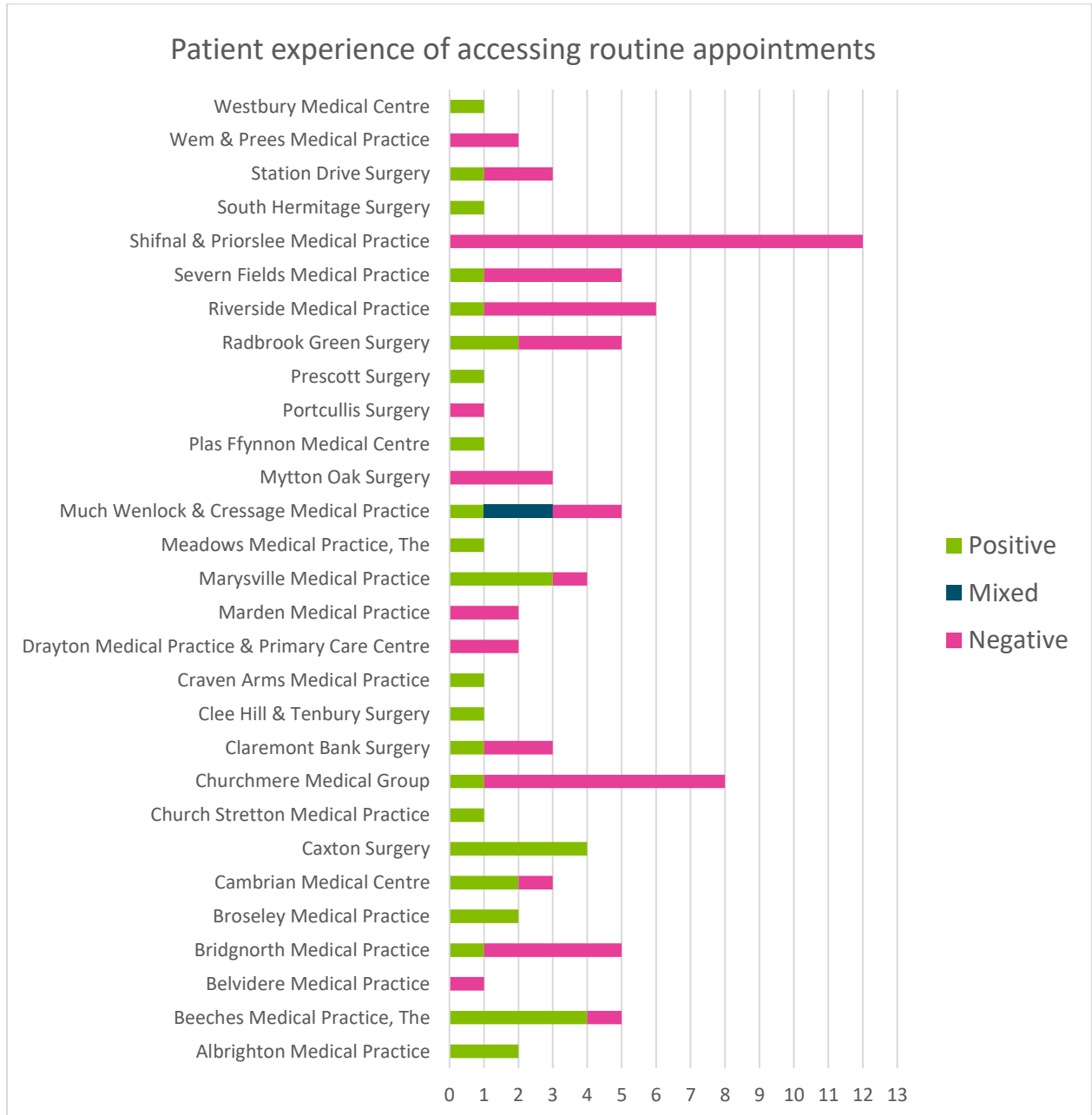
- The online GP consultation scheme is both beneficial to patients and also to GPs. The software will help patients choose where they need to go for their care, giving them the medical advice they require and it could also save them a visit to their GP.⁴

It is hoped that patients at all Shropshire CCG practices will have access to the online GP service by March 2020.

⁴ <https://www.shropshireccg.nhs.uk/news/new-online-gp-consultation-service-launched-at-shropshire-practices/>

Access to routine appointments

Ninety three people shared experiences of accessing routine appointments, 55 (59%) were negative, 36 (39%) were positive and 2 (2%) were mixed. The feedback covered experiences at 29 practices, negative experiences were encountered at 18 practices.



A selection of the feedback we received:

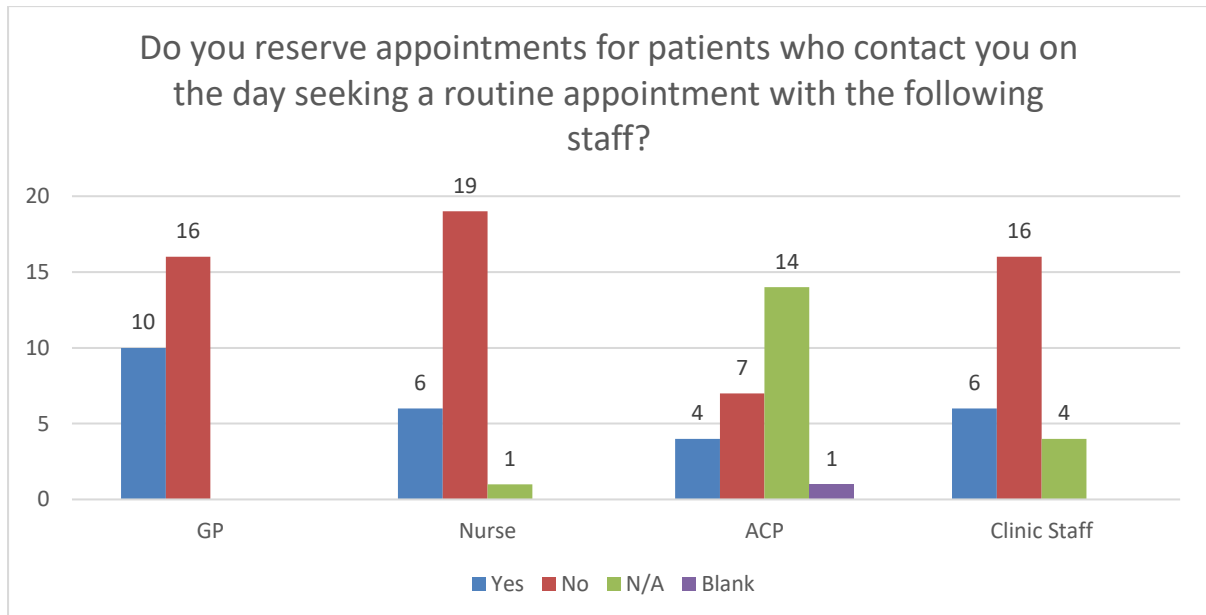
- It takes three weeks to get a regular appointment to see a GP. So I asked can I have a phone consultation and they said it would be three days shorter wait.

- There should be access to early morning and evening appointments, which should also be available on Patient Access. It can be very difficult if your workplace make it difficult for you to take time for medical appointments.
- When we first came the GP was really good but now you have to phone after 2pm for an appointment and it will be a month away. Worried about making an appointment one month in advance as my husband has Parkinson’s and Dementia.
- Cannot fault the surgery. I am having my health MOT next week, which was easy to book. I can always get appointments easily.

On our Enter and View visits patients told us:

- They are good at fitting me in. It is a very good practice.
- It can take three weeks for a non-urgent appointment.
- At one surgery seven patients told us it is only possible to book an appointment on the day you call.

A minority of practices, 10 (39% of those who responded to our questionnaire), told us that they reserve routine appointments for patients who contact them on the day.



Where they do reserve appointments the proportion reserved varies from 2% through to ‘up to 100%’. It is unclear for the practice that reserves ‘up to 100%’ how that works with their policy of releasing 67% of their GP appointments to be available to be booked online.

Sit and wait

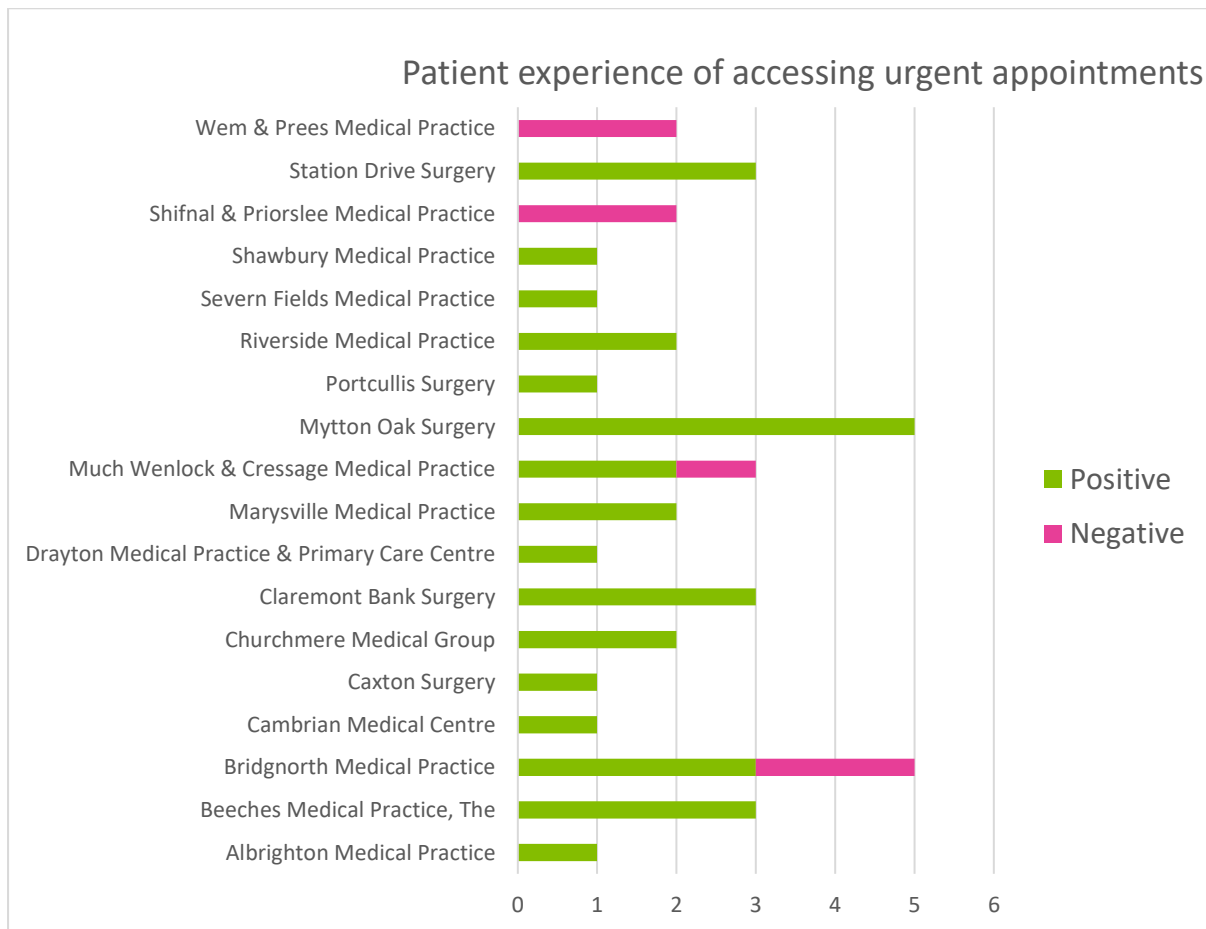
Two practices reported that they offer a ‘sit and wait’ service for patients seeking a routine appointment on the day.

Bank Holidays

We asked if practices arranged for extra capacity to meet demand for appointments following Bank Holiday periods. Eighteen (69%) told us they did, seven (27%) that they didn’t and one left the answer blank. Two of those who don’t arrange extra capacity explained that they provide a ‘sit and wait’ service anyway.

Access to urgent appointments

Forty two patients shared their experience of accessing urgent appointments, 35 (83%) were positive and seven (17%) were negative.

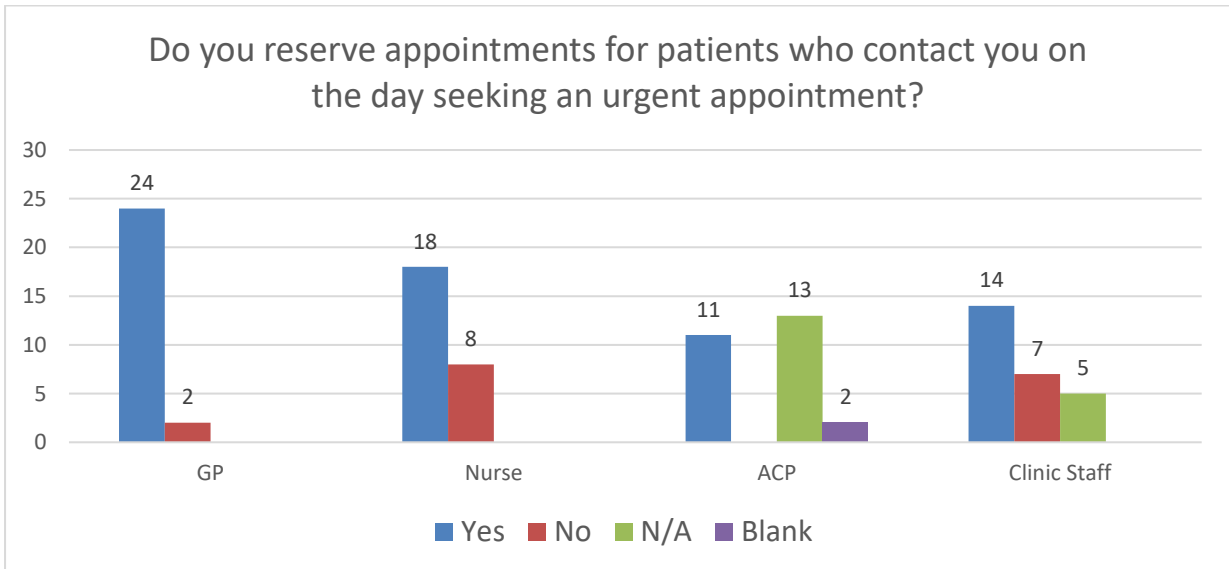


A selection of the feedback we received:

- In an emergency you can see anyone the same day which is good.

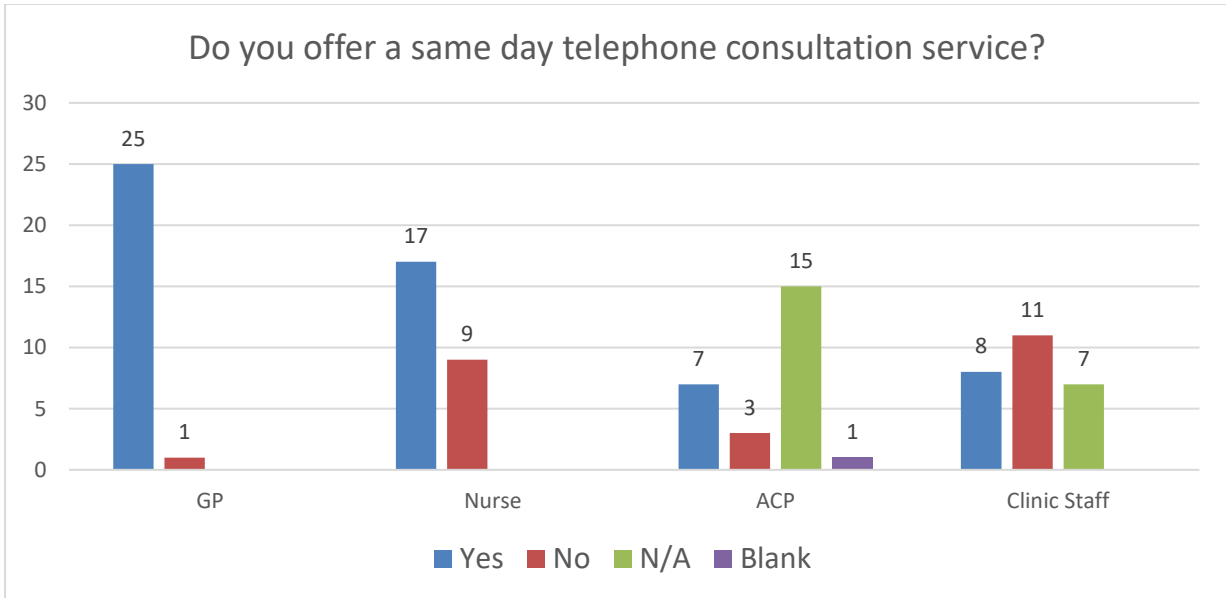
- I am happy with my GP. You have to book in advance but there is no problem with that. If it is urgent you get seen on the same day.
- Sometimes I have to wait for two weeks but they always respond to emergencies on the same day.
- As I was unable to get through on the phone lines (even the number for urgent calls was not being answered), I drove my Mum in person to the surgery. It was approx. 4.30pm by this time and the Receptionist told us that the Duty Doctor was on a home visit so we would have to wait for his return. After waiting over an hour we were told that he was back at the other practice surgery but he would not see my Mum, he advised her to go to A&E if her breathing was really that bad.

Nearly all the practices told us that they reserve appointments for patients seeking an ‘urgent appointment’.



Of the two who said they did not one explained:

- We run a duty telephone triage system every day which allows patients to speak to the GP and an appointment to be made on that day if they need to be seen urgently.



All of the practices except one offer a same day telephone consultation service for patients who contact the practice urgently.

On our Enter and View visits we were told by two practices that they run a Duty Doctor system to triage urgent calls and give same day appointments where necessary.

Extended access appointments

Extended access is part of NHS England’s national agenda⁵. It means patients are able to book routine appointments to see a GP, practice nurse, or other qualified healthcare professional, at a time which may be more convenient - in the evenings, at the weekend and during bank holidays.



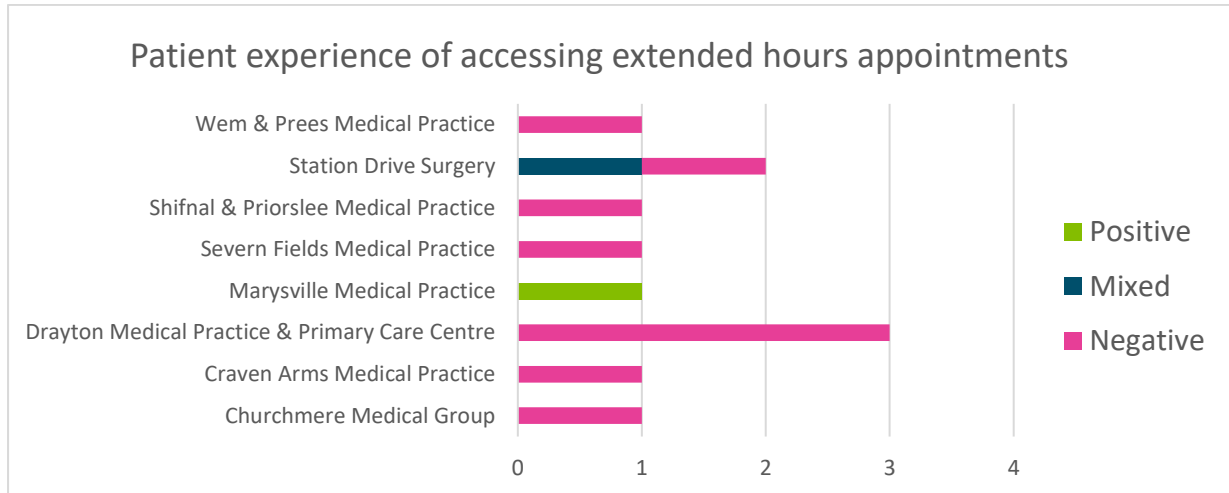
In Shropshire, local practices are working together in a network of ‘hubs’ to provide this Extended Access service⁶. This means patients can access additional appointments at a nearby practice in their local area - the practices will take turns on a rota basis and patients will be advised about location at time of booking, so they can make an informed choice. Five of the six largest towns in Shropshire, Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Bridgnorth, Whitchurch and Ludlow have practices that act as hubs, the exception being Market Drayton.

⁵ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/gp/gp/vf/redesign/improving-access/>

⁶ Hub locations are indicated in Appendix A

In November 2019 the take up of these appointments was reported by Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group (SCCG) to be ‘consistently over 75% and continues to grow.’⁷

Eleven patients shared their experience of accessing Extended Access appointments, 1 (9%) were positive, 1 (9%) mixed and 9 (81.8%) were negative.



A selection of the feedback we received:

- 🔴 Also GP does not do extended hours and Saturdays.
- 🔴 My family and I have never been offered an appointment on Extended Access.
- 🔴 The 0300 number cut me off after I had been holding for 10 minutes. The line seemed to be always busy so I gave up and made an appointment for a normal time

On our Enter and View visits practices told us of a range of approaches to offering these appointments:

- Including them in opening hours and routine appointments (this practice was a hub)
- Offering them only when patients could not get an appointment during normal surgery opening hours
- Not routinely offering evening and weekend appointments as patients are able to get an appointment at a suitable time at the surgery

⁷ <https://www.shropshireccg.nhs.uk/media/2610/combined-gov-body-public-board-papers-131119.pdf>

We directly asked 38 patients about Extended Access appointments. Eleven people told us they had heard of them.

- One patient told us that they had called their surgery for a same day appointment, none had been available so they had been asked to ring the next day. Their condition got worse and the patient had to go to ShropDoc. The patient told us that if they had known about evening appointments being available they would have taken one even though it involved travel to another surgery.
- One patient told us their partner had used the service but it had not been useful as they had been told to come to this practice to have tests done.
- One patient reported that they had used the service on a Saturday morning and felt it was so convenient not to have to ask for time off work to attend during working hours.

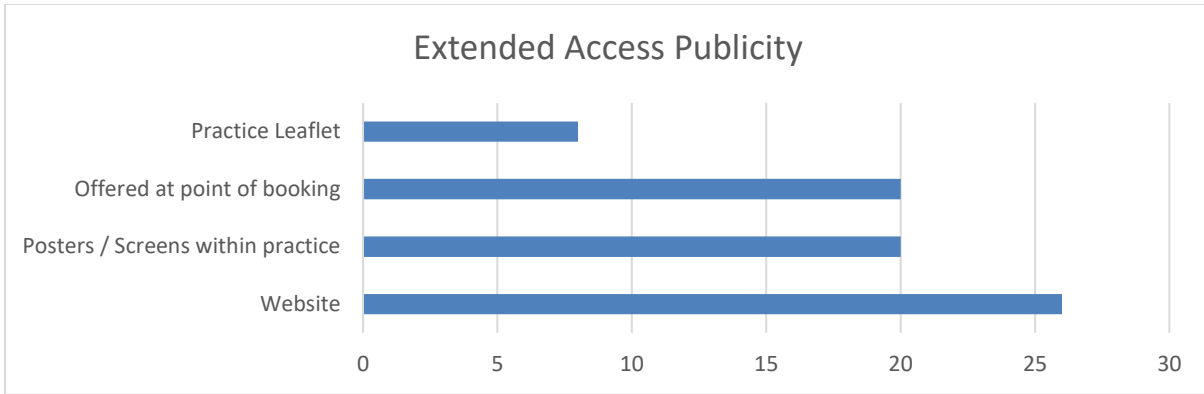
We asked the practices we visited about the take up of Extended Access appointments. Responses varied:

- Use of this facility is infrequent. There does not seem to be a demand for them as requests for appointments are generally met.
- The take up is quite high with appointments with GPs, nurses and phlebotomy usually fully booked.
- These appointments are not popular as they often involve travelling considerable distances.
- Not many people use it - it's too far from here.
- Doctor appointments are taken up but Nurse appointments are less used.

At one surgery we were told that there is an extended hours cervical smear clinic which has had good attendance and the Practice Manager told us that this has resulted in an increase in uptake of smear tests.

Publicising the Extended Access Scheme

In our questionnaire we asked practices to describe how they made patients aware of the Extended Access appointments.



One of our volunteers carried out a survey of how the information available to patients is presented through the general practice websites in Shropshire.

The majority of the 40 practice websites, 38, have information about the Extended Access appointment scheme on their website, 2 do not. One of these two did reply to our questionnaire in error indicating that they did publicise the scheme on their website.

We found that 11 practices, 29% of the 38 who have information on their website, did not have the information linked to their appointments page or their opening hours pages. Most often it was in an item on their news page which became more difficult to find as more recent news is added or in a list of ‘further information’ where the reader would need to know what Extended Access meant.

We checked the content of the information provided by the 38 practices against the current information provided about the scheme by Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group⁸. We found that 17 practices (45%) were giving either incorrect or incomplete information or both. Most frequently this was practices giving incorrect hours of availability or not listing the availability of Sunday or Bank Holiday appointments.

Several practices also make reference to appointment slots where appointments are available outside core hours under a different ‘extended hours’ scheme.

Shropshire CCG reported that from 509 survey returns completed by patients who had used the Extended Access service (18th July 2019):

- 98% of patients were either ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the ability to book appointment at weekends and evenings

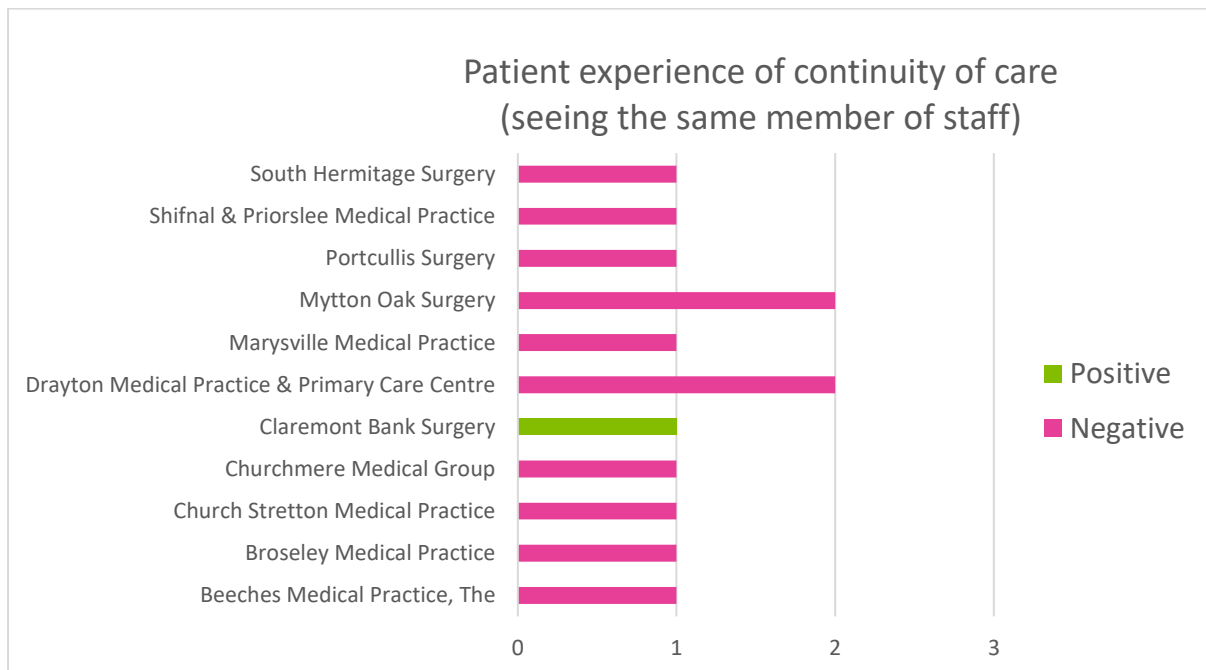
⁸ <https://www.shropshireccg.nhs.uk/local-services/extended-access-and-out-of-hours/>

- 99% of patients stated their Extended Access appointment was given to them at a convenient time with a further 98% stating the location of the appointment was convenient too.
- 97% of patients were either ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with arrangements for making an appointment.
- Over 99% of patients were either ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the service and care they received.

Continuity of care

(Being able to make an appointment to see the same member of staff)

We heard from 14 patients about their experiences of being able to see the same member of staff for their appointments, 13 (93%) were negative and 1 (7%) was positive. These were spread evenly across a number of practices.



- It is difficult when you don't see the same GP.
- You never see a practice partner, you see a lot of other GPs, I have never seen my named GP.
- I do have a named GP but I never see him, I can never get to see the same which is frustrating as I have to completely repeat the information.
- I am not happy with the GP as my wife couldn't see the specific doctor she wanted to. Re-explaining is difficult for us.

On our Enter and View visits patients told us:

At six of the seven GP Practices we visited we were told that there could be a long wait for an appointment with a named GP. Wait times were quoted as being between two and three weeks

- It is “difficult” to make an appointment. This appeared to be because a specific GP was requested and therefore an appointment wasn’t readily available.
- All the patients we spoke to at one surgery said it is difficult to get an appointment with a named Doctor. The patients said they can get an appointment in a few weeks time.
- One patient was unhappy that they could not access the named GP that they wished to see as an emergency. They had a specific medical problem and felt that only one of the doctors had the appropriate qualification to treat them.

Alternative Clinicians

(Seeing a different clinician, not a Doctor)

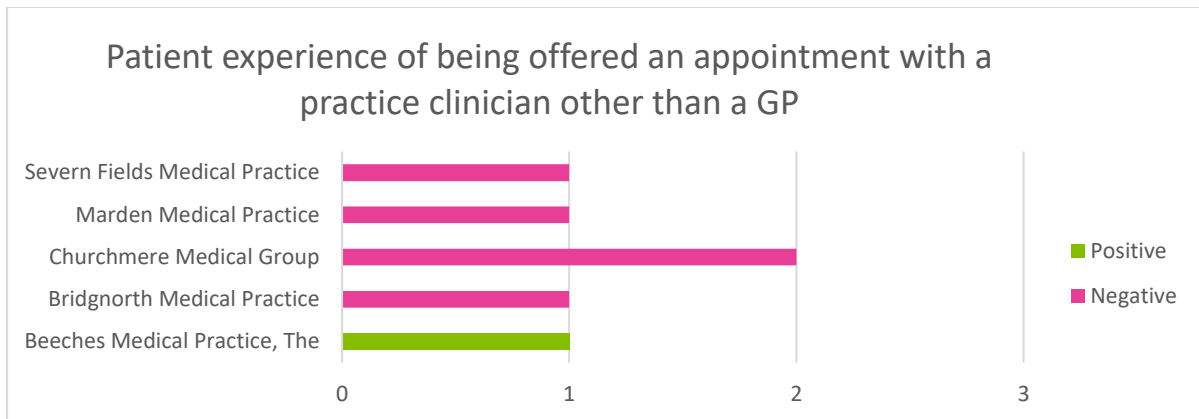


NHS England states that

- patients want high quality care provided by a familiar team of healthcare professionals who they know and trust and who know their medical historyThe General Practice Forward View provides the support for practices to build the capacity and capabilities required to meet these needs, including support to adopt new ways of working (at individual, practice and network or federation level) and to develop different ways of managing clinical demand. In addition to increasing self-care, this includes the use of different triage methods and development of the broader workforce, or alternative services.⁹

Six patients shared their experiences, 5 (83%) were negative and 1 (17%) was positive.

⁹ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/gp/gpfv/about/>



A selection of the feedback we received:

- 👉 It is almost impossible to see a GP. The best I could do was to see the advanced nurse practitioner. She could not refer me to GP and I had to make another appointment.
- 👉 Emergency appointments are now with the nurse which puts me off too.

One practice commented that;

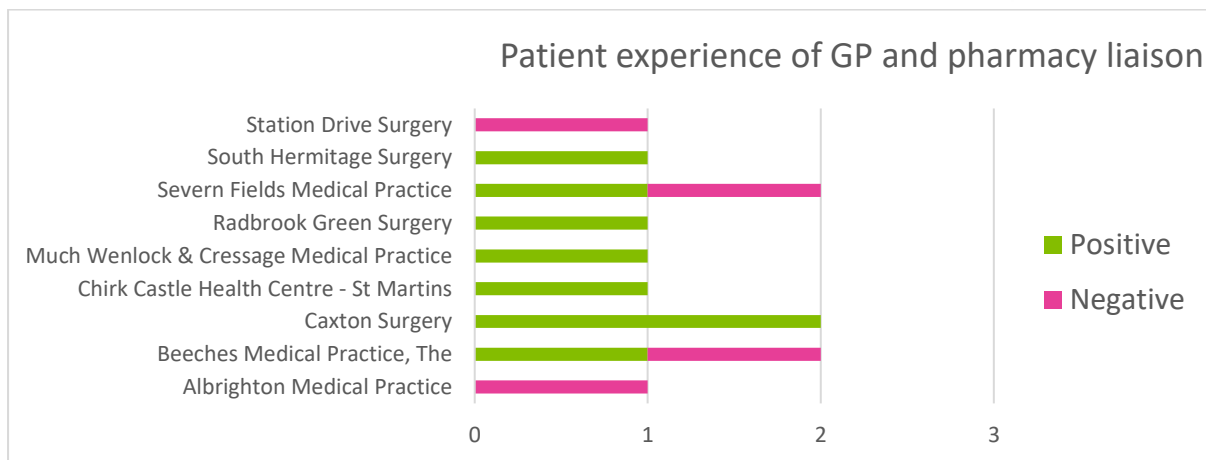
- 👉 Patients need to be educated and encouraged to see alternative clinical staff to GPs. The practice team now includes Nurse Practitioners, Clinical Pharmacists, Physios, Paramedics, Physician Associates etc. and the default of seeing / speaking to a GP needs to change.

Pharmacy patient experience

Shropshire CCG explain that “Pharmacists can provide free, confidential, expert advice for a range of common illnesses and complaints - and no appointment is necessary. Visit the NHS website to '[Find a Pharmacy](#)' near you”¹⁰

Pharmacy and General Practice Liaison

Thirteen people shared their experiences of liaison between General Practices and Pharmacies, 9 (69%) positive experiences and 4 (31%) negative.



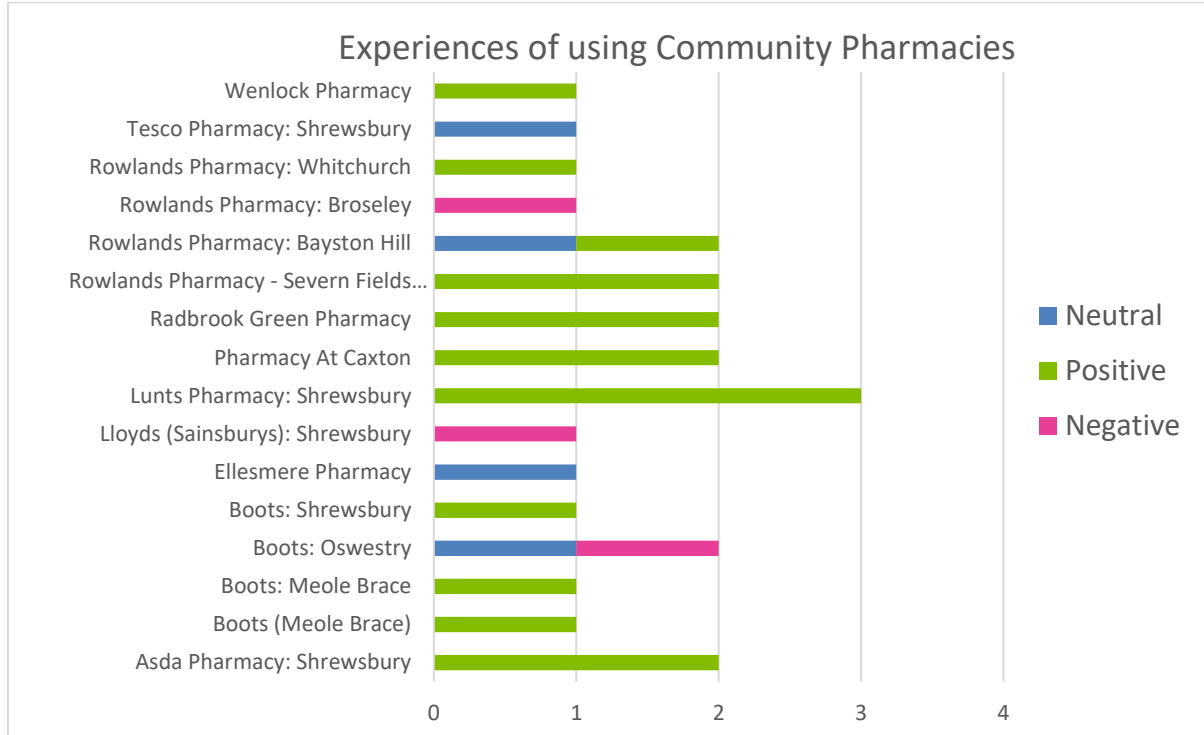
A selection of the feedback we received:

- For my repeat prescription, it goes straight to the pharmacy. We complete it online and I can collect a few days later. We have started to use the pharmacist as a mini GP, they review our meds and do blood pressure. It's an excellent service.
- The pharmacy is on the same premises and it works well. It's all done electronically now.
- I get repeat prescription with 48hrs, it is never delayed and works really well. I also speak to the pharmacy if I have a question, it is quicker and the problems get sorted.
- I have had difficulty with repeat prescription. Tried over the phone but prefer now to collect prescription and take it to the Lloyds pharmacy

¹⁰ <https://www.shropshireccg.nhs.uk/health-advice/self-care/where-to-get-medical-help/>

Pharmacy service experience

Twenty four people shared their experiences, 17 (71%) were positive, 3 (12%) negative and 4 (17%) neutral.



Two pieces of negative feedback raised a similar concern:

- I have a real problem with being told to go to the pharmacist. I saw a great long list in the surgery saying don't see your doctor with these things. On the list is a sore throat. My friend had a sore throat and didn't think he should see a doctor. He went to the pharmacist to get help. It got worse, he went to the doctor and then was told he had throat cancer. By the time he was diagnosed he only lived a month longer. I think you shouldn't be put off going to see your doctor. What training do pharmacists have? How do we know how serious something is?
- My worry about asking the pharmacist in Boots is are they even qualified? They are only going on my self-diagnosis. They are not qualified to diagnose, are they? So if I have Googled it wrong, I could get the wrong advice. I would rather go and see the GP.

We asked Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group if records are kept of the advice offered by community pharmacists and if so are they shared with the patient's GP? We were told:

- Regarding your query for advice services supplied by community pharmacists, our understanding is that this is not currently possible for records from community advice services to be transferred onto the patient's medical records due to issues with interoperability between systems. We will raise this with NHS England and seek a solution.

A local pharmacist also pointed out some concerns

- Pharmacists are being asked/commissioned/expected to see extra people especially through the winter period with sinus problems, conjunctivitis for example. There is a national concern about the stress on Pharmacists with increased responsibility, increased disturbances throughout the day. The pressure on staff has increased but the hours have not increased. There is an increased workload and effectively decreased pay. Often less qualified staff are being taken on to fulfil these roles to keep costs down. In this pharmacy it is not too bad the owners are aware of the pressure although they have not increased staff hours. Working in the villages is easier than in urban areas. I would not go and work in [a town centre pharmacy], I would prefer to lose a day's pay then do that. Recruiting for dispensers in Shropshire is difficult, there are many vacancies in this area.

Additional findings

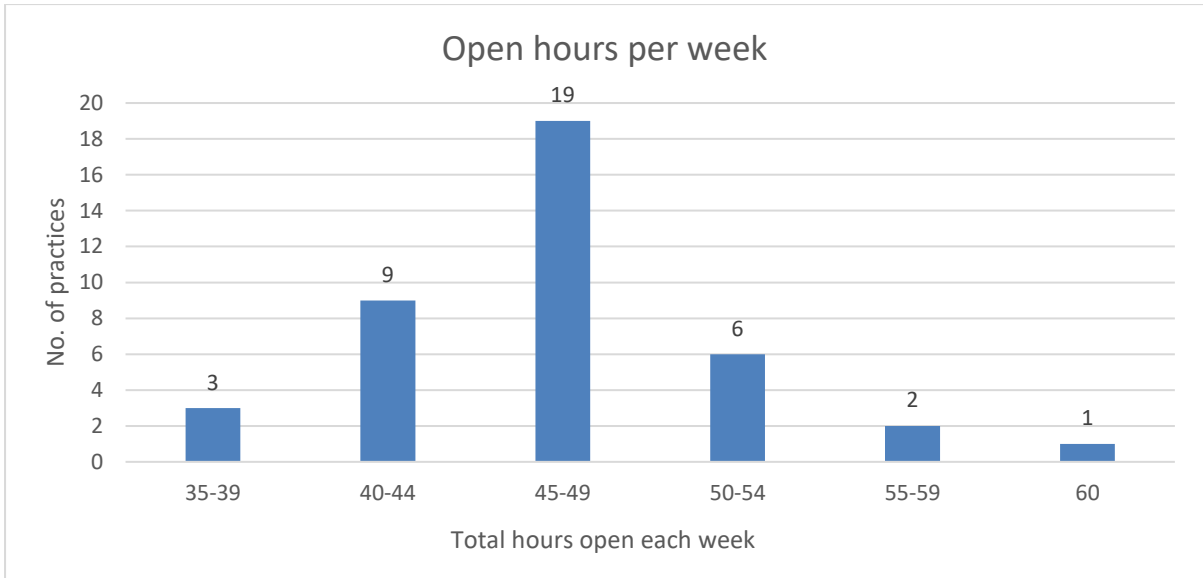
General Practice Opening Hours

When we surveyed the practice websites we found that they offer a variety of daily opening hours. The Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group (SCCG) has told us that

- 100% of Shropshire patients have had access to pre-bookable and on-the-day appointments with a GP or other clinician, from 8.00am to 8.00pm on weekdays, and at agreed hours on weekends.

The evening and weekend access is arranged through the Extended Access scheme which we look at on page 17. We looked at the advertised opening hours of the practices, 10 (25%) advertised that they were open at 8am or earlier every day during the week and two (5%) that they were open either 1 or 2 days a week at 8am. The rest, 28 (70%), open between 8:15am and 8:40am. Several did indicate that staff were in before the opening times to answer the telephones but none gave any indication how patients can access appointments from 8am.

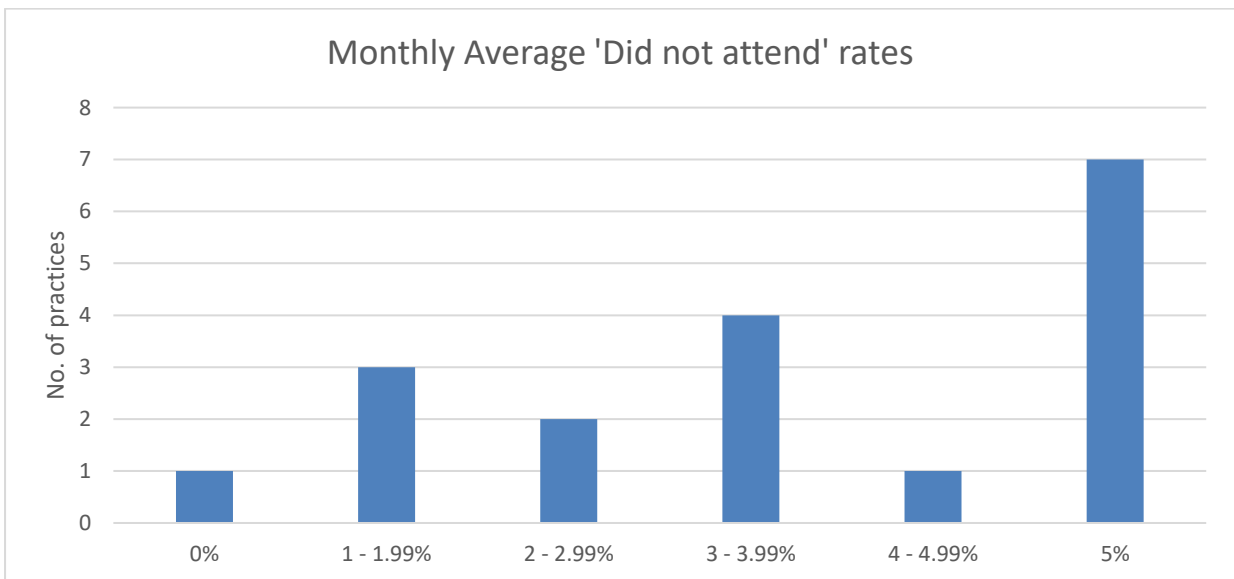
The total numbers of practice open hours each week also varies across the county as shown below.¹¹



Appointment reminders and ‘Did not attend’ rates

In our questionnaire we asked if the practices send out appointment reminders. Twenty four, of the 26 practices who responded, send them via text message, one does not and one left the question blank.

Eighteen of the 26 practices supplied figures for the monthly average rate of patients not attending booked appointments.



¹¹ If a practice runs surgeries from more than one site we took the hours of the site open for the longest period

Several practices reported a higher rate for nurse appointments than for GP appointments.

The practice which does not use the text message reminder system reported a rate of 5%.

Out of Hours service coordination

We asked practices about the number of appointments that are reserved for direct booking by the 111 service. At the time of the questionnaire the system was not up and running in Shropshire, Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group has stated that:

- Direct booking of GP appointments by 111 services will be rolled out during Q3 & Q4 of 2019/20¹² [September 2019 - March 2020].

All practice websites signpost patients needing out of hours treatment to the 111 service. In addition six practices signpost to the Walk-in Centre Shrewsbury¹³ and one to the Walk-in Centre Wolverhampton¹⁴ which are open 8am to 8pm every day. Several of the practices in the south of Shropshire also signpost to the Ludlow Minor Injuries Unit¹⁵ which is open 8am - 8pm every day.

Residential Development

Nine of the comments relating to four practices raised concerns about the negative impact on access to General Practice services that residential development is having currently and in the future.

We were told on one of our Enter and View visits that the practice's list size was increasing markedly due to large estates being built nearby.

¹² <https://www.shropshireccg.nhs.uk/media/2610/combined-gov-body-public-board-papers-131119.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.shropshireccg.nhs.uk/local-services/hospitals-mius-and-walk-in-centre-information/walk-in-centre/>

¹⁴ <https://www.royalwolverhampton.nhs.uk/services/service-directory-a-z/phoenix-health-centre/phoenix-walk-in-health-centre/>

¹⁵ <https://www.shropscommunityhealth.nhs.uk/miu>

Shropshire CCG Response

Shropshire CCG welcomes this Healthwatch report on Primary Care access in Shropshire and would like to thank you and also all the patients and primary care staff who provided valuable feedback. The report offers an insight into the good work being done across the county and also highlights areas of improvement, particularly around advertising and promoting services to our patients. The engagement work helps us to understand our local population's experience of accessing primary care services and provides useful information, in addition to the national and local data that is collected. It is important to note that the period of focused engagement for this report was October and November 2019 and that since then, our practices have increased the variety of ways for patients to access primary care services. All practices within the CCG now offer online and video consultations, providing convenient alternatives to traditional patient appointments.

Our practices work hard to ensure that patients get the support and care that they need, when they need it, and this has been highlighted in NHS England's national annual GP Patient Survey where access to primary care in Shropshire was rated better than the national average. Nevertheless, the CCG will continue to work with practices in reviewing the recommendations outlined in this report, in order to reduce the variation in patient experience and promote equal access to high quality primary care services across the County.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Shropshire would like to thank the organisations who helped to promote this Hot Topic, the staff who spoke to us and the General Practices who responded to our questionnaire. We particularly thank all those people receiving services who have shared their experiences with us.


Get in Touch

Please contact Healthwatch Shropshire to share your views and experiences of this service or any other health and social care service in Shropshire. We gather comments anonymously and share them with service commissioners and providers to highlight areas of good practice and identify areas for improvement.

 01743 237884

 enquiries@healthwatchshropshire.co.uk

 www.healthwatchshropshire.co.uk

 Healthwatch Shropshire
4 The Creative Quarter, Shrewsbury Business Park,
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6LG

Appendix A

Shropshire Primary Care Networks and Extended Access hub locations

North Shropshire PCN		
Clinical Director: Dr Catherine Rogers (Wem & Prees Medical Practice)		
Practice Name	Total Patients	Extended Access Local Hub Locations
North Shropshire Extended Access Delivery Group		
Churchmere Medical Group	15962	Hub (All sites)
Clive Medical Practice	4689	Hub
Dodington Surgery	4946	Hub
Drayton Medical Practice	17524	
Hodnet Medical Centre	3522	Hub
Knockin Medical Centre	3443	
Wem & Prees Medical Practice	11526	Hub (Wem)
Oswestry Extended Access Delivery Group		
Cambrian Medical Centre	12955	Hub
The Caxton Surgery	13440	Hub
Plas Fynnon Medical Centre	9049	Hub
Total	97,056	
Darwin PCN		
Clinical Director: Dr Julia Visick (Marysville Medical Practice) and Sarah Harwood (Riverside Medical Practice)		
Practice Name	Total Patients	Extended Access Local Hub Locations
Shrewsbury and Atcham Extended Access Delivery Group		
Belvidere Medical Practice	5300	
Claremont Bank Surgery	7701	Hub
Marden Medical Practice	7752	Hub
Marysville Medical Practice	5456	Hub
Mytton Oak Medical Practice	10657	
Prescott Surgery	6689	
Pontesbury Medical Practice	7811	
Radbrook Green Surgery	9660	Hub
Riverside Medical Practice	10154	

Shawbury Medical Practice	3999	
Severn Fields Medical Practice	17031	Hub
South Hermitage Surgery	8032	Hub
The Beeches Medical Practice, Bayston Hill	6319	Hub
Westbury Medical Centre	2824	
Worthen Medical Practice	1994	Hub
Total	114,955	

South East Shropshire PCN

Clinical Director: Dr Shailendra Allen (Highley Medical Practice)

Practice Name	Total Patients	Extended Access Local Hub Locations
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South Shropshire Extended Access Delivery Group

Albrighton Medical Practice	8075	Hub
Alveley Medical Practice	2302	
Bridgnorth Medical Practice	16474	Hub
Broseley Medical Practice	4684	
Brown Clee Medical Practice	3434	
Cleobury Mortimer Medical Centre	7083	
Highley Medical Centre	3163	Hub
Much Wenlock & Cressage Medical Practice	8177	
Shifnal & Priorslee Medical Practice	10694	
Total	64,086	

South West Shropshire PCN

Clinical Director: Dr Juliet Bennet (The Meadows Medical Practice) and Dr Digby Bennet (Church Stretton Medical Practice)

Practice Name	Total Patients	Extended Access Local Hub Locations
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South Shropshire Extended Access Delivery Group

Bishops Castle Medical Practice	5352	Hub
Church Stretton Medical Practice	7391	
Craven Arms Medical Practice	3957	
Portcullis Surgery, Ludlow	7908	Hub
Station Drive Surgery, Ludlow	8284	
The Meadows Medical Practice, Clun	3060	Hub
Total	35,952	

Appendix B

Volunteer Crib Sheet for Enter & View Visits to GP Surgeries

Questions for Practice Manager

- Is there currently pressure on appointments and what do you think is causing it?
- Do you know what the demand is for appointments?
 - What is the average waiting time?
 - What is the take up of extended access appointments?
 - How many people can get an urgent same day appointment?
 - Do you know how many people you turn away i.e. people who cannot get an appointment to suit them and so do not book one?
- How do you make patients aware of extended access appointments?
- How are staff trained to offer extended access appointments?

Questions for Receptionist

- What is the policy on how appointments are offered?
 - Urgent
 - Routine
 - Telephone
- Are you aware of extended access appointments? Have you had training on this?
- How do you manage or offer these appointments?
- What is the policy on signposting to other services within the surgery? And external services?
- What feedback or reactions have you had from patients when booking appointments?

Questions for Patients

- How easy is it to get an appointment with the GP here?
- If you can't get an appointment with the GP where do you go?
 - A&E
 - Pharmacy
 - Call 111
- Are you aware of extended access appointments?
 - If no explain extended access appointments are appointments in the early morning, evening or on weekends which are available locally, although not always at your own GP surgery. If they would like more information signpost to the Practice Manager or receptionist. Once explained what the system is - would they find it useful?

- If yes have they used it? What was their experience?

Things to look out for during the visit

- Is there any information regarding appointments and extended access appointments visible in the surgery?
- Is there any information advertising appointments with other surgery staff i.e. Practice Nurse?
- Is there any information about using other services rather than seeing a GP i.e. pharmacy?

Appendix C

Enter & View visit patient Questionnaire

How easy is it to get an appointment with the GP here?

Very easy

Easy

Difficult

Very difficult

If you can't get an appointment with the GP where do you go? Tick all that you have used in the past

A&E

Pharmacy

Call 111

Shropdoc

Other (please state)

Are you aware of extended access appointments?

Yes

No

If you have used this service what was your experience of it?

Do you have any other comments on access to appointments at your GP surgery?

Thank you

Appendix D

Practice Questionnaire

1. How far in advance can patients book appointments by phone or in person to see the following staff?

	Up to 7 days	Up to 14 days	Up to 21 days	Up to 28 days	Up to 2 months	Up to 3 months	Over 3 months	N/A
GP								
Nurse								
ACP								
Counsellor								
Clinic Staff								

2. How far in advance can patients book appointments online to see the following staff?

	Up to 7 days	Up to 14 days	Up to 21 days	Up to 28 days	Up to 2 months	Up to 3 months	Over 3 months	N/A
GP								
Nurse								
ACP								
Counsellor								
Clinic Staff								

3. What percentage of routine appointments are made available for online booking?

Please indicate for the following groups of staff what percentage of appointments are routinely accessible through online channels such as the Patient Access app

Staff	Percentage
GP	
Nurse	

ACP	
Counsellor	
Clinic Staff	

4. Do you reserve appointments for patients who contact you on the day seeking a routine appointment with the following staff?

	Yes	No	N/A
GP			
Nurse			
ACP			
Counsellor			
Clinic Staff			

5. For those staff groups that you do can you say typically what percentage of the days appointments are reserved

6. Do you reserve appointments for patients who contact you on the day seeking an urgent appointment?

	Yes	No	N/A
GP			
Nurse			
ACP			
Counsellor			
Clinic Staff			

7. For those staff groups that you do, can you say typically what percentage of the days appointments are reserved

8. Do you offer a 'sit and wait' system for patients asking for a same day routine appointment?

	Yes	No	N/A
GP			
Nurse			
ACP			
Counsellor			

Clinic Staff			
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9. Do you offer a 'sit and wait' system for patients asking for a same day urgent appointment?

	Yes	No	N/A
GP			
Nurse			
ACP			
Counsellor			
Clinic Staff			

10. Do you offer a same day telephone consultation service?

	Yes	No	N/A
GP			
Nurse			
ACP			
Counsellor			
Clinic Staff			

11. What proportion of appointments are reserved for 111 or out of hours service referrals?

Staff	Percentage
GP	
Nurse	
ACP	
Counsellor	
Clinic Staff	

12. Can you say on average how many appointments are not attended each month?

Please give an indication of the average for non-attendance for all appointments

13. Do you send out appointment reminders?

Channel	Yes	No
Text Message		
Email		

14. How does your practice make patients aware of the extended hours appointments available to them?

15. Do you arrange extra capacity following bank holidays?

Do you rearrange surgeries to provide extra capacity in the days following a bank holiday?

16. If you would like to add further comments please do.