

Healthwatch Portsmouth Community Research to review improved access for patients to new extended access to GP services via a city- wide hub at Lake Road Health Centre.

Background to the research.

Portsmouth Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), which plans and buys a range of health services, has commissioned the Integrated Primary Care Service (IPCS) to provide the new 24/7 extended hours service, which offers 24/7 access to GP services via a city-wide hub.

Information on the new 24/7 extended hours GP service has been made available to the public and launched in June 2018. Information has been placed in the Portsmouth Evening News, Portsmouth City Council Flagship, and media releases. The CCG website was accessed 16th November 2018, again on 14th December, and again 15th February 2019 with no change to the initial media release of 8th November 2018, which became rather historical. The website was accessed again on 12th August 2019 when further information on the new service, including a Frequently Asked Questions sheet, became available.

The CCG described the new service on its website;

“In a pioneering new-look approach, patients can not only access routine appointments in-hours at their own GP surgeries as they did previously, but now also make weekday evening and Saturday appointments at a GP hub at Lake Road Health Centre, in central Portsmouth. As well as additional routine appointments the service offers urgent same-day appointments every day from 6.30am to 10pm, 365 days a year. The extended access service – to provide routine medical provision from Mondays to Saturdays to registered patients outside of core hours until 8pm, and urgent, same-day appointments until 10pm every day and Out-of-Hours provision – accessed through the NHS 111 service, with GP care provided overnight from 6.30pm to 8am.”

The new services were intended to impact positively on the waiting times at Queen Alexandra (QA) Hospital A&E waiting times;

“It is hoped this new service will deter people who don’t need emergency treatment from attending the Emergency Department at Queen Alexandra Hospital – especially as the hub will be a much-easier place for many people to get to, and it has free car parking.”

Introduction

Healthwatch Portsmouth identified a need to know more about the choices residents make when accessing NHS services following Healthwatch Portsmouth's publication of; "Are members of the public aware of the most appropriate service for their health needs? A Community research project carried out by Pam Pritchard Volunteer Researcher 2017."

In 2017/18 Healthwatch Portsmouth looked at the impact of Portsmouth CCG actions taken to reduce pressures on Queen Alexandra Hospital (QA) A&E by inappropriate Ambulance call out, and in 2018 published; "Feedback from Portsmouth Clinical Commissioning Group regarding the content of the HWP Enter and View summary reports relating to Enhanced Health in Care Homes pilot (MCP project)."

Extended access to GP and Primary care services has been a key part of the Portsmouth CCG strategy to address A&E waiting times. QA Hospital has had a highly publicised media profile of the "Jumbulance" and queuing Ambulances waiting for patient admission to A&E (The Guardian 8th June 2016). QA Hospital had been performing poorly in national statistics for A&E waiting times. In February 2019 of the total number of patients attending at QA Hospital's A&E, only 65.5 % of patients were seen in less than the national target; to be seen in under four hours (NHS England March 2019.) Regrettably it appeared that the new initiatives of June 2018 were not; "impacting positively on waiting times." Healthwatch Portsmouth decided to look at the new extended access to GP services via a city- wide hub at Lake Road Health Centre; to find out more about this poor outcome and to understand more about why patients continue to make the decision to access A&E services as against using the extended GP services.

Purpose of the research

To obtain feedback from Portsmouth residents within the postcode area of PO1 – PO6.

1. To establish the awareness of the new extended city-wide 24/7 GP hub at Lake Road Health Centre.
2. To establish the patient experience of using the new service
3. To make recommendations for service improvement in response to the patient and public experience of the new service.

Methodology

The method used is that of Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR). CBPR is a partnership approach to research that equitably involves community members in all aspects of the research process, with all partners in the process contributing expertise and sharing in the decision-making and ownership.

The research group decided to use primarily a quantitative method by questionnaire that could be carried out in GP surgery waiting areas. The purpose of the research was driven by feedback from Healthwatch Volunteers that in their own experience, and in their Patient Participation Group (PPG), the new Extended Access Service was largely unknown. It was agreed this lived experience required further evidence, and that extended access to GP services and its' impact was of significant community interest.

The development of the questionnaire was led by Lee Greenwell, a Healthwatch Portsmouth Volunteer who was experienced in business and industry research and an active participant in her local surgery Patient Participation Group (PPG). It was agreed that ethically, as the research would be carried out with members of the public in GP waiting areas, it should be brief, focused on the experience of awareness, and could be completed in less than 3-5 minutes. The questionnaire closed by inviting comment from patients, if they chose to extend the time taken to complete the questionnaire that was in the patient's control.

The participant researchers commented on the research experience and other observational information gathered relevant to the research. This is captured during discussion of the data as shown in the Discussion section below.

The research was carried out initially in March 2019, and recommenced and completed on October 2019. Research was carried out across 17 GP Surgeries in the city, having first established with the Practice Manager a time when the surgery would be appropriately busy to improve access to members of the public. The research activity was promoted in each surgery, stating time and date of research taking place and providing 5-10 days' notice of the event. Direct electronic access to the survey was also promoted by poster and on the Healthwatch Portsmouth website.

Implementation

The implementation plan was developed with the Healthwatch Portsmouth Volunteer researchers over a series of meetings and dedicated sessions during the monthly Volunteer drop- In meetings.

During these meetings the HWP research group;

1. Confirmed the research method and questionnaire design
2. Gathered observations on the promotion of new services from their own GP service
3. Examined the quality of communication between CCG and GP surgeries.
4. Decided to utilise the publicly available information so that, when appropriate, researchers could inform members of the public who stated they were unaware of the new service.
5. Agreed the final questionnaire format.
6. Carried out input of data into an online survey package
7. Met for discussion and analysis of data
8. Formulated recommendations from the research

Research findings.

Sample size 592 participants.

Appendix 1: Table 1. Graph representation

Appendix 2: Table 2. Results summary document

1. The study established that 88%, of those 592 surveyed, **were not aware** of the new Enhanced Access Service (EAS), the 24/7 GP hub at Lake Road Health Centre.

2. The study established that 71%, of those 592 surveyed, said that it is important to see their regular named GP
3. The study established that 44% of those 592 surveyed said that they were not happy to go to an alternative surgery to see a GP
4. It was decided by the research group that the data set on the experience of patients using the new service was not a significant sized sample group.

Community Based Participatory Researchers' observations

1. It was difficult to observe key information on the new 24/7/GP hub. Information was seen; on an outer glass door, a poster on wall and laminated on a tabletop display.
2. Information on the new service is ambiguous, contradictory at times, and not consistent with other information sources.
3. Signage to the Lake Road Health Centre is poor to almost non- existent, there is one sign directing drivers, there is no signage from the bus stops. The site is surrounded by 8-10 ft hedgerows, access, if brave, is via an unlit alley sided by trees and wire mesh. There is no direction at the end of the alley/path to the Lake Road Health Centre.
4. There is no standardised literature promoting the new service and it comes from a variety of sources; CCG, Portsmouth Primary Care Association (PPCA), GP surgery.
5. Researchers felt there was a failure to use public places and communities, libraries and meeting places, to promote awareness of the new service.
6. There was a failure to communicate to PPGs. HWP realised this early on through the PPG members who were also Healthwatch Portsmouth Volunteers and could verify that information was not coming through on the new 24/7 GP service
7. There was poor use of social media, including requiring a deep dive on the Portsmouth Clinical Commissioning Group (PCCG) CCG website to get at key info such as the frequently Asked Questions, which were not available for the first year of running the new service.
8. An example of the new service at it's optimum; A Receptionist was able to reassure a patient on a Friday afternoon seeking an urgent GP appointment that, if her condition deteriorated over the weekend, she would be able to go to the Lake Road Health Centre and see a GP. She left the surgery feeling able to cope without taking an urgent appointment at her surgery.
9. A patient was told that there would be a 3 week wait for a GP appointment at their own surgery, and were not informed about the Lake Road GP surgery at which that there are appointments available.
10. Researchers were told that when making an appointment to see a GP using the online booking system it wasn't showing Lake Road Health Centre EAS appointments at all. Nurse Practitioner appointments were being offered over GP appts, with a 3 – 4 weeks wait

Interpretations of the significant results

The results of the survey show that **88% of those surveyed are unaware of the new extended access to GPs** and by being uninformed they are therefore unable to change their behaviour of attending at A&E, out of hours, in response to the new service.

The results of the survey show that **71%, of those surveyed, said that it is important to see their regular named GP**. This may mean that there is a resistance to go to a different surgery, to see a GP other than their known GP.

The results of the survey show that 44% of those 592 surveyed said that they were not happy to go to an alternative surgery to see a GP. **This is a significant percentage resistant to the idea of the new service at Lake Road Health Centre.**

The pressures on Portsmouth QA Hospital's A&E have grown, as demonstrated in waiting times reports, despite the stated intent that the new EAS Hub at Lake Rd Health Centre would reduce these pressures.

Implications

There has been a failure in the service promotion, advertising, and communication to Portsmouth residents. Due to the poor quality of information and limited promotion of the new EAS service It has not been conveyed to the public that there is a new service they can use; out of hours, same day, and for routine appointments, as an alternative to attending the QA Hospital A&E Department. Patients and public are, as in the hypothesis, not informed and therefore unable to change their decision making and behaviour in the use of A&E services.

Limitations

As the research took place in the PO1-PO6 area it is not known what is happening in neighbouring Hampshire where a large population is using QA hospital, and QA continues to miss national targets on A&E waiting times. Despite the continued rise in the number of patients using QA's A&E department it is possible that Portsmouth residents may be reducing their use of A&E services, given the CCG's statistics on a high uptake in use of the new EAS service.

The CCG reports the new EAS extended service as being well used and in line with the numbers anticipated. It is very difficult to understand the extent of the take up of the new service from the information provided by the CCG, as different aspects of the EAS and out of Hours services are conflated to give a summary number. It is believed that much of the real take-up of the new service is still embedded in 111 data. We do not know what happens to patients who try to access the new service via 111.

It is difficult to identify or understand the CCG's publicised level of uptake of the EAS. The CCG's reporting of activity at the new EAS is inconsistent with the Healthwatch Portsmouth (HWP) research findings of a lack of awareness by the public of the new EAS service.

Recommendations:

- 1: Promotion of the new service needs to be consistent, clear and unambiguous.
- 2: Information needs to follow Accessible Information Standards and be available in alternative formats.
- 3: There needs to be a systematic use of all social media platforms to promote awareness of the new EAS service.

4: There needs to be an audit of each surgery's display of information. An all- round tidying up of information on surgery walls, doors, windows, and outer building signage, including direction signage at Lake Road Health Centre.

5: There is evidence of a lack of knowledge in GP Surgeries of how to access the new EAS service. Patients need good verbal promotion of the service by reception staff/ care navigators. There needs to be an IT system prompt to remind receptionists to look up available appointments at Lake Road Hub on the system when they can't find an appointment at the patient's first choice of surgery stated.

Conclusion.

Healthwatch Portsmouth identified a need to know more about the choices residents make when accessing NHS services, and the impact of a new 24/7 Extended Access Service (EAS) to GPs at the Lake Road Health Centre city-wide Hub.

It is proposed that the intended impact of Portsmouth CCG actions, of initiating the new EAS service, to reduce pressures on Queen Alexandra Hospital A&E has not been demonstrated at the time of conducting the research.

It is proposed that patients are continuing to make the decision to access A&E services, as against using EAS GP services, because of a lack of information.

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