

Report on the Healthwatch Wandsworth Urgent Care Consultation

Background

Urgent Care is a much-discussed topic, with many people asking how the NHS can help people gain access to the right advice, treatment and care in the right place, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

We wanted to know which factors are important to local people when choosing services in an 'urgent situation' (an urgent situation is when health or social care advice, care or treatment are needed on the same day, and differs to an emergency situation which might be serious or life threatening).

We will discuss the results of this consultation, and our report, with local decision makers who are looking at improving urgent care services and implementing national Urgent Care Treatment Centre standards. We have also sent early comments received to the Pharmacy Needs Assessment team at Wandsworth Council, which they told us will inform their work.

Our Consultation Survey

We developed a survey based on key considerations around urgent care commissioning. Our survey was devised to be quick and simple and relevant to a wide range of local people. It included a mixture of open and closed questions to understand people's experiences of services they had used, and what was important to them about future services.

The survey was open from 14th November 2017 to 3rd May 2018 and was advertised on our website, social media and circulated to our local contacts. We also used the survey during our regular outreach at local events. Additionally, we conducted the survey in the waiting areas at Clapham Junction Walk in Centre, A & E at St George's Hospital and Queen Mary's Minor Injuries Unit to gain responses from people who use urgent care services.

Findings

We received a total of 71 responses to the survey. See Appendix A for a sample questionnaire.

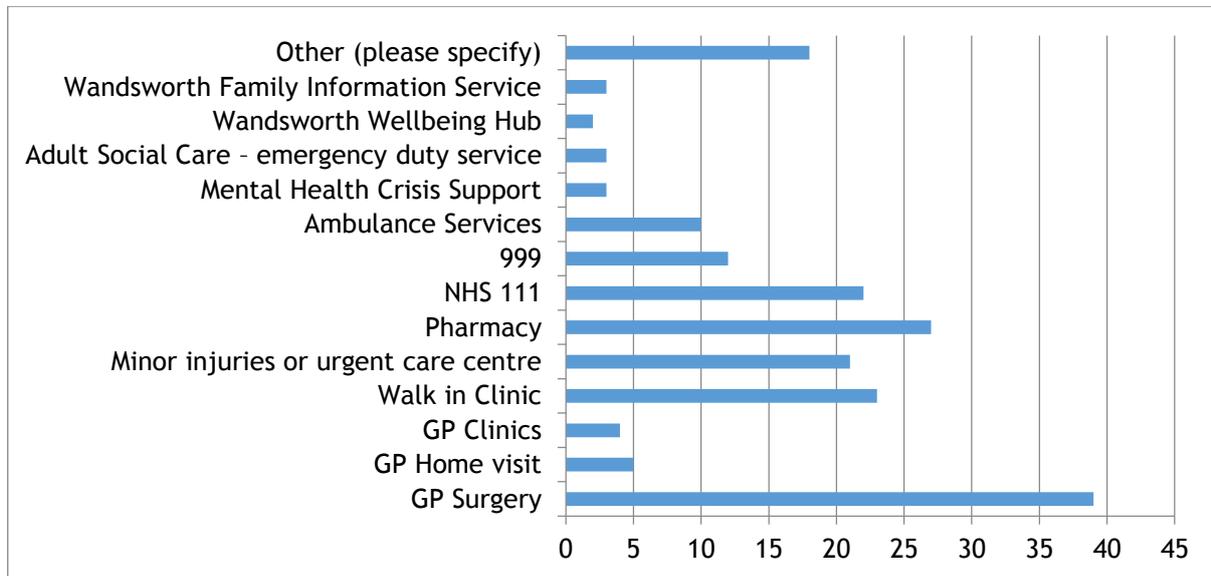
Question one: Have you used any of the following local health services in the last 12 months in an urgent situation?

We first wanted to ask people which services they had used, to understand where people accessed help and to understand which services their responses related to (responses are shown in Figure A). Most respondents (39) had used their GP surgery; pharmacies (27) and walk-in centres (23) were the next most used services.

Some people specified 'other' services that they had used, including the following:

- GP phone consultation
 - Sexual health clinic
 - A&E (5 respondents)
 - Dentist (3 respondents)
 - Not registered with a GP (2 respondents)
 - Wandsworth Wellbeing Hub
 - 2 people highlighted that they are not registered with a GP at the moment
- Outpatients, scans and a hospital in Spain were also mentioned.

Figure A: Graph showing local health services used in the last 12 months in an urgent situation



We then wanted to know more about whether respondents’ needs were met in the urgent situation and to understand their experience of the service they used. We asked them ‘**If yes, please tell us about your experience of the service. Do you think your needs were met by the service you used? If you would like to, include a description of the condition that you had.**’

Waiting times and time to get information and support: A number of respondents suggested that waiting times at walk-in clinics and A&E were too long, and that information was not shared between different professionals. Similarly, a majority of respondents reported long waits to get a GP appointment, leading them to seek help in walk-in clinics and A&E.

Those respondents that had called 999 however, found the experience positive and reported that waiting times for an ambulance service or information were very quick. Several respondents used their pharmacy as well as NHS 111 for general medical advice and found the service to be good, except one comment that NHS 111 always sends them in an ambulance and another who said they always send you to the walk-in clinic. One person highlighted that while waiting for extended periods, sometimes staff change shifts which ‘keeps people in the dark’. Another said that they were ‘forgotten about’ whilst waiting due to an administration error.

“It was great. They met my needs (most of the time). A&E waiting time was shorter than I expected (Chelsea and Westminster Hospital).”

“NHS 111 was as good as it could be, but they did not have access to my notes. Urgent care centre at Clapham Junction was excellent except that I had to wait 3 hours to have a dressing on a wound. 999 excellent, came within 10 mins and seen on arrival at hospital after falling down stairs.”

“A&E service was poor. The waiting time was 3 hours to check my 18-month old’s urine. It turned out that she had a viral infection. There was no other care whilst we were waiting.”

Comments about GPs were mixed. Some appreciated referral and felt the service was good; others talked about problems due to difficulty getting an appointment and having to look for other services to help. A couple of respondents highlighted diagnosis issues with what seemed to be an urgent situation. For example, “GP Clinic - absolutely useless. They advised exercise for the pain in my back. I went to an A&E unit and they diagnosed me with fluid in the lungs and heart failure.”

Question two: What is important to you about choosing where to get help in an urgent situation and would you consider different services to visiting your GP or A&E?

We wanted to understand what the main issues are for people considering using Urgent Care services, and the reasons they have for using their GP, or not, in those situations. The main themes to emerge were as follows:

- Severity of condition and perceptions of waiting times and speed of service
- Proximity of service to home and accessibility
- Availability of appointments and waiting times: one person calls ahead to check waiting times and another would like to check waiting times online
- Levels of confidence in healthcare staff to correctly diagnose issues
- Quality of staff and friendly atmosphere

“[I think about where will be] the quickest that I’ll be seen. I don’t like coming to A&E - sometimes you feel its wasting time when you’ve got others with life-threatening conditions.”

“That I can get treated. I pay for private healthcare too (I don't feel confident enough in the system [NHS]).”

“Accessibility. Knowing that you'll be seen quite soon. People that are friendly and accommodating.”

“It's important to make sure you get the right treatment, and not put [a] strain on other services.”

Information and help to choose was also highlighted by some. Many mentioned that they call the GP practice first and some said they were signposted on to other services if needed or if there wasn't a GP appointment available:

“Making a decision of urgency - have found using NHS 111 to be useful as provides additional sources of information.”

“I don't really know how to choose, apart from very urgent cases to A&E”

Another person commented that it's important “That the doctors are good. I've been to countries around the world and they check you properly, not just give you paracetamol. I'm a little bit disappointed. I went to the Mitcham walk-in centre yesterday and when I got there, they said it was closed. I was so upset as the doctors there were good”.

Other respondents highlighted the additional challenges and needs some people might have, such as young people with Autism and people with long-term conditions.

“I don't see A&E as necessarily safe - there are drunken people. I need to know the right number to call and [be] sent to somewhere local. I need to go with a support worker to help me - they don't work weekends”.

Question three: How could people be helped to consider using the different services available?

We wanted to understand which urgent care services people were aware of, and how awareness of these services could be improved.

A number of recommendations emerged from this question:

- Improved publicity and information provided via newspapers, postal adverts, TV, radio, advertising and online searches. The majority of respondents suggested this as a way to improve awareness of services. One person suggested that branding could be changed to ‘urgent doctor’ rather than ‘walk-in clinic’ to help people know where to go. Another suggested patients might sign up to a newsletter for updates and information.
- Training for GP staff and better use of pharmacists.
- Signposting online and at different health care services based on symptoms; many suggested that GPs could signpost, another mentioned how 111 helped them decide where to go.
- Improving patient confidence in healthcare staff and confidence that the right training and diagnostics equipment will be available at the service. A few people highlighted that it is important that someone signposting you to a service has the right knowledge.
- More information about what the services offer and information about waiting times.

“I feel that the NHS is very informative of the options available. Maybe more posters and more visual advertising. Probably more advertising on TV.”

“If people were more aware of the telephone service, that you can call to get a prescription, that would ease the burden.”

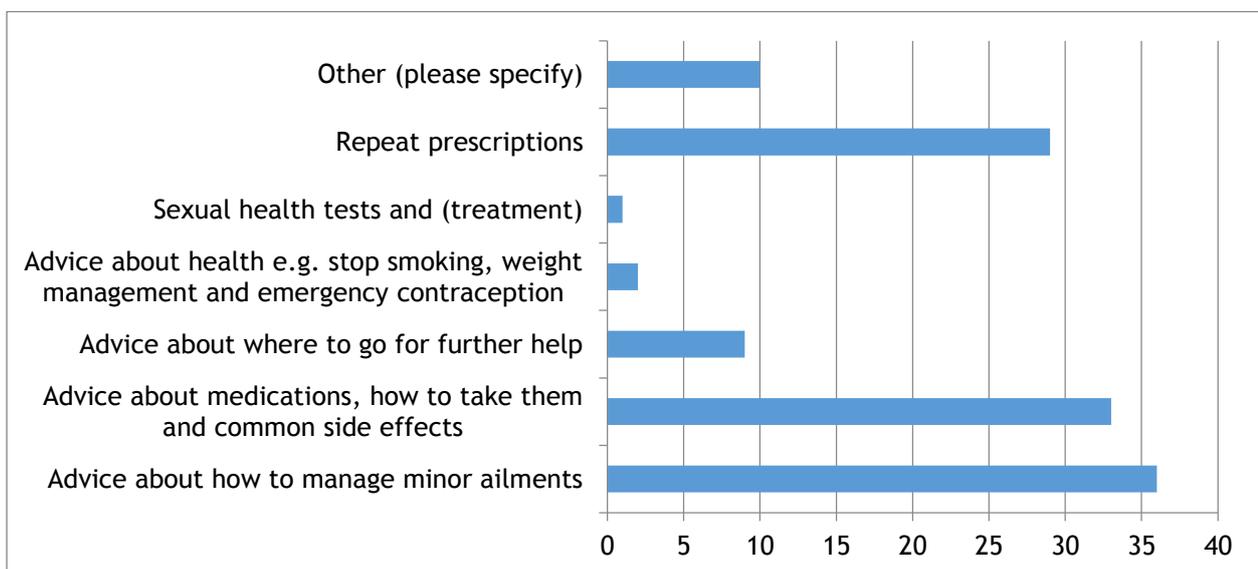
“More advertising on TV and social media - similar to the antibiotics campaign.”

“Plenty of information is available. They need to focus on the services that are already available and improve [them].”

Question four: Do you use your local pharmacy for the following?

Pharmacies are often located close to home, so we wanted to know more about what people use them for. Most respondents said they use them for advice, with the most common reason being advice on managing minor ailments (36 respondents) and then advice on medications and side effects (33 respondents).

Figure B: Graph showing how people use their pharmacy



People who specified ‘other’ mentioned the following services:

- Flu jab (two respondents)
- General advice
- To pick up a prescription
- Medicines for a cough or sore throat
- Blood pressure check
- Advice on taking more than one medication at the same time

Question five: Did you find it easy or difficult to use these services and why? Are there any other services that you would like from pharmacies?

We wanted to ask people about their experience of using pharmacies and whether their needs were met by this service.

The majority of people felt it was easy to use their local pharmacy services, for several reasons. First, pharmacies are close by and **situated in many places**, and **many** of them are **open 7 days a week**. A number of people also felt that they could **build a relationship** with pharmacists and staff, and that they were very helpful. Respondents also reported that **waiting times are short**, and that **pharmacists are knowledgeable about health issues**.

“I’ve known my pharmacist for years. He’s known me since I was four - it’s a trust thing. I probably trust him more than a doctor.”

Many people commented on how knowledgeable pharmacists are, though other respondents said the opposite.

Although the majority of respondents found pharmacy services easy to use, several issues were highlighted, and a number of suggestions were offered by respondents to improve services. These included:

- Private consultation rooms to discuss sensitive issues
- Reminders to collect prescriptions
- Sharing information between services so that pharmacists can have access to medical history and better knowledge of needs
- Availability of other professionals, e.g. nurses, doctors, mental health support, on site to treat minor injuries, offer specialist advice etc.
- Some wondered if pharmacists could directly prescribe medicine such as treatments for infections, and whether they could perform weight and blood pressure checks

Question six: How did you get to your pharmacy, did you take the train or a bus, walk, drive or cycle? If you have any issues accessing the pharmacy, please tell us.

We wanted to find out how accessible pharmacies are, so we asked people how they travel to the pharmacy and if they have any problems. The majority of people **walk** to their pharmacy or use a **mixture of transport options**, such as driving, the bus or other public transport.

Most people reported no issues in accessing their pharmacy, with one person highlighting that their pharmacy delivers medication to their house. However, one person suggested that their pharmacy could extend opening hours, for example, opening on Sunday, and a few others also highlighted issues regarding accessibility.

Question Seven: Do you have any other comments about using services in an urgent situation?

Finally, we wanted to understand any other issues facing service users that may not have been addressed in the survey questions.

A number of suggestions and comments emerged, which are as follows:

- A **contact who is knowledgeable** and able to quickly signpost to the right service.
- **Increasing the number of GP appointments** was suggested as important by many, so as to avoid people using other services, particularly A & E, or perhaps availability of a **GP in A&E** to treat minor issues.
“One of [the] reasons people go to A&E is they can’t get an appointment with GP - services are over exhausted.”
“We get appointments elsewhere (sometimes we’ve had to go elsewhere) because our GP has been packed. Maybe more capacity in the GPs would help.”
- Introduction of a **Virtual GP or telephone/at surgery, triage.**
- **Improved access and support for people with specific needs**, for example **mental health was mentioned many times**, as was Autism and the elderly.
“If it’s a physical issue or ailment, you get seen to pretty quickly. I think that there could be better support for people’s mental health.”
- **Extending pharmacy opening hours.**
- **Improved communication and sharing of information between health professionals.**
- **Improved information and communication for patients to help people manage their own health concerns.**
One person suggested “[It would be good for a] Nurse/consultant to clarify what someone/a patient does next after an operation for example (especially the elderly, or if someone is on their own or doesn’t have a next of kin).”
- **More walk-in centres or appointments** (one person suggested more places for x-rays and blood tests); another said it was good to have walk-in services when it is not possible to get a GP appointment.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

A **central theme** to emerge from the survey was concern over **waiting times to get an appointment with a GP** and the **pressure this then places on other urgent care services**. For example, respondents suggested they often went to A&E for urgent concerns because of a perception that this would be the quickest place to receive treatment.

“[I go to] walk-in centres because it’s probably quicker than A&E and I don’t want to waste A&E’s time. I think about going to my GP, but can’t get an appointment, so I go to a walk-in.”

However, a number of respondents also reported waiting for a long time when attempting to receive care at other services such as walk-in clinics and A&E. Some negative comments about the GP knowledge were linked to those who had more positive experiences of getting what they needed from walk-in clinics and A&E.

In this respect, improving awareness of the variety of urgent care services, such as pharmacies and NHS 111 could reduce pressure on GPs and A&E. Respondents suggested that **increasing**

publicity of services through advertising and signposting in healthcare centres could also help people understand the different services. Likewise, **improving patient confidence in the quality of urgent care services**, for example, in **staff training or availability of diagnostic equipment**, could encourage people to use the variety of services available to them.

“I don't know what is available out of hours except A&E.”

Feedback from respondents highlighted a **high level of satisfaction with pharmacy services** as the first port of call for treating minor ailments. However, it was felt that pharmacy services **could be improved by having trained professionals**, such as nurses and mental health professionals, **or expanded services on site**, as well as private consultation rooms to discuss concerns.

“They [pharmacies] are very easy. My pharmacy is absolutely brilliant - I have a terrific pharmacist there. They do a very good job.”

“They could do quick dressings of minor wounds, so people don't need to go to A&E - they could have a trained nurse. That could save time for A&E to respond to real emergencies.”

Across the different urgent care services, respondents **also suggested that services could be improved if information and medical histories were shared between different healthcare professionals**. This could have the effect of encouraging people to use services other than A&E for urgent concerns.

“Better systems to share information so [they] can attend [to] any[one]. Should not take 2 working days to get repeat prescriptions”.

Appendix A

Urgent Care Services

The local NHS is looking at how it can help people have access to the right advice, treatment and care in the right place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

We want to hear what you think so that we can share information with the NHS about what matters to local people.

The questions are about **when you are using services in an ‘urgent situation’**. This is a situation where you need health or social care advice, care or treatment on the **same day** and is different to an emergency situation where the situation is serious or life threatening. Examples of urgent situations are suspected broken bones, sprains and running out of essential medicines.

Your responses will be anonymised and will be used within our report.

Q1 Have you used any of the following local health services in the last 12 months in an urgent situation?

<input type="checkbox"/> GP Surgery	<input type="checkbox"/> 999
<input type="checkbox"/> GP Home visit	<input type="checkbox"/> Ambulance Services
<input type="checkbox"/> GP Clinics	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health Crisis Support
<input type="checkbox"/> Walk in Clinic	<input type="checkbox"/> Adult Social Care – emergency duty service
<input type="checkbox"/> Minor injuries or urgent care centre	<input type="checkbox"/> Wandsworth Wellbeing hub
<input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Wandsworth Family Information Service
<input type="checkbox"/> NHS 111	<input type="checkbox"/> Other,
<input type="checkbox"/> NHS Choices website	please specify _____

If yes, please tell us about your experience of the service. Do you think your needs were met by the service you used? If you would like to, can you include a description of the condition you had.

Q2 What is important to you about choosing where to get help in an urgent situation and whether you consider different services to visiting your GP or A & E?

Q3 How could people be helped to consider using the different services available?

Q4 Do you use your local pharmacy for the following?

<input type="checkbox"/> Advice about how to manage minor ailments ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> Advice about health e.g. stop smoking, weight management and emergency contraception
<input type="checkbox"/> Advice about medications, how to take them and common side effects	<input type="checkbox"/> Sexual health tests and (treatment)
<input type="checkbox"/> Advice about where to go for further help	<input type="checkbox"/> Repeat prescriptions
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other, Please specify _____

Q5 Did you find it easy or difficult to use these services and why? Are there any other services that you would like from pharmacies?

Q6 How did you get to your pharmacy, did you take the train or a bus, walk, drive or cycle? If you have any issues accessing the pharmacy please tell us?

Q7 Do you have any comments about using services in an urgent situation?

¹ Back pain, [Dermatitis](#), [Heartburn and indigestion](#), [Nasal congestion \(blocked nose\)](#), [Constipation](#), [Migraines](#), [Coughs](#), [Acne](#), [Sprains and strains](#), [Headaches](#)