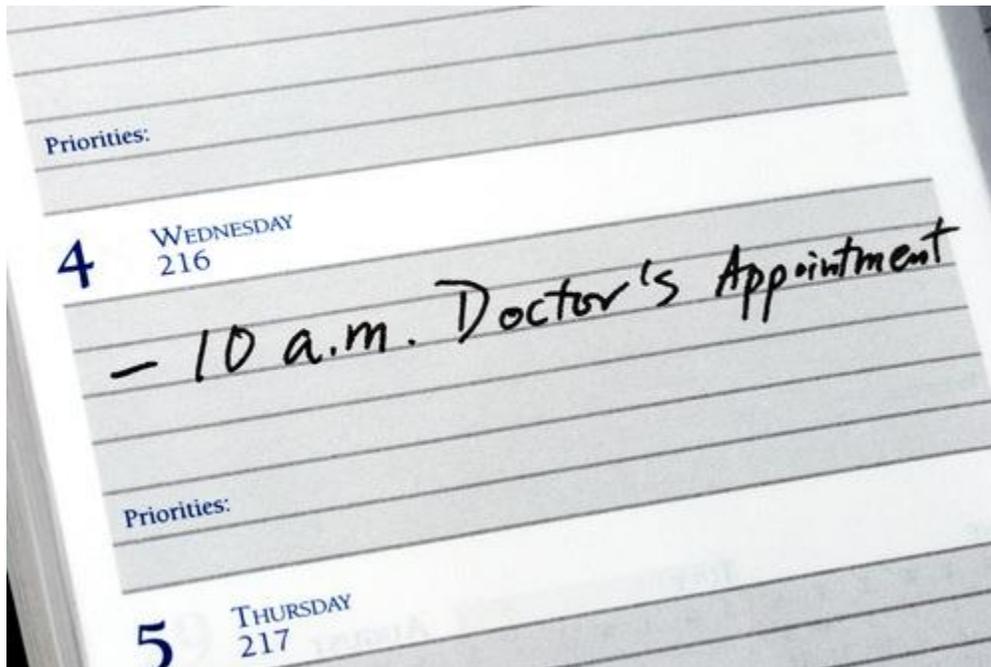




**GP Access Survey –  
Opening Times and Booking Preferences**



***Report by Healthwatch Sandwell***

***July 2017***





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### DISCLAIMER

This report is based on the views and experiences of respondents. Due to the nature of this approach, we recognise that there may be differences between people's views and providers' intentions. Efforts have been made to ensure information is accurate or where necessary, reflect more than one view, whilst keeping to the brief.

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## Summary

This investigation took place as a result of discussions at the Primary Care Co-Commissioning Committee (SWB CCG) meeting of 5th April 2017, regarding 7 day opening for General Practitioners. Various views were presented, and evidence gaps highlighted.

The overall finding is that, if there is varied and available access to GP appointments, weekend opening is only preferred for serious conditions.

It was also found that GP opening times is a far more complex area than simply asking people when they want GPs to open, depending on several factors, and it is difficult to obtain meaningful evidence.

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*GP opening and booking preferences is a complex area and it is difficult to obtain meaningful evidence*

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There was significant preference shown for most of the appointment times and booking methods presented in the investigation scenarios. There was also considerable support for a Skype or telephone consultation with any GP, if it was within ten minutes.

The aim of this investigation was to gain some insight into patients' views and behaviours in relation to GP opening times and booking preferences, to help inform the commissioning process and how patients might be engaged. This included looking at:

- Stated preferences
- What patients would actually do
- What they think their GP offers

The survey was completed by 62 members of the public which covered 31 GP practices in Sandwell.

The background to this investigation included NHS England having set goals that by 2020, 100% of the population to have access to weekend/evening routine GP appointments.

## Recommendations

- When considering GP opening times and access, the need to obtain meaningful evidence and the complexities involved in doing this has to be taken into account. This includes recognising that what people say they prefer, can vary depending on the specific need, and stated preferences can differ from behaviour in given situations.
- GP services, including consultations, need to be provided in a variety of ways to meet the varied expectations of patients. For example:
  - Providing telephone or Skype consultations with any GP within 10 minutes.
  - Walk in and wait to be seen

How much variation there is between different practices in ways of booking should be investigated, with the intention to move towards a more consistent patient offer, that addresses their expectation and needs.

## Findings and Results

The survey was completed by 62 members of the public which covered 31 GP practices in Sandwell. For a breakdown of practices see appendix one. HWS visited 19 places to complete the survey with the general public between May and June 2017. This included local libraries, leisure centres and various community groups and events.

The findings are as follows:



**Overall Finding:** These results are very complex, but we have tried to combine all of the results from the preference and scenarios questions into a single statement thus:

If there is varied and available access to GP appointments, weekend opening is only preferred for serious conditions.

**Complexity and Meaning of Evidence:** In designing and carrying out this investigation, it was identified that GP opening and booking preferences is a complex area, and it is difficult to obtain meaningful evidence. The complexity arises from the multiple factors and options, and their many combinations e.g. patient condition, opening times, booking methods. Therefore, the real public need is unlikely to be resolved by simple centralised policies.

**Support For Alternative Access:** There was significant support for most of the appointment times and booking methods presented in the scenarios, except for advanced booking, 2 or more weeks ahead, for the early morning or evening. There was a significant preference for walk in and wait to be seen. There was also considerable support for a Skype or telephone consultation with any GP, if it was within ten minutes. Although this would not suit everybody, there was a demand, and we assume that this approach provides a cost effective solution. Therefore, if a variety of ways of accessing a GP are to be offered (e.g. opening times, how to book), this suggestion should be considered as part of a range of services.

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*If there is varied and available access to GP appointments, weekend opening is only preferred for serious conditions*

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### **Patient Preferences and Behaviours Vary:**

When people were asked about their preferences for opening times and how to book, the results were fairly similar for the minor or serious conditions, with 'Weekdays opening' and 'Book on the day only' being most preferred. However, when presented with different scenarios, which were being used as a proxy for how people actually behave, preferences varied with conditions. In particular, people wanted different opening and booking times if they found themselves with a condition at the weekend. We believe that the main finding here is that people's stated preference does not necessarily correlate with their behaviour.

The age profile was slightly underrepresented in the 75+ age group. The ethnic profile gives a profile representative of the area in terms of white English/British to other groups.

For a full breakdown of results see appendix two.

### **Rationale and Aim**

The aim of this investigation was to gain some insight into patients' views and behaviours in relation to GP opening times and booking preferences. This included looking at:

- Stated preferences
- What patients would actually do
- What they think their GP offers

It was decided to undertake this investigation as a result of discussions at the Primary Care Co-Commissioning Committee (SWB CCG) meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> April 2017, regarding 7-day opening. Various views were presented. This included views that patients don't want or use this facility, as well as views in favour, and there being Government policy relating to providing this facility. Healthwatch Sandwell (HWS) was also aware that GP access is an issue that is regularly heard from its experience gathering.



There did not appear to be evidence available regarding patients' views to inform the discussion. Therefore, HWS decided that patient's views needed to be investigated and better understood to inform this ongoing area which is of significant concern to patients, along with a review of background information and evidence.

## Background

HWS met with finance officers from Sandwell and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group (SWB CCG) on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2017 to obtain background information into how SWB CCG had addressed extended opening hours at GPs.

Currently 55% of GPs are offering Saturdays with only 2 offering 7 days. SWB CCG has been implementing extended opening 2 years ahead of NHS E requirements.

There are various publications that recommend that GPs should aim to improve access to their service, including:

**A mandate from the Government to NHS England: April 2016 to March 2017.** (December 2015)

This document includes a summary of the current Government Mandate to NHS England. It sets out the areas in which the Government expects the NHS to improve by 2020. The objectives of the NHS are set out in section 6: To improve out-of-hospital care. This section lists the overall 2020 goals which includes 100% of the population has access to weekend/evening routine GP appointments.

This mandate is also included in **NHS Operational Planning and Contracting Guidance 2017 – 2019** (September 2016)

Finally, **the General Practice Forward View** (April 2016) states that an extra £2.4 billion a year is being committed to support general practice services by 2020/21.

It aims to improve patient care and access, and invest in new ways of providing primary care. As part of this package NHS England is investing £500 million in a national sustainability and transformation package to support GP practices, which includes additional funds from local clinical commissioning groups (CCGs).

The plan was developed with the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and Health Education England (HEE) and contains over 80 specific, practical and funded steps to:

- channel investment
- grow and develop the workforce
- streamline the workload
- improve infrastructure
- and support practices to redesign their services to patients.

This publication identified that patients want... *'to be able to receive care in a timely fashion when they need it'*.

## Methodology

HWS designed a questionnaire with 10 questions, which included various scenarios. Questions were asked about opening times and booking preferences.

The questionnaire was piloted with 6 members of the public and amended accordingly.

A mainly quantitative survey was chosen for this investigation, because we wanted to understand categorical preferences that could be applied to a large number of people.

In designing the survey, several issues emerged, and it became clear that a simple question relating to opening times would lack meaning as it is dependent on several other factors. These include:

- Medical situation
- Choice of booking e.g. specific times, on the day only, advance etc



These factors could all play an important part in patient preferences to opening times, and it is not possible to address the issue of opening without taking these factors into account.

This presented the difficulty that there are too many combinations of variables to address everything without making the survey too complex for patients. Therefore, the survey was based on a compromise of broad headings and limiting some options.

However, this analysis had also highlighted the question as to whether or not choices were affected by these factors, and so understanding their effect became one of the aims of this research, as opposed to definitively answering preferences for opening times.

We used situations (conditions, symptoms) as one of the basis for questions:

- Quite serious
- Non- serious condition and routine

We described the situations in terms of the patients' viewpoint, which therefore may not always coincide with clinical conditions, as patients cannot always diagnose this. We have not considered emergency situations i.e. need to see someone that day, as the answers are obvious.

HWS aimed to survey a cross section of the community, see appendix three.

## Ethical considerations

Throughout this research HWS gave due consideration to ethical issues. Codes of confidentiality were adhered to and the information gathered was recorded and stored as defined by the Data Protection Act (1998).

## About Healthwatch Sandwell

HWS is an independent consumer champion that gathers and represents the public's views on health and social care services in Sandwell. It ensures that the views of the public and people who use the services are taken into account by those who commission and provide services.

Healthwatch Sandwell's activities include:

Experience Gathering. HWS staff meet with the public at various locations including community events, supermarkets, bingo halls, high street etc. They provide information about Healthwatch and ask if people would, 'describe their last experience of health or social care services'.

Enter and View. These are visits to health and social care premises, involving staff and volunteers to look at the quality of services from the patients' perspective.

Information and Communication. HWS provides information and means for people to contact through various means including: telephone, website, email, public meetings, networking with community groups, Twitter, Facebook.

As part of HWS's statutory functions, it is our responsibility to make:

'...reports and recommendations about how local care services could or ought to be improved.'

(1 Section 221 (2) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act - 2007)

## Acknowledgements

HWS would like to thank Staff at the CCG for their time and contribution to this piece of work.



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## References

NHS England and NHS Improvement (December 2015) A mandate from the Government to NHS England: April 2016 to March 2017. Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 13A (1) of the National Health Service Act 2006

NHS England and NHS Improvement (September 2016) NHS Operational Planning and Contracting Guidance 2017 – 2019

NHS England (April 2016) General Practice Forward View



## Appendices

### Appendix One: General Practitioner Practices and number of surveys completed.

General Practitioner and Practice	Number of surveys completed
Bearwood Medical Centre	2
Carters Green Medical Centre	4
Crankhall Lane Medical Centre, Wednesbury	3
Glebefields Health Centre, Tipton	1
Great Bridge Partnership for Health – Yew Tree	1
Great Bridge Partnership for Health – Slater Street	1
Haden Vale Surgery - Rowley	2
Hawes Lane Surgery - Rowley	1
Horseley Heath Surgery, Tipton	2
Jubilee Health Centres - Wednesbury. Dr. Bhadauria	1
Linkway Medical Practice in the Lyng West Bromwich	4
Lyng Centre for Health - Dr. Arora	1
Lyng Centre for Health - Dr. Bassan	2
Lyng Centre for Health - Dr. Dewan	2
Malling Heath Parsonage Street - GP Practice	1
Oakeswell Health Centre, Wednesbury	3
Oakham Surgery, Oldbury	3
Old Hill Medical Centre, Rowley Regis	1
Oldbury Health Centre	6
Malling Health Great Bridge Practice	1
Portway Family Practice, Oldbury	1
Primary Care Centre - Dr. Haque	1
Regis Medical Centre, Rowley Regis	2
Stone Cross Medical Centre, West Bromwich	2
Swanpool Medical Centre, Tipton	2
Spires Health Centre, Wednesbury	1
Village Medical Centre, Crankhall Lane, Friar Park, Wednesbury	1
The Black Country Practice (Neptune), Tipton	5
Warley Medical Centre Oldbury	2
The Surgery, Stone Cross, West Bromwich – Dr. Agarwal	2
The Surgery, St Paul’s Road, Smethwick	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>



## Appendix Two: Questions and Results

<b>Questions and scenarios</b>						
<b><i>A worsening condition that's painful but just about tolerable, can't work or go to school, mobility limited.</i></b>						
<b><i>Q1. Can you tell me your opening time preferences?</i></b>						
<b>PREFERENCES</b>	<b><i>Weekdays 9.00-5.00pm</i></b>	<b><i>Weekdays 7.00am - 8.30 am &amp; 6.00pm – 8.00pm</i></b>	<b><i>Weekends Saturday and Sunday daytime</i></b>			
<b><i>First Choice</i></b>	32	23	7			
<b><i>Second choice</i></b>	7	19	21			
<b><i>Q2. What are your booking options preferences?</i></b>						
<b>PREFERENCES</b>	<b><i>Book on the day only</i></b>	<b><i>Walk in/Turn up and wait</i></b>	<b><i>Advance booking/specific time more than 2 weeks ahead</i></b>	<b><i>Wouldn't go to the doctors</i></b>		
<b><i>First Choice</i></b>	33	20	8	1		
<b><i>Second choice</i></b>	11	16	16	2		
<b><i>A condition that is not adversely limiting i.e. can live with but concerned</i></b>						
<b><i>Q3. Can you tell me your opening time preferences?</i></b>						
<b>PREFERENCES</b>	<b><i>Weekdays 9.00-5.00pm</i></b>	<b><i>Weekdays 7.00am - 8.30 am &amp; 6.00pm – 8.00pm</i></b>	<b><i>Weekends Saturday and Sunday daytime</i></b>			
<b><i>First Choice</i></b>	36	19	7			
<b><i>Second choice</i></b>	9	22	9			
<b><i>Q4. What are your booking options preferences?</i></b>						
<b>PREFERENCES</b>	<b><i>Book on the day only</i></b>	<b><i>Walk in/Turn up and wait</i></b>	<b><i>Advance booking/specific time more than 2 weeks ahead</i></b>	<b><i>Wouldn't go to the doctors</i></b>		
<b><i>First Choice</i></b>	28	22	10	2		
<b><i>Second choice</i></b>	13	13	11	2		
<b>Scenarios</b>						
<b><i>Q5. It is Monday. You woke up with severe throat and ear pain. Can't swallow or sleep and have shivering attacks. Been getting worse for 2 days and not improving. What is your first and second preference?</i></b>						
<b>PREFERENCES</b>	<b><i>An appointment for a specified time on Monday between</i></b>	<b><i>An appointment for a specified time on Monday between</i></b>	<b><i>An appointment at a specified time 2 weeks or more ahead between 7.00</i></b>	<b><i>Walk in today, and wait to be seen. Could be a few hours wait.</i></b>	<b><i>Have a telephone or Skype consultation within 10 minutes with any GP</i></b>	<b><i>Make a weekend appointment (same day if scenario is Saturday)</i></b>



	<i>9.00am – 4.00 pm</i>	<i>7.00am – 9.00am or 6.00pm – 8.30pm</i>	<i>am – 8.30 pm Monday – Friday</i>			
First Choice	27	10	0	17	10	1
Second choice	9	8	0	11	9	0
<b>Q6. It is Saturday. You woke up with severe throat and ear pain. Can't swallow or sleep and have shivering attacks. Been getting worse for 2 days and not improving. What is your first and second preference?</b>						
PREFERENCES	<i>An appointment for a specified time on Monday between 9.00am – 4.00 pm</i>	<i>An appointment for a specified time on Monday between 7.00am – 9.00am or 6.00pm – 8.30pm</i>	<i>An appointment at a specified time 2 weeks or more ahead between 7.00 am – 8.30 pm Monday – Friday</i>	<i>Walk in today, and wait to be seen. Could be a few hours wait.</i>	<i>Have a telephone or Skype consultation within 10 minutes with any GP</i>	<i>Make a weekend appointment (same day if scenario is Saturday)</i>
First Choice	13	0	0	18	7	30
Second choice	1	3	1	11	6	10
<b>Q7. It is Monday. You have been passing blood in urine for 2 weeks. Minor discomfort, but still carrying on as normal. What is your first and second preference?</b>						
PREFERENCES	<i>An appointment for a specified time on Monday between 9.00am – 4.00 pm</i>	<i>An appointment for a specified time on Monday between 7.00am – 9.00am or 6.00pm – 8.30pm</i>	<i>An appointment at a specified time 2 weeks or more ahead between 7.00 am – 8.30 pm Monday – Friday</i>	<i>Walk in today, and wait to be seen. Could be a few hours wait.</i>	<i>Have a telephone or Skype consultation within 10 minutes with any GP</i>	<i>Make a weekend appointment (same day if scenario is Saturday)</i>
First Choice	34	10	3	13	0	2
Second choice	5	11	2	15	4	1
<b>Q8. It is Saturday. You have a stabbing pain in knee when bending. Had for several weeks and seems to be getting worse. You can still move around. What is your first and second preference?</b>						
PREFERENCES	<i>An appointment for a specified time on Monday between 9.00am – 4.00 pm</i>	<i>An appointment for a specified time on Monday between 7.00am – 9.00am or 6.00pm – 8.30pm</i>	<i>An appointment at a specified time 2 weeks or more ahead between 7.00 am – 8.30 pm Monday – Friday</i>	<i>Walk in today, and wait to be seen. Could be a few hours wait.</i>	<i>Have a telephone or Skype consultation within 10 minutes with any GP</i>	<i>Make a weekend appointment (same day if scenario is Saturday)</i>
First Choice	20	11	7	6	5	14
Second choice	2	8	4	12	7	3



## Appendix Three: Demographic of respondents

