



First Steps to Health Executive Summary

Purpose of project

The First Steps to Health survey was designed to investigate attitudes to non-emergency care in Cambridgeshire. It was particularly concerned with gathering evidence from patient groups who did not appear to be represented in the last Ipsos MORI annual GP patients' survey.

These “missing voices” included:

- young people (16-17 years of age)
- women aged 18 - 34 years of age
- older people, particularly those aged 75+
- Gypsies and Travellers
- Asian, Asian British and Chinese people

A short questionnaire was designed to capture the responses from individuals to a series of scenario questions about different non-emergency health issues. The health issues covered multi-generational topics. People were asked to indicate what their first step would be for themselves, a friend or family member in different health circumstances.

The survey wanted to find out if people have enough information to make a relevant choice for non-emergency medical problems, and whether they have access to non-urgent medical care when and where they need it.

What people told Healthwatch Cambridgeshire

The survey was completed by 1180 people from Cambridgeshire. Responses to the survey showed that most people feel they can manage without medical advice on some health issues but not others. For each of the questions there were people whose first step would be to ask for a GP appointment.

Whilst individuals' comments showed an awareness of the pressures on resources and the impact on access to GP services, many people were not necessarily using their Pharmacy, NHS 111 or other sources of information instead. Pharmacists were often consulted for physical health issues but not for mental health issues. Not many of the respondents opted to call NHS 111 for help for the scenarios illustrated, although many reported previously using NHS 111.

Responses from individuals in the targeted missing voices groups were mostly in line with the responses from other sections of the community.

Most people were positive about their experiences of using their GP surgeries, although a significant number of people commented on negative experiences with front line staff.

Some people reported concerns about the accessibility of GP services for deaf and hearing impaired people, for people who need an interpreter and for people with mental health problems. This was a particular issue in relation to the telephone triage system used by some practices for emergency appointments.

Recommendations

As a result of the findings of this survey, Healthwatch Cambridgeshire is making a number of recommendations:

Recommendations for GP practices

1. Where telephone triage is used, guidance should be provided to patients on how this works. Alternatives should be made available to people who cannot easily use the telephone.
2. Reception staff should receive training in mental health awareness and helping people with additional communication needs.
3. Patients with additional communication needs should be informed how their interpretation needs will be met for both routine and urgent appointments.

Recommendations for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough CCG and NHS England

1. Patients should be easily able to find out about alternative services such as NHS 111 and local pharmacy services. Targeted advertising to certain client groups such as carers should be considered, in conjunction with groups which represent carers.
2. There should be more information available about how young people can get support with mental health issues, using expertise of groups in contact with young people.

For 1180 patients in Cambridgeshire area:

- 89% people are positive about their surgery and their Doctors.
- Many people are not using the NHS 111 advice line or their pharmacy for advice.
- Half of people who commented on the phone triage system to get an emergency appointment at their GP surgery, struggle with this system.
- Reports of issues accessing GP services were made by some people with additional communication needs and people with mental health problems.

You can download a full copy of the report from www.healthwatchcambridgeshire.co.uk or call 01480 420628.