



Spotlight Series

GP services



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GP services

A summary of the feedback we've heard about GP services

GP services is one of the top issues we hear about from the public. People ring our freephone Helpline, email us or talk to us when we are in their communities about their experiences about their local GP.

Between April 2017 and November 2018, we've heard from 365 people about their experiences of GP services. From these people we heard 394 negative comments about their experiences of visiting a GP in Kent compared to 129 positive comments.



We hear lots of positives

- "I can make an appointment without any problem"
- "I am very happy with my treatment"
- "I needed a call back from the Doctor. He rang me within a few hours and we sorted out the issue. We always get excellent service"
- "I can get an emergency appointment for my children on the same day. It is a very good service"
- "I get regular home visits from my GP. I've never had any problems"
- "There is a drop in service every morning from 9am so you get to see a Dr that day"



The issues we hear about are:

- Long waiting times for appointments and difficulties getting an appointment
- Quality of treatment is not always what it should be
- Staff attitudes and customer service
- Complications and delays to referral processes
- Challenges for patients to get prescriptions and manage their medicines
- Concerns about changes to GP services such as closures and mergers



Here are some of the stories we heard in more detail

Appointments and waiting times

We heard **120 negative comments** from people who were struggling to get an appointment or were waiting a long time to get an appointment.

25 people shared positive experiences about getting an appointment.

Comments include:

- “It’s a devil of a job to get an appointment. You can only ring from 8am but by the time you get through all the appointments have gone.”
- “I have to get a taxi to get to the surgery for 8am to try and get an appointment as you can’t get through on the phone.”
- “Changes to the appointment system have made it much harder. I now wait 3 weeks for an appointment”
- “I was calling my surgery for 4 hours and didn’t get through. I tried again the next day and gave up after an hour of calling”
- “If you aren’t in the queue by 7:30am you won’t get an emergency appointment”
- “I have to wait 5 weeks for an appointment”
- “I am hard of hearing and find using the telephone difficult, so I have to go into the surgery to make an appointment. I went 3 mornings in a row at 8:30am to get an appointment but it was fully booked.”
- “I struggled to get an appointment for weeks online, so I rang the surgery. Reception weren’t able to book me an appointment, so a GP had to ring me to sort it out which was a total waste of his time”
- “I arrive at the surgery at 7:30am to try and get an appointment and there are already 19 people waiting”
- “I use 111 because I can’t get to see my GP”
- “I have called the practice 132 times to try and get my tests results following a mini stroke”
- “I normally wait 4 weeks for an appointment”
- “My son needs an appointment. He has to wait for 5 weeks”
- “My husband is 84 and he can’t stand in the queue at 8am to get an appointment”
- “I feel very let down that the only way I can get an appointment is to sit by the phone trying to get through for hours on end, day after day”



Here are some of the stories we heard in more detail

Quality of treatment

95 of the experiences we've heard about were negative stories about the quality of the service they received from their GP surgery.

We also heard **62 positive stories** about people's experience of their GP.

Comments include:

- “We changed surgeries as we were really unhappy with the treatment we got”
- “I went to the GP with IBS symptoms. The doctor didn’t examine me but gave me some cream. I had to see a different GP some weeks later who referred me to a colon consultant.”
- “I am blind and there are no audio sounds at my surgery to tell me when the Doctor is available and which room to go to.”
- “I have an ulcer and the GP prescribed medication over the phone without seeing me. It didn’t get any better, so I went to the surgery and saw a nurse who referred me to the thrombosis clinic. I still haven’t seen the GP or had my medication reviewed. Now my knee surgery has been postponed because the ulcer hasn’t healed”
- “At my husband’s diabetic check, the nurse couldn’t find a pulse in one foot but she said ‘it’ll be fine’. 2 weeks later it went black and had to be amputated”
- “The same GP rings me every few months to question why we have a liquid medication rather than the pill form which is cheaper. Each time I have to explain that he has a feeding tube so he can’t take pills. It’s the same conversation each time”



Here are some of the stories we heard in more detail

Staff attitudes

55 negative comments were made to us about the attitude of staff particularly practice staff.

Comments include:

- “I can’t understand my GP so I have to take someone with me so they can tell me what the GP is saying”
- “I am at my wits end. I can’t resolve the situation with work without the support of my GP, but they won’t help me. I am a carer and I can’t care for my disabled teenager and my young child. I need help”
- “I am concerned about complaining to the surgery as am worried about the repercussions.”
- “The receptionist was very rude to us”
- “I left the practice having been told I was wasting their time. It made me feel like not going back to the Doctors in future”
- “I don’t want to visit my GP anymore because I don’t feel they are listening to me. It has reduced me to tears.”
- “They appear uninterested in why I am there, and I was made to feel like I was in their way”



Here are some of the stories we heard in more detail

Referrals

26 people talked to us about their frustrations with the referral process.

Comments include:

- “My GP made a referral in Dec 2017 but nothing happened so he tried again in Feb 2018 and got an appointment. But when I got there, there was a sign saying there were no more appointments for a week”
- “I called my GP to follow up on my referral only to be told he’s only just done it. That was 4 weeks after my appointment”
- “The District Nurse told me I needed to be referred to a burns specialist but the GP refused to refer me”



Here are some of the stories we heard in more detail

Medicine management and prescriptions

We heard **31 comments** about medicine management and challenges for people to get their prescriptions in time.

Comments include:

- “I was prescribed statins but there didn’t seem to be any follow up to check how I was doing. I haven’t been offered any blood tests or follow up appointments”
- “My wife registered at a new practice and she needed to sort out her repeat prescription. The GP wouldn’t help, and he told me to ring 111 who then issued her with a repeat prescription. It seemed like such a waste of everyone’s time”
- “I have moved surgeries but now I can’t get my repeat prescription as my records have not transferred. I have been waiting 2 months now”
- “After being discharged from hospital there was a dispute about the syringe to administer morphine for my mother’s end of life care. The GP refused to authorise it. I had to get Pilgrims Hospice involved to help me”
- “I had difficulty getting my repeat prescriptions so I rang the surgery but they told me they don’t do this over the phone anymore. I had to pay £16 for a taxi to take me there to get it sorted”
- “I am trying to come off controlled drugs for pain management but the GP says ‘it’s nothing to do with me’ and won’t help me”



Here are some of the stories we heard in more detail

Changes to GP services

- “I have mental health issues. My GP always used to ring me and check up on me and make a home visit if necessary but he doesn’t have time to do that now. He has tried to refer me to community mental health services but we haven’t had any luck”
- “I changed GP surgeries but the old surgery wouldn’t share my records for 4 months.”
- “Since the surgery in the village closed I can’t get to the GP surgery and there is no public transport. There is a community bus but only on a Friday.”

Access to GPs

- “There is no GP surgery in my village. I am disabled and have to pay £10 to travel by taxi for each appointment”
- “Our surgery told us we needed to register with another practice against our wishes as they have reduced their catchment area”



What have we done about it?

We've shared the feedback we have heard from patients directly with the seven Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in Kent who are made up of GPs. We have asked each of them to respond in detail to our report and let us know how they are planning to improve GP services particularly access to GPs in local areas.

Our priorities for 2019/20 include focussed work with GP surgeries to address these issues.

In some areas, we have invited the Clinical Commissioning Groups to come and talk directly to us about their plans for GP services and for us to raise specific issues about primary care.

For example, in West Kent we have raised concerns about inconsistency in the service with some West Kent residents reporting up to 6 weeks wait for an appointment but other practices offering same day appointments.



We would encourage anyone to share their experience with us #itstartswithyou



Healthwatch Kent is the independent voice for local people in Kent.

We have a freephone helpline on 0808 801 0102 or email us anytime on info@healthwatchkent.co.uk

We can arrange home visits too