

Telford and Wrekin Health and Wellbeing Board Meeting

Date: 30th September 2021

Paper title: GP Access Update

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1. Summary

Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin (STW) CCG wishes to acknowledge the huge contribution that Primary Care has made and continues to make to the health system locally in the way they have responded and adapted to the challenges created by the COVID pandemic for the benefit of their patients.

In the recent National GP Survey STW CCG practices scored an average satisfaction score of 69 % for ease of getting through to GP practice on the telephone compared to the national average of 68% .However the CCG is aware from the range of responses in the National GP Survey Data, local Healthwatch surveys and individual complaints that some patients have experienced difficulties in accessing Primary Care especially via telephone, therefore the paper details the range of actions underway to assist both in access to primary care as well as promoting alternative routes for accessing care and support for health care conditions.

These changes in the range of appointment types are in line with the national direction of travel for transformation of Primary Care and have been nationally as well as locally accelerated through impacts of Covid.

2. Recommendation

To note the content of the report and to receive a update in 6 months

Access to Primary Care in Telford and Wrekin

1. Introduction

Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin CCG wishes to acknowledge the huge contribution that Primary Care has made to the overall health system locally in the way they have responded and adapted to the challenges to Healthcare provision over the Covid Pandemic. Examples of this include the joint working with Shropshire Community Trust to deliver care to the most clinically vulnerable at the start of the pandemic, the joint working to deliver vaccinations programmes across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and the adoption of technologies that have enabled covid safe care to be delivered using different appointment types.

As figures below detail this has been during a time of increasing demands placed on primary care. Despite these pressures, locally we know that overall experience of primary care has remained positive. The results of the National GP patient survey published in July 2021 (reflecting data collected Jan – March 2021) indicate that across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin (STW) CCG footprint Primary Care has maintained high levels of patient satisfaction with their services. The results show that the average overall satisfaction score for GP practices was 84% (national average score 83%).

However subsections within this National GP survey and locally the Healthwatch survey along individual patient complaints indicate that some residents are experiencing difficulties in accessing Primary Care services especially with regard to getting through via the telephone to their practices.

This paper seeks to share how the CCG in partnership with Primary Care are working to improve this experience.

2. Background

General Practice has seen an increase both in the number of calls requesting appointments and in the number and range and type of appointments offered. It is acknowledged that pre pandemic the issues of long waits for telephones to be answered existed and it is not solely a consequence of increased demand, however the levels of increased demand do create challenges for Primary Care locally and importantly can impact detrimentally on patient's experience.

The demand for Primary Care appointments has increased to levels above those seen pre pandemic. The table below sets out the increase in demand from June 2019 to June 2021 across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin:

	June 2019	June 2021	Change
Total number of GP appointments	209,519	231,845	+10.7%
Face-to-face appointments	171,370	135,163	-21.1%
Home visits	2,573	2,709	+5.3%
Telephone consultations	27,552	83,702	+203.8%
Video consultations	0	74	n/a
Percentage of patients seen face-to-face	81.8%	58.3%	

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/appointments-in-general-practice/june-2021>

Overall demand has increased by more than 10 percent and, despite the number of telephone consultations rising from 27,552 to 87,702 almost six in 10 patients are still being seen face-to-face. The mix of appointment types reflects new ways of working including telephone triage and expanded roles within practices. It is line with the national direction of travel to have mixed appointment types according to clinical need.

This demand has fluctuated over the last 12 months. The CCG has promoted over the pandemic period through multiple media channels that Primary Care was open and available to see patients, however it is known that for a period after the announcement of the Pandemic many individuals across the whole of the country did not come forward with a surge of demand happening post March 2021 as society began to open back up as a consequence of the success of the vaccination programme. This surge in March 2021 was significant locally for our practices in Telford.

3. Current Actions in relation to Primary Care Access

The CCG is working with practices to improve patients' experience of contacting the practice by telephone and also improve the timeliness of access to an appointment / information to assist the patient's needs.

Key Actions are described below

- I. STW CCG have provided significant support to all its primary care practices to ensure that the IT/ telephony is as efficient and effective as possible to assist patients in being able to access general practice via this route .Information leads from within the CCG have undertaken work with Redcentric, the main provider of

telephony services for our practices who have provided additional technical support to make adjustments and improve phone systems.

- II. The CCG has undertaken monitoring both of the data / information accessible via the Redcentric system in addition to mystery shopper approaches to test out processes put in place to improve telephone access and issued guidance back to practices on what has been found. The Redcentric phone system provides detailed information on call volume , wait times , and demand across operating hours and the CCG is undertaking indepth targeted work with primary care so that data can inform internal changes in practices that will deliver patient benefits in reduced waiting times.
- III. The CCG have identified through an analysis of the GP Survey results that access to online services remains a potential area for improvement for the CCG with 65% of respondents not having accessed online services in the preceding 12 months, compared to a national average of 56%.The CCG have undertaken reviews of Practice websites to assess if details of how to make use of online consultation (e-consult/Emis online triage) is available and easy to find and also if there are alternative ways to contact the practice such as an email address. In addition details on the practice websites about extended hours access has also been checked. Following the website review practices have been supported to make any necessary changes.
- IV. Working with the CCG communication team and patient groups, the CCG is developing messaging that enables our wider population to be aware of alternatives ways to access primary care and other services that might be of assistance to meet their presenting concern.
This also includes messaging that patients hear when they are on hold so they can be informed of what the alternatives there are such as prescription ordering services or online options. The ultimate aim is that we develop a system where these options and others in the community are more widely known and understood and accessed first. This links to the programme of work to build on promoting pro active intervention as part of the Telford and Wrekin place Based Partnership (TWIPP).
- V. The CCG is aware that there is variation across practices and has been triangulating data from various sources to offer targeted support to practices that patients are experiencing greater levels of difficulty accessing the practice. This will also inform our physical quality visits as they are resumed which were a regular part of our calendar pre-covid and involved checks to ensure practices

are meeting all quality targets and taking action against any improvement advice from their most recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection.

- VI. The CCG is also supporting practices to adopt schemes such as the NHS Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS) which offers patients same day minor illness consultations with appropriately trained community pharmacists which will improve access to timely care and also free up primary care appointment slots .
- VII. The CCG has assisted primary care in an ICS system level bid to gain additional funding to deliver increased appointment slots over the Winter Period. This will assist in managing some of the increased demand over this period.
- VIII. The new models of general practice advocate the diverse skills of a range of professionals. This is already reflected in our practices across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin with a range of healthcare, mental health and social prescribing practitioners working in our GP networks. The CCG will work with our practices and PCNS to understand the role of these individuals in managing demand and improving patient experience.
- IX. Additionally the role of receptionist/ call handlers is expanding and changing and many staff in these roles now performs the function of a care navigator. This means they are involved in redirecting/ making appointments with wider team members. Whilst this is a positive thing for individual patient experience, further work is underway to understand if/ how this might be impacting negatively on other patient call wait times and how this can be better managed.
- X. Additionally the CCG have supported practices with Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidelines which have provided advice to practices to help them navigate the fine line between ensuring their doors are open and maintaining the necessary IPC measures to keep their patients and staff safe.

4. Conclusion

Despite high levels of satisfaction generally across STW CCG Primary Care there is considerable variation in access and some patients are struggling to access primary care in a timely way with excessive waits to get through to book appointments or discuss issues. The CCG has shared the range of actions it has undertaken and is continuing to undertake in partnership with primary care to address this situation.

The CCG welcomes working with the Local Council and system partners including the voluntary sector to consider the issue of digital inclusion for those who may have difficulties accessing some of the online platforms that can be used instead of telephony systems as it recognises not all sections of the community can access these routes.

5. Recommendation

To note the content of the report and to receive a update in 6 months