



**Analysis of GP Service Feedback
in Stockton-on-Tees
October 2016**

Introduction

Local Healthwatches have been set up across England to create a strong, independent consumer champion with the aim to:

- Strengthen the collective voice of citizens and communities in influencing local health and social care services to better meet their needs.
- Support people to find the right health and social care services for them by providing appropriate information, advice and signposting.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees works with local people, patients, service users, carers, community groups, organisations, service providers and commissioners to get the best out of local health and social care services. This doesn't just mean improving services today but influencing and shaping services to meet the needs of the local communities tomorrow.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees is steered by a Board of volunteers, commissioned by the Local Authority and accountable to the public. Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees are the only non-statutory body whose sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak-out on their behalf.

Healthwatch has:

- The statutory right to be listened to; Providers and Commissioners must respond to Healthwatch within 20 days of submission of requests for information or reports.
- The statutory power to Enter & View publicly funded health and social care services.
- A statutory seat on the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Rationale

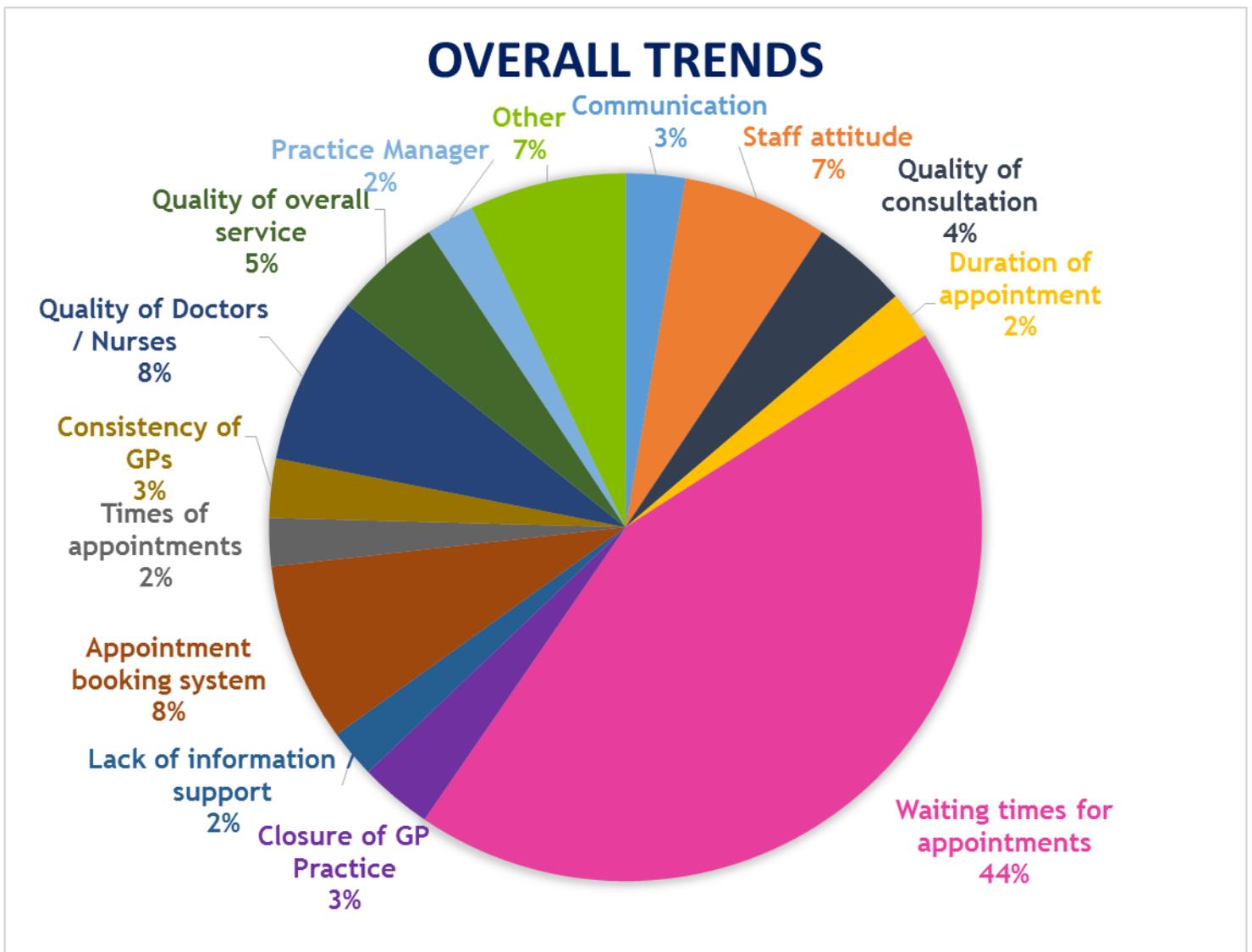
Since January 2016, Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees have received an overwhelming volume of feedback regarding access to and service provision of primary care services in the area. This feedback contains comments, concerns and praise for a number of GP surgeries in Stockton-on-Tees. Healthwatch feel it is important to collate this feedback into a report with some recommendations to address current problems faced by patients at these practices.

Methodology

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees regularly carry out engagement activities in Stockton-on-Tees including; drop-in session in various locations, attending events and holding a stall at community events, visiting community groups in Stockton-on-Tees, distributing a questionnaire in Stockton Citizens Advice Bureau and more. This engagement work has been the primary source for gathering patient feedback on their views and experiences of primary care.

Results

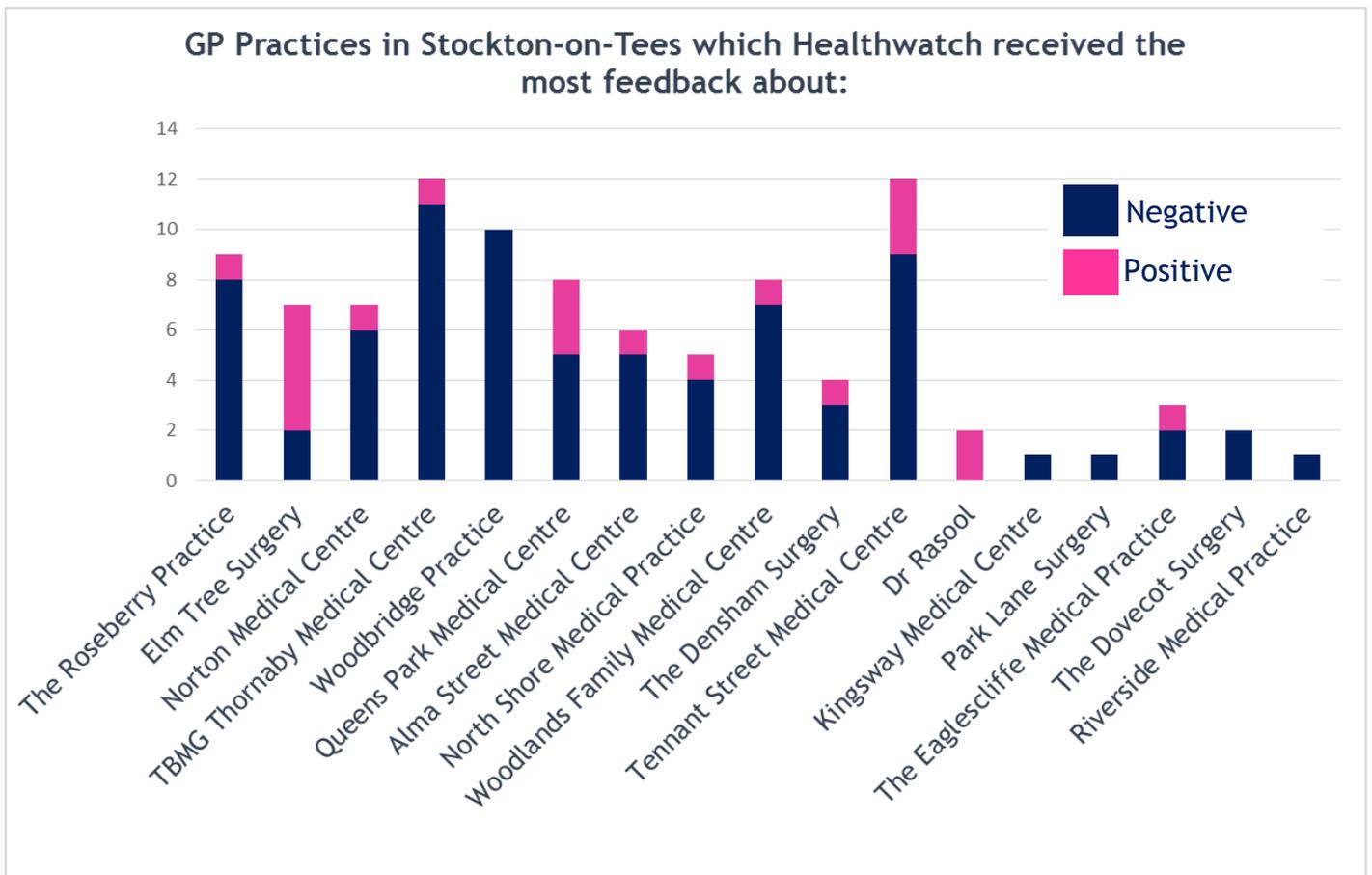
Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees received a total of 183 comments in relation to GP service provision since January 2016. Analysis of the feedback identified common issues with regards to GP Practice, the most commented on being waiting times for appointments. The chart below show the range of themes on which patients gave their views and experiences.



The graph below shows the practices which Healthwatch received the most feedback about. The majority of feedback received was of a negative sentiment, mostly with regards to Thornaby and Barwick Medical Group, Woodbridge Practice, Tennant Street Practice and The Roseberry Practice.

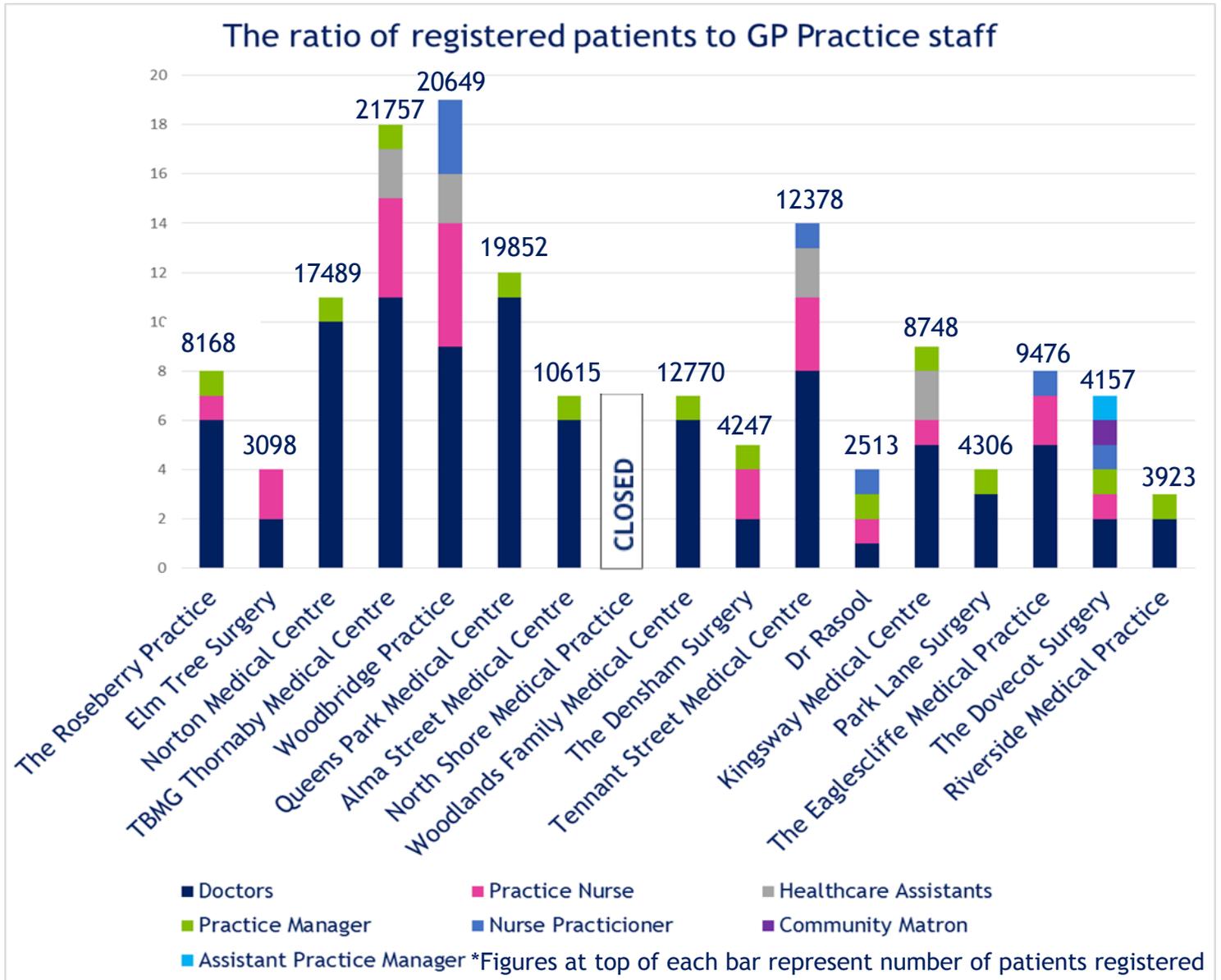
A number of GP practices also received various positive comments with the most in reference to Elm Tree Surgery. The only GP practice in Stockton which received no negative comments and a number of positive comments was Dr Rasool.

The graph below highlights the need for improvements to GP service provision with particular reference to certain GP Practices in Stockton-on-Tees to ensure patients have more positive experiences in the future.



The ratio of registered patients at GP Practices in Stockton-on-Tees in comparison to the number of GP practice staff

(Information gathered from NHS Choices website - October 2016)



Waiting Times for Appointments

A total of 44% of all of the feedback received regarding GP service provision in Stockton-on-Tees was with regards to waiting times for appointments.

Many individuals expressed their frustration to Healthwatch about the length of wait to get an appointment at their GP surgery. A number of individuals said that they were unable to book an appointment until 3-4 weeks later often leaving them with no other choice than to go to the nearest walk-in centre. This feedback was in relation to numerous different GP Practices in the Stockton-on-Tees area.



‘It takes too long to get an appointment’

‘Difficult to get an appointment, have to wait three weeks to see a doctor’

‘For the last one month I have failed to get an appointment with my GP and I am in pain’

‘Unable to make an appointment unless it’s an emergency’

‘Waiting times at G.P. are horrendous’

‘Trying to see a Dr sometimes takes 2 weeks to get to see one [usually] go to walk-in clinic’

Some positive comments were received from individuals with regards to particular GP practices in Stockton-on-Tees who do not appear to have any problems or long waiting times to get an appointment. These GP Practices were Elm Tree Surgery and Dr Rasool.

‘Excellent service, appointments available when needed’

‘It’s easy to get an appointment at Elm Tree Surgery’

‘Many appointments available at short notice’

‘Waiting times are quick, 1-2 days’

‘Recently registered and can get same day appointment’

‘After difficulties with two other practices I registered with Elm Tree Medical Practice and I am amazed with the fantastic service delivered by such a small practice. In my previous GP practices, I had to wait on average three weeks for a doctor appointments. After booking each appointment I receive a text

confirmation which is great as a reminder to ensure I attend my appointment, the receptionist even apologised as I had to wait one week for my most recent appointment because one Dr was currently on annual leave, I almost fell off my chair in shock. It has been years since I have been able to get an appointment so quickly!”

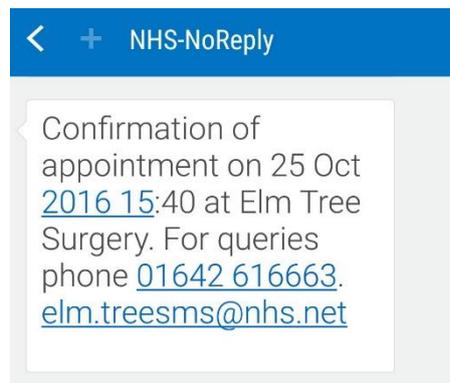
Appointment booking system

Healthwatch received a total of 15 comments with regards to the appointment booking systems which vary between different GP Practices.

A number of people often find it difficult to make an appointment at their GP surgeries due to the process this entails. For many GP Practices, this often involves ringing up first thing in the morning, usually between 8:00am and 8:30am to then be faced with a constant engaged tone, being put on hold or left waiting in a queue. Following this many people find that when they eventually get through to speak to someone, they are told that all of the appointments have now been booked for that day and that they must ring back the following day to complete the process all over again without any guarantee of getting an appointment.

Comments received also expressed the need to update old telephone systems which although would be costly initially, would be beneficial to both patients and staff at the practices to help ease pressures and improve accessibility on the

permanently busy phone lines. Healthwatch have also received several positive comments with regards to a ‘Text Reminder Service’ which a number of GP Practices in Stockton use. Following an appointment booking, the surgery will send a text to the patient with details of their appointment including; date and time of appointment, location of appointment and a phone number / email address if the patient has any queries - see image for example.



Healthwatch have also received feedback from patients who use a GP online booking system. The majority of patients find this to be a quick and easy way of getting an appointment. However, a number of GP Practices in the area do not

have this available to patients or are not widely advertising this as an option for booking an appointment.

In addition to this, many practices have a system in place called 'Dr First'. This is where patients are told that before they can book an appointment, a Doctor must ring them back first to carry out a telephone consultation to assess whether a face to face appointment is necessary. A number of individuals expressed their dissatisfaction with this process explaining how it presents as a barrier to being able to see their GP and that for certain medical conditions, it is important to have a face to face consultation.

A triage system is also in place at a number of GP Practices in Stockton, whereby the receptionist will ask the patient to briefly explain their complaint / illness. By doing this the receptionists are able to prioritise individuals who need the most urgent appointments and identify those who would be able to see a Nurse Practitioner rather than a GP. Some patient are not happy with this as they do not like to disclose personal information to a receptionist who has no clinical experience. If patients are booking an appointment in the surgery, there is also a lack of privacy at the reception desk making patients reluctant to give details of why they need an appointment.

'There are many occasions when it is unsuitable to stay in and wait for a call back e.g. patient working'

'Telephone consultations are not what is needed'

'Telephone answering service, it's impossible to get a response'

'Each time I ring they are fully booked and I'm told to ring back tomorrow'

'Receptionists insisting you tell them what is wrong with you'

'Doctors call back service needs reviewing'

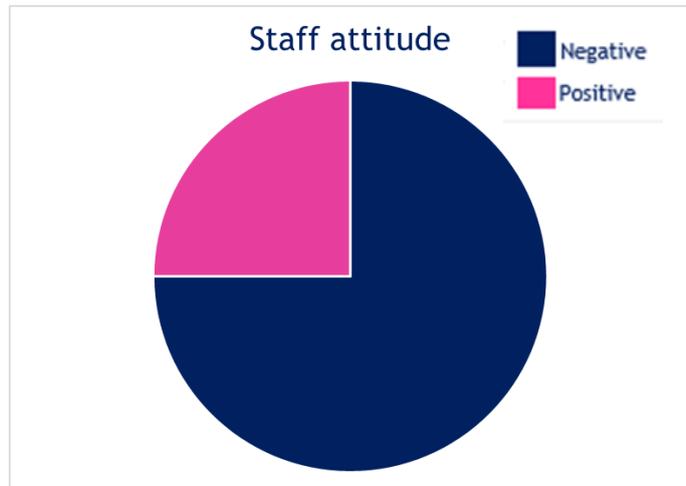
'You have to phone on the day for an appointment, then the doctor rings you, and sorts you out on the phone, sometimes you want to talk face to face to the doctor'

'Doctors do not ring back as promised so I had to keep phoning'

'How can a doctor make a correct diagnosis over the phone without seeing the patient?'

Staff attitude

Healthwatch received a significant number of comments with regards to staff attitude and behaviour at their GP Practice. Many patients reported bad experiences when dealing with the receptionists and clinical staff which for many individuals has resulted in them choosing to re-register at another practice.



‘Made to feel a hassle’

‘Insensitivity from doctors’

‘Don’t feel I get examined or listened to’

‘Attitude was always very negative towards me’

‘The receptionist is a bit rough on patients’

‘Receptionists expect patients to know and are rude on the phone’

‘So abrupt, not friendly or helpful in any way’

‘He’s so rude’

A number of individuals also gave lots of positive feedback with regards to staff attitude at their GP Practice and explained that they are very friendly, caring and co-operative in everything they do with a number of people rating the staff as ‘excellent’.

‘GP is lovely’

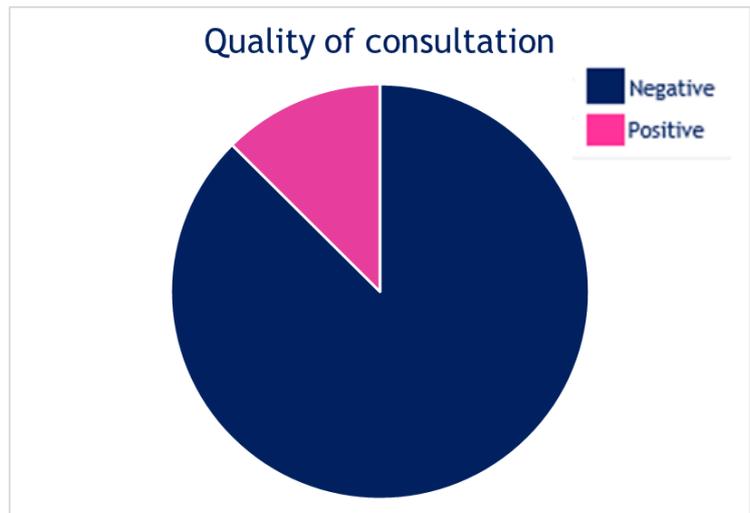
‘Excellent staff’

‘Always good, all staff [are] excellent’

‘Very supportive and understanding [of] our needs’

Quality of consultation

A number of comments were received in relation to the quality of consultations. Some negative feedback was received with regards to appointments with locum doctors. Some individuals felt that as they didn't know the patient, they often end up asking inappropriate questions. For example; asking about mental health of the patient when no signs were displayed to signal that this was necessary. Some patients feel that some of their medical complaints are often overlooked due to other conditions e.g. substance misuse / mental health.



'Because of substance addiction, all other health matters ignored'

However, some positive comments were received explaining how patients feel that they are listened to and supported appropriately.

'GP is very supportive and understanding of our needs'

'He listens'

Duration of appointment

GP appointments are on average 10 minute per consultation. A number of patients expressed to Healthwatch that this is not enough time and often feel rushed during their appointment. Although the pressures faced by GP's are well known and appointment times must be limited to ensure all patients needs are met, individuals feel that the way this is dealt with could be improved so that they do not feel like they are **'just a number'**.



'Too little time spent with GP'

'Appointments very rushed'

'Feel rushed when there'

'Rushed out'

Consistency of GPs

A number of individuals contacted Healthwatch to express their dissatisfaction with seeing a different doctor each time they need an appointment. For individuals who don't regularly see a GP, this was not as big of an issue compared to those with long term conditions who have regular GP appointments. Individuals feel that the lack of continuity with GPs results in them having to repeat 'their story' several times which is time consuming and results in the patients feeling frustrated.



'No continuity of care as no GP stays there long enough'

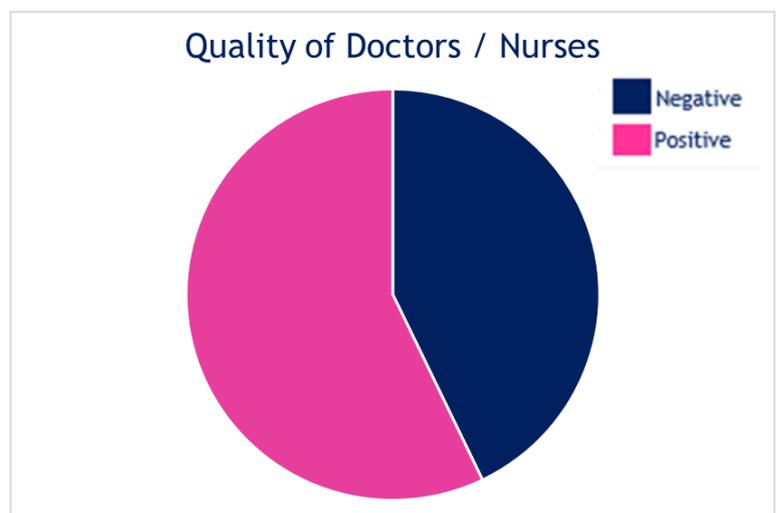
'Different GP every time'

'Now I am going to have to tell a new doctor my situation all over again'

'So difficult to get appointment with doctor you wish to see'

Quality of Doctors / Nurses

Healthwatch received lots of feedback regarding a number of GP's working at the Practices in Stockton-on-Tees, the majority of which were positive and gave praise about their care and treatment.



'Dr Williams - wouldn't see anyone else at Tennant Street'

'Always see Dr Rasool - good service, I can't fault it'

'Fantastic Doctors at Alma Medical Centre'

'Shame my doctor is retiring but other great doctors there'

'Dr Smith is fab' - Tennant Street Medical Practice

Closure of GP Practices

A number of calls received through our Information and Signposting service are from individuals giving their comments and concerns about the closure of their GP Practice, the most recent one being North Shore Medical Practice. Healthwatch have provided advice to patients on which alternative GP Practices they could register with and guided them through the correct process on how to register. All of these calls tend to be of a negative nature due to the process and 'hassle' which results. However, this is to be expected and is a process which unfortunately cannot be avoided at times.

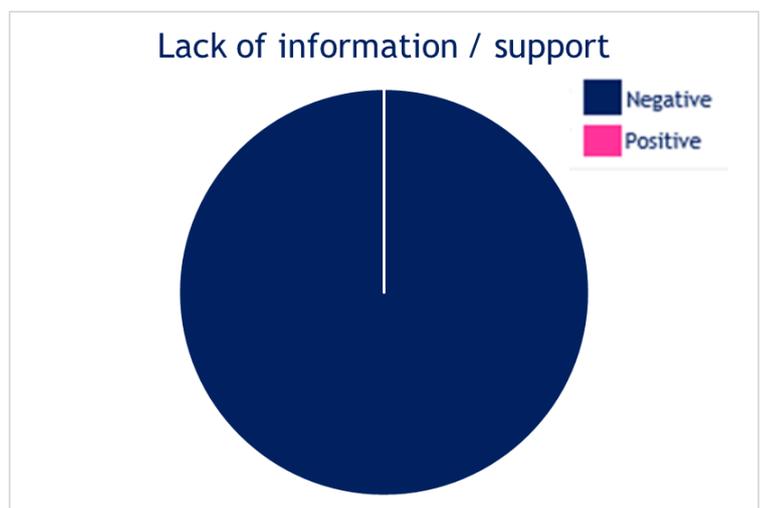


'My doctors are closing because my doctor is moving on and it's upset me really bad'

'Closure of North Shore Medical Practice'

Lack of information / support

A number of individuals contacted Healthwatch to access the Signposting service in which advice and guidance was given to help direct individuals to community and support groups in Stockton-on-Tees. A lot of feedback received about GP Practices in Stockton-on-Tees highlighted that there is a lack of information displayed in GP practices about local projects and groups which people could attend e.g. mental health support groups.



Individuals feel that by displaying this information on notice boards around the Practices and informing patients during GP consultations, it would greatly benefit patients in knowing how and where they can access additional support.

'We are not told of any community projects that are going on'

'The practice has no mental health information or leaflets regarding other projects'

‘The GP should provide more medical support for their patients’

‘Queenstree Practice provides information on boards on the wall - this is needed’

Times of appointments

Healthwatch received feedback about the times available for GP appointments in the Stockton area, in particular for individuals who work full time. Some patients feel that it would be appropriate to offer late night appointments to accommodate for these individuals who cannot attend GP appointments within normal working hours.

‘Doctors should offer more appointments other than 9-5’

‘Could be better appointment times’

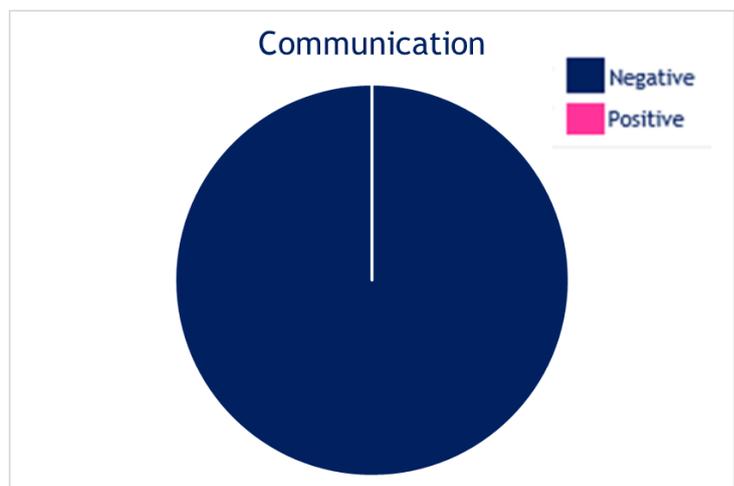
‘Not flexible’



Communication

Poor communication was found to be an issue raised numerous times with Healthwatch. Individuals have found that they have been told incorrect information by GP Practice staff resulting in delays in receiving treatment, prescriptions and sick notes. Patients have phoned the practice to be told for example; that a prescription is ready to collect only to go to the surgery to pick it up to find that it is still with the GP waiting to be signed and is therefore not available for the patient to take away.

In addition to this, patients who have raised complaints with their GP Practice have found that a lack of communication and response from their Practice has resulted in them taking their complaint up with NHS England rather than with the Practice itself.



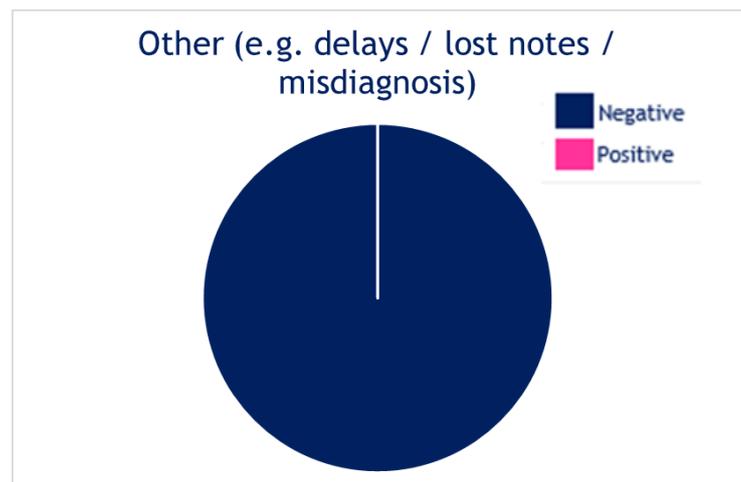
Experiences with Practice Manager

Although only a small amount of feedback was received with regards to the Practice Managers of GP Practices in Stockton, some issues were brought to our attention. There appears to be a lack of availability and opportunity to speak to the Practice Manager about a particular concern and in particular, lack of urgency when dealing with individual complaints.



Other

Other issues raised with Healthwatch were with regards to changes in GP practices with a lack of information or update given to the patients, difficulties parking with a lack of flexibility resulting in a refusal of appointments due to being late.



‘I’ve been refused an appointment at the doctors for being 1 minute late’

‘Lots of changes in last couple of years’

‘Lack of parking near practice’

‘Patients are not informed of change of protocol or procedures at GP Practices’

Quality of overall service

Healthwatch have found that although a number of issues have been raised regarding GP Practices in Stockton-on-Tees, patients are generally happy with the overall service provided by their GP.

Negative comments:

‘Bad service’

‘Terrible service’

‘I would rather go somewhere else’

Positive comments:

‘Very good service’

‘The GP services are perfect’

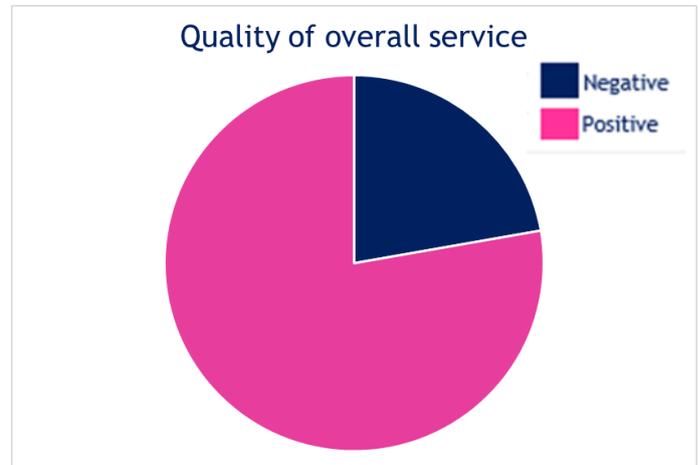
‘Good service from my GP’

‘Positive experience’

‘Pleased with this service’

‘Excellent service’

‘The service I get from my doctors is outstanding’



Recommendations

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees recommend the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) who now commission GP services as of April 2016, to provide a response on how the CCG propose to address the issues of current ineffective booking systems and waiting times for appointments at GP Practices in the Stockton-on-Tees locality.