

# Mystery Shopping Project Results Summary

## Background

Towards the end of last year Healthwatch released a report about urgent care in the city<sup>1</sup>. The report covered lots of different services, including GP surgeries, pharmacies, NHS 111 and Accident and Emergency (A&E). One of the recommendations of this report was to ensure that GP answerphone messages include information about the new 111 service. This was so that people could be directed to an out of hours doctor if they needed one, instead of going to A&E or being unable to get the treatment they needed. Healthwatch Brighton and Hove decided to take a practical look at how GP surgeries were giving their out of hours information.

Aside from information on NHS 111, Healthwatch also sought to find out if our local GP surgeries were signposting to the local pop-up clinics and the Brighton Health Centre on both their websites and answerphone messages, as they had been advised to do by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). We also wanted to find out if websites and answerphone messages were clear enough, and mentioned the surgeries' opening times.

## Method

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove volunteers and staff met on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2014 to review the websites and answerphone messages of all GP practices in Brighton and Hove, according to the 2013 CCG list of practices. They were specifically looking for information on NHS 111, the pop-up clinics and opening times, as well as clarity of messages. Their findings were individually fed back to all practices in Brighton and Hove, with examples of best practice shared (see appendices 1 and 2). All surgeries were informed that a summary of our findings would be produced for the CCG, along with some recommendations. GPs were encouraged to share their results with their local Patient Participation Group for discussion, and to use the best practice guides to improve their out of hours communications.

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<sup>1</sup> For the full report visit our website: <http://tinyurl.com/o57jdyf>

## Results

### Answerphones

10% of answerphones (n=5) were found to be unclear, due to either fuzziness of the message, fast talking on the message or giving too many confusing out of hours options. The majority of answerphones gave multiple out of hours options for different times and days, which made the messages longer and more difficult to understand.

66% (n=35) of answerphone messages offered the surgery opening hours, the remainder commonly stated that the surgery was closed. 90% (n=48) included some information about NHS 111, often amongst other out of hours numbers. Many included information about the 111 service, including that it was free on mobiles and landlines. Just 13% (n=6) of surgeries called included any information about the pop-up clinics available around the city during the winter and spring.

### Websites

9 of the 53 (17%) surgeries<sup>2</sup> we investigated appeared to have no surgery website available for their patients to view<sup>3</sup>. Of these 9 surgeries, 7 claimed to provide online appointment booking and/or online repeat prescriptions on their NHS Choices pages<sup>4</sup>.

Of the remaining 44 surgeries in Brighton and Hove which had websites, all had information about their surgery opening times available to view. 70% (n=34) included information about NHS 111, although the quality of information varied from mentioning the service to detailed information about service. A range of surgery websites chose to give their own out of hours options, including 0845 numbers and links to other surgeries, alongside their 111 information.

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<sup>2</sup> Number includes all branches and separate locations for GP Practices which may operate under the same organisational title

<sup>3</sup> Surgeries with no obvious website included: Broadway Surgery, Church Surgery, Lewes Road Surgery, Links Road Surgery, Matlock Road Surgery, Meadow Parade Surgery, Ridgeway Surgery, St Luke's Surgery and Saltdean and Rottingdean Medical Practice

<sup>4</sup> Exceptions include Broadway Surgery and Ridgeway Surgery

Only 34% of surgeries (n=15) provided information about the pop-up clinics which ran over the winter and spring months. Across all answerphone and website out of hours information, our volunteers noted down only 8 instances where the Brighton Station Health Centre was given as an option for out of hours treatment.

## Conclusions

Brighton and Hove CCG's recent campaign 'We Could Be Heroes' was designed to encourage local people to make appropriate out of hours choices when they become ill. However, many people are not getting the information they need from their local surgery to make an informed decision.

The information that surgeries provide on the answerphone and on their website is very often a first port of call for people without a pre-existing knowledge of NHS structures, and is a key part of ensuring patients are getting the most appropriate care. Whilst the number of answerphones that refer to NHS 111 is encouraging, a section of patients across the city are still receiving long and complicated messages about a wide range of different and complex out of hours options. Further to this, useful services like the pop-up clinics and the Brighton Station Health Centre were seldom mentioned by surgeries in their out of hours communications.

Improving the information that surgeries provide is a very positive step towards ensuring people get appropriate out of hours care, and would greatly improve patient experience. The CCG provided email information to all GP surgeries to encourage the promotion of pop-up clinics. Unfortunately, the report illustrates that this type of promotion lacks impact with individual surgeries. It is clear that NHS England and the local CCG need to look at alternative methods to ensure that a higher proportion of primary care organisations adhere to spreading important messages.

## Next Steps

1. This report has highlighted the issues around getting individual surgeries to disseminate important health information. How will the CCG work with NHS England to engage surgeries better in the future, in light of this information? How do you plan to monitor if messages are being disseminated by individual surgeries?

**CCG Response:** GP surgeries are private businesses and as such the CCG/NHS England are unable to tell them what to say on their out of hours telephone messages or insist that they have a website. We are only able to make recommendations. The CCG will discuss the report with NHS England, to ensure all contractual requirements are being met.

2. 9 surgeries we looked at appeared to have no website, yet many of these claimed to provide online services via their NHS choices pages. Please tell us what you plan to do in collaboration with NHS England to ensure that patients are receiving accurate information about what surgeries can deliver.

**CCG Response:** Of those listed by Healthwatch as not having a website, 2 are branch surgeries of others listed as not having a website. Another, Links Road Surgery, does have a website: [www.linksroadsurgery.co.uk](http://www.linksroadsurgery.co.uk). The remaining 6 do not have websites, but as stated above, the CCG/NHS England cannot insist that they do so.

Regarding the comment that some of these practices offer on-line booking and on-line prescription services despite not having a website, these services are available through a practice's clinical system and do not rely on the use of a website to enable them.

3. Healthwatch picked up a trend whereby GP surgeries are offering two or three alternatives for out of hours treatment, which each have a specific time at which they are available. This was found to be confusing and complicated. How does the CCG plan to work with NHS England to persuade individual surgeries to simplify their messages?

**CCG Response:** GP surgeries are private businesses and as such the CCG/NHS England are unable to tell them what to say on their out of hours telephone messages or insist that

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## Appendix 1

# Hints and Tips for a Surgery Answerphone Message

- 1.** Speak clearly, slowly and loudly, so that patients with comprehension difficulties have the best chance of getting assistance.
- 2.** Be sure to repeat any key telephone numbers or pieces of information, so that patients have time to write them down and check them.
- 3.** Give your usual opening times at the start of the message, as this gives patients the option of waiting until the surgery is open if they want to.
- 4.** Include information about NHS 111 as an option to call when the surgery is closed, and explain that it is free to call. If you have alternative out of hours arrangements alongside NHS 111, be careful to explain them clearly, as this can be confusing for patients.
- 5.** Mention the Brighton Station Health Centre and other out of hours options such as the pop-up clinics so that patients have the option of going to see a GP right away, if they care calling out of hours.

## Appendix 2

# Useful Local Services

<p><b>Brighton Station Health Centre</b></p>	<p>At the walk-in centre you can access a GP out of hours and without an appointment. The service is open 7 days a week, from 8am to 8pm (including bank holidays, although the sexual health service closes at 7pm)</p> <p><a href="http://www.brightonstationhealthcentre.nhs.uk/">http://www.brightonstationhealthcentre.nhs.uk/</a></p>
<p><b>Information Prescriptions</b></p>	<p>This website provides reliable Health and Social Care information to residents and professionals in Brighton &amp; Hove, and aims to support those wishing to improve their health and wellbeing.</p> <p><a href="http://www.ipbh.org.uk/">http://www.ipbh.org.uk/</a></p>
<p><b>Healthwatch Brighton and Hove</b></p>	<p>Healthwatch Brighton and Hove supports local children, young people, adults, and their communities to influence the design, delivery and improvement of their local health and social care services now and for the future. We enable people to make informed choices about their health and wellbeing by assisting them when they have concerns or complaints about these services.</p> <p><a href="http://www.healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk/">http://www.healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk/</a></p>
<p><b>We Could Be Heroes Campaign</b></p>	<p>A campaign by the Brighton and Hove Clinical Commissioning Group to help people understand where to go for different levels of medical treatment. Includes information about pharmacy, NHS 111, Brighton Station Health Centre, self-care, mental health and A&amp;E.</p> <p><a href="http://www.wecouldbeheroes.nhs.uk/">http://www.wecouldbeheroes.nhs.uk/</a></p>
<p><b>A guide to Childhood Illnesses</b></p>	<p>The Clinical Commissioning Group have made a simple guide for parents and carers about illnesses and wellbeing for children under 5 years old. The information includes a large section on the first few months of life.</p> <p><a href="http://brighton.sensecds.com/">http://brighton.sensecds.com/</a></p>