

Clinicians commissioning healthcare for
the people of Northumberland

Improving Access Project Feedback Report

18 May 2022



Background

- COVID-19 > reduction in face-to-face appointments
- New digital tools introduced
- Patient and practice views not considered
- Negative media coverage and public perception
- SDF Funding and Engagement Project



Overview of research

- Explain Market Research were commissioned to design and deliver the engagement with practices and patients. The project ran between January and February and included:

2750 online and 87 paper surveys
distributed by CCG and voluntary partners

504 on-street interviews with demographically representative Northumberland residents

11 focus groups with respondents from various backgrounds

17 in-depth interviews for practices

Online survey for practices completed by 14 individuals

- Outreach surveys and focus groups delivered via the voluntary sector and Healthwatch Northumberland
- Engagement widely promoted through press releases, social media and stakeholder briefings












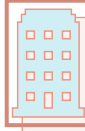
Northumberland CCG

Access to GP practices in Northumberland

May 2022

Professionals: Wellbeing

- Wellbeing was being impacted by current working pressures with descriptions of burnout and exhaustion
- This was particularly impacted by the pandemic, but other pressures highlighted were:

	Increased demand		Workforce crisis
	Too many emails from CCG/associated bodies		Staff shortages
	Too much change		Involvement in PCNs and the additional work required
	Demanding patients (short fuses and high expectations)		Physical working environments e.g. not enough space



Professionals: Best practice

- In general, **Practice Managers** had a positive outlook on how access to appointments was currently working in their respective practices, in terms of ensuring patients were able to get an appointment when they needed one
- Other positive aspects around access were identified as follows:

Triage

- Patients getting more comfortable providing more information to the receptionist for triage

The 'return to normal' working for other health professionals

- Allowing for more signposting, easing pressure on GPs

Adoption of accuRx and a dedicated team member to monitor this

- To allow for a better understanding of patient needs prior to appointment by live messaging

A signposting tool devised by GPs within the Forum Practice

- Used to help with triage and determining when and how a patient needs to be seen

Educating patients in the availability of other practice professionals – seen as key for future

- Easing pressure on GPs and changing patient mindsets

Using different terminology for job types e.g. 'muscular-skeletal specialist' instead of Physiotherapist

- Increasing confidence in other practice professionals, easing pressure on GPs

Buddying system with other practices within the PCN

- Supports admin/reception staff with demand



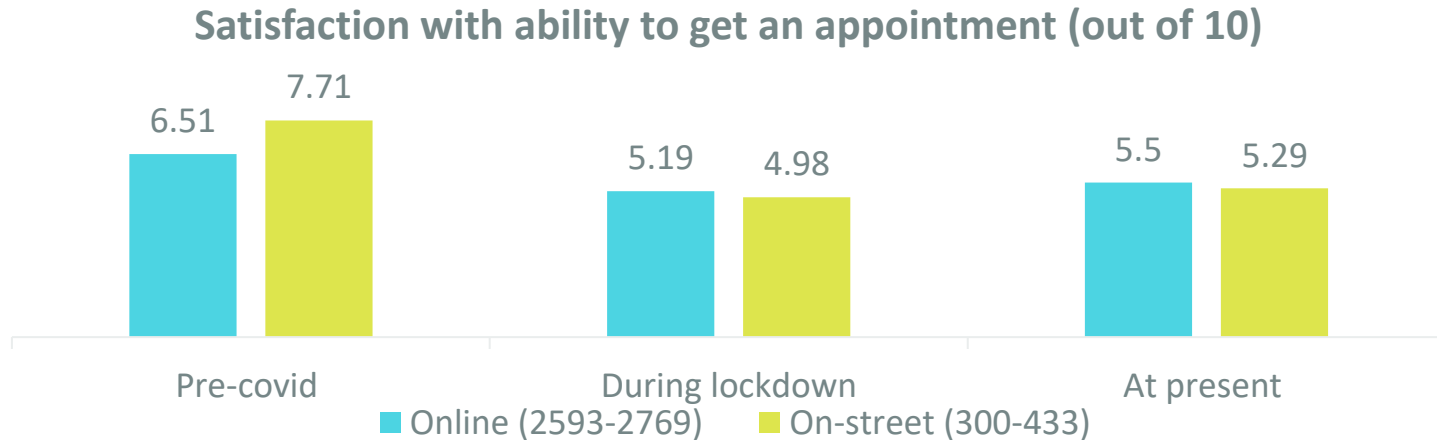
Professionals: digital tools

- In general, the introduction of digital tools was thought of as a **positive in terms of improving access**
- eConsult was highlighted as most useful tool
 - The ability for **nurses to pick up quickly**
 - **Reduced demand** on telephone/admin staff,
 - Ability for **quick medication reviews**.
- AccuRx also reviewed positively
 - Particularly helpful for **communicating with those who had long term health conditions** such as diabetes, or those who have had tests and can be given results through this service.
- There was felt to be an opportunity for greater use of the NHS app for booking appointments



Patients: overall satisfaction

Overall, access was felt to have declined post COVID with both the satisfaction score for online and on-street respondents showing significant room for improvement



More F2F appointments
On-street (11.7%)
Online (33.3%)

Improve phone service (waiting times):
On-street (15.2%)
Online (16.1%)

Pre-bookable appointments
On-street (5.6%)
Online (8.1%)

Opening evenings and weekends
On-street (12.2%)
Online (6.5%)

End morning booking system
On-street (6.3%)
Online (6.8%)



The 8am rush caused by the morning booking system

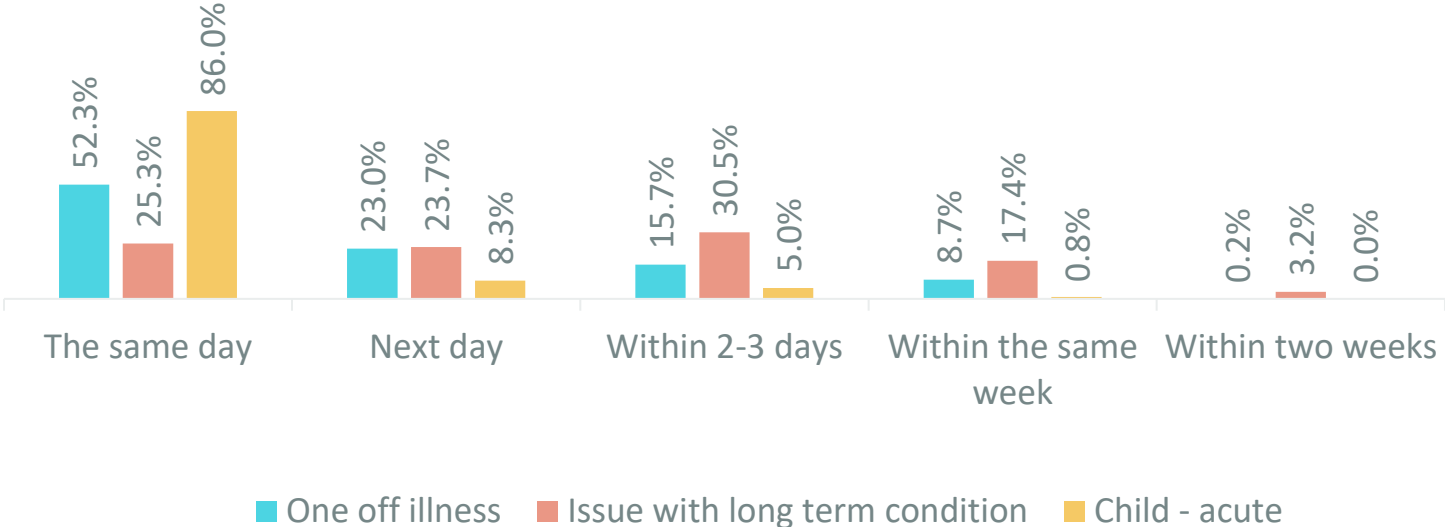
- Patients acknowledged the ability to get an appointment on the day
- However described a “**battle**” for an appointment
- This 8am surge clashed with school drop offs and working hours
- Some respondents in the protected characteristics groups also raised the concern that 8am was not a suitable time for those with additional needs



Greater availability of pre-bookable appointments

- The availability of pre-bookable appointments was a key area of improvement from the survey
- Respondents in the focus groups also discussed ‘same day’ appointments being the only way to get an appointment
- In the survey, there was a high propensity to be seen the same day for an acute issue with a child, but otherwise many were willing to wait

How quickly would you want to be seen (on-street survey only)



Awareness raising required around booking online

- The large majority of respondents stated that they preferred to book appointments via the telephone (61% in the online survey and 64% in the on-street survey), this was particularly prevalent amongst socio-economic group E and over 65s
- Those aged 16 to 24 showed greater support for booking via an app and the focus groups also identified a general appetite for online booking among younger respondents.
- Amongst those who did have a propensity to book online, a number of barriers were identified to be addressed going forward:

The need to provide ID and complete paperwork, seen as a hassle

A lack of awareness that online booking is available

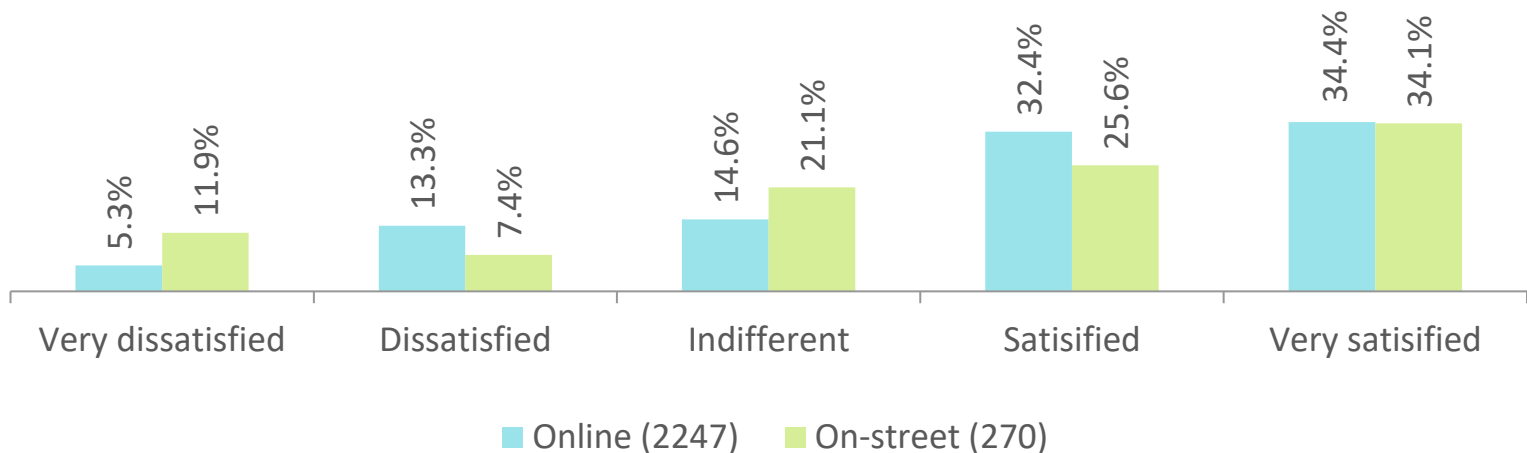
A lack of knowledge as to how to access online booking systems



Face to face vs telephone appointments

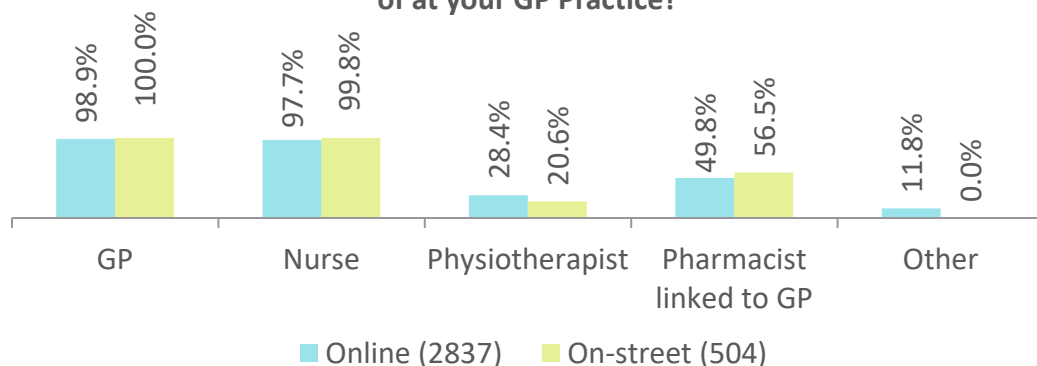
- A key theme across the research was also the ability to have a face to face appointment
- This was particularly highlighted by respondents in older age groups, lower socio-economic groups and other protected characteristics
- However, this was not across the board any many respondents described positive experiences with telephone consultations, particularly those in the working age focus groups and parents of young children, emphasising the need for a **segmented approach**

Satisfaction with telephone consultation



Issues with awareness and confidence in the wider healthcare family

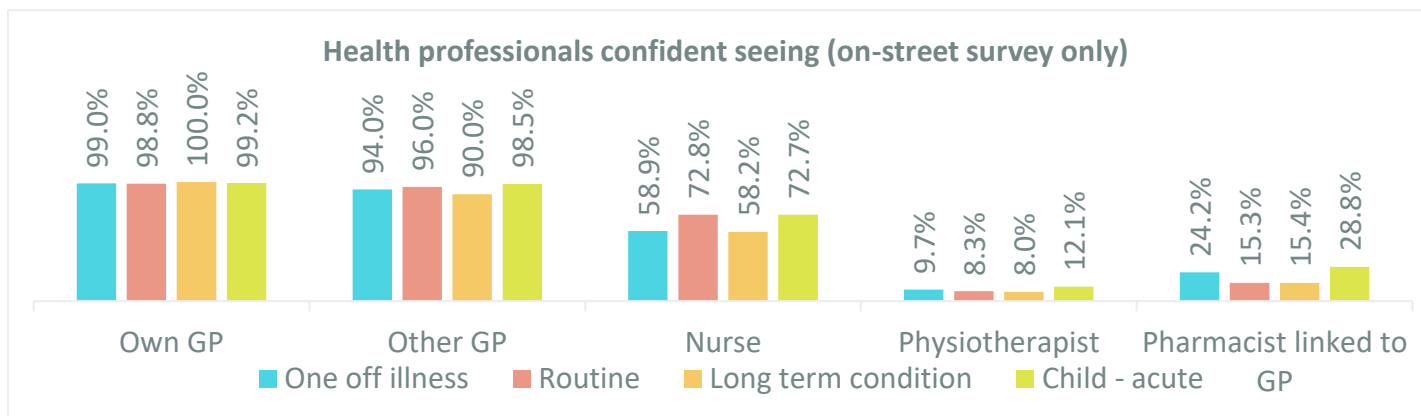
Which of the following healthcare professionals are you aware of at your GP Practice?



Respondents showed a lack of awareness of physiotherapists and pharmacists as well as a misunderstanding of a pharmacist's role

There was also some variation in levels of confidence in seeing a nurse, physio and pharmacist at the practice, demonstrating the need to educate around the skills, qualifications and competencies of these important healthcare professionals

Health professionals confident seeing (on-street survey only)



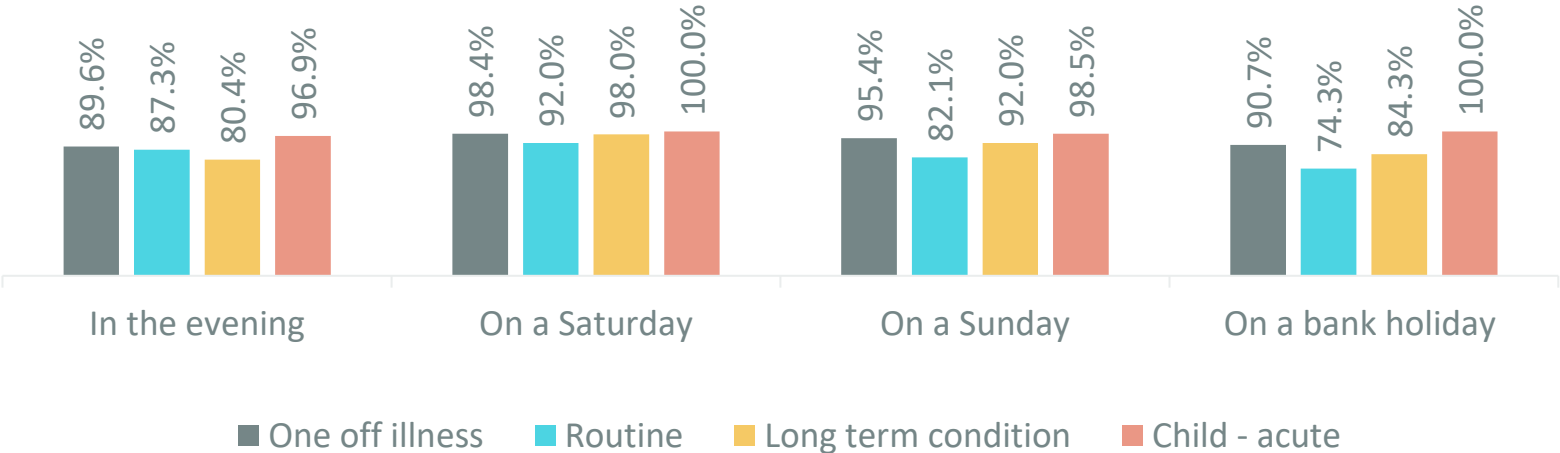
Strong support for out of hours

Offering appointments on evenings and at weekends was suggested unprompted in the surveys and was one of the most common themes suggested

Later in the surveys, respondents were asked whether appointments would be useful in the evening, on weekends and bank holidays in each of the four scenarios and there was high support

However there was a lack of awareness that this is being provided currently

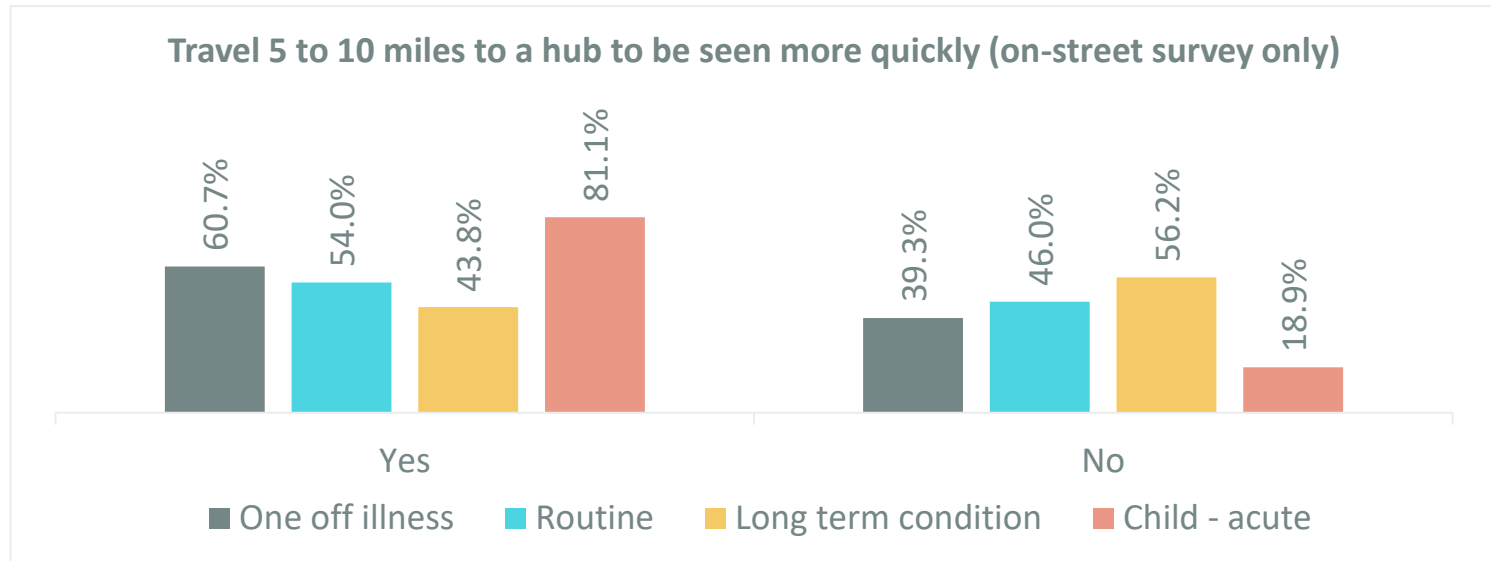
Would it be useful to be seen... (on-street survey only)



Low awareness of hubs

The majority of respondents across focus groups were not aware of Hubs demonstrating a need to raise awareness

In the survey, there was willingness to travel to be seen quicker across all four scenarios, but in particular in the case of an acute issue for a child (like an ear infection):





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Next Steps



Improving Access

What do we need to do?

- Reports at Network level – informing communities
- Consolidate what we heard from the survey
- Understanding the variation of access models currently in place + reflections from the survey
- Tackling the perception of general practice - balancing the impact of the media
 - Face to face and practices are open
 - Who works in General Practice
 - Appointment types – a review
 - Raising awareness of extended access
 - Strengthen the relationship between practices and their patients
 - 7 day access
- Identifying improvements / alternatives - patients with additional needs
- Defining the language
- Wellbeing of Staff

How will we do this?

- Establish Improving Access Programme Group – Strategic and Operational
- Practices will implement 'exit reviews' to assess patient perception
- Education and engagement programme
- Agree the approach to enhance the relationship between patients and practices
- Wellbeing – CCG acknowledge what we have heard and provide a statement of feedback, use of other transformational funds i.e. retention and resilience programmes
- Roles on a wall – describing the different staff groups in practices i.e. Clinical Pharmacists, Social Prescribing Link Worker
- Review practice access models – identifying those with the elements highlighted for issue

Programme Timeline?

- July – Stakeholder feedback and next steps
- August – Agree Strategic and Operational Group Frameworks – who, when and what?
 - Terms of Ref agreed
 - Action plan developed
 - Governance agreed
- September – Wellbeing Offer for staff agreed
- October – Develop 'exit reviews' and outline the education programme
- November – Variation review of practice access models and co-design of the patient and stakeholder compact, 'Roles on a wall' poster agreed

Why are we doing this?

- Improved patient experience...whilst also educating patients
- Raise awareness of the different roles within general practice – to support demand on general practice services and staff
- Fairer and equitable services patients through the review of variation
- Improving Access isn't just a 'GP' or a Commissioner issue...it's a system issue, by working together the Northumberland community will benefit



HOW CAN A

SOCIAL PRESCRIBING LINK WORKER

HELP YOU?

I can help you by...

- supporting with issues that are affecting your health and wellbeing.
- providing advice and support on social issues.
- linking you into local services, groups and activities.



JANE, NORTH EAST ENGLAND



HOW CAN A

PHARMACIST

HELP YOU?

I can help you by...

- giving advice and information about your health and minor ailments.
- supporting you to manage and get the best from your repeat prescriptions.
- supporting you to manage long-term conditions.



EMMA, NORTH EAST ENGLAND



Any Questions

