

Our GPs

What local people say



A report from Healthwatch Tower Hamlets

January 2018

About this report

This report examines important aspects of the services provided by GP surgeries in Tower Hamlets.

We have coded and analysed a total of 1388 issues, from 332 service users collected between April and September 2017.

For anonymity purposes, names of individual GP surgeries have been changed to unique codes. Each surgery receiving this report will privately receive their own code.

This report is following up on our previous baseline study, tracking improvements in the provision of GP surgery services.



Healthwatch Tower Hamlets is an independent organisation led by local volunteers. It is part of a national network of Healthwatch organisations that involve people of all ages and all sections of the community.

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets gathers local people's views on the health and social care services that they use. We make sure those views are taken into account when decisions are made on how services will be delivered, and how they can be improved.

www.healthwatchtowerhamlets.co.uk

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In a nutshell:



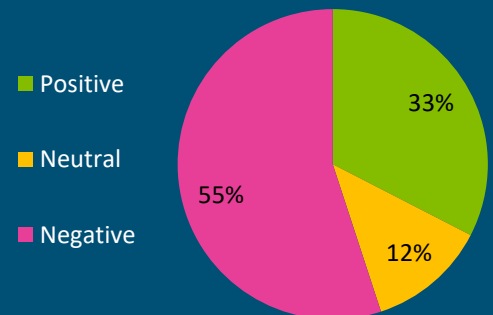
- According to the comments, sentiment about GP's in the borough is 52% positive, broadly similar to our previous report.
- Compared with our previous report, attitude towards booking has slightly improved.
- Patients are happy with the quality of service provision, but are frustrated about the process of booking appointments. Sentiment about advice and information is also leaning negative. This suggests that GP services in Tower Hamlets are seen by residents as high quality, but difficult to access, and some people may feel kept in the dark about their care options.
- Patients are broadly happy with the attitude of reception staff, who they find to be helpful and approachable; but they are dissatisfied with the level of advice and information they receive from the reception desk.
- Most patients see both doctors and nurses as supportive, caring and competent. Only a minority report rude or unprofessional treatment, or express doubts about medical professionals' competence.
- Offering referrals promptly and communicating efficiently with other specialists is an important quality for a GP surgery, according to patients.
- Patients appreciate GPs who listen to them without making them feel rushed, involve them in their own care and empower them to make informed choices.
- Nurses and healthcare assistants play a crucial role in supporting, informing and educating patients. Opinion on how well they provide advice and information is mixed.
- In some cases, nurses can offer advice or treatment to patients when other professionals are unavailable or don't have the capacity. However, this solution is not suitable in all cases. Some patients report seeing a nurse when they actually needed a doctor.
- Many perceive surgeries' booking systems as inefficient, lacking transparency, error-prone and difficult to understand, particularly around emergency bookings. Because of the lack of transparency, some service users perceive it as unfair or arbitrary.
- For many patients, contacting the surgery on the phone is a frustrating experience. Online booking is more popular than telephone booking, but not all surgeries offer it and, where they do, patients cannot always make full use of it, for technical or administrative reasons.
- There are reports of admin errors made by reception and medical staff, including failing to record bookings accurately or to sign patients in, losing records or test results, or not processing prescriptions correctly. There were reports of staff not using patient record software confidently.
- Some surgeries only allot 10-15 minutes time per appointment or enforce a strict "one problem per appointment" policy. Both of these measures are unpopular with patients.
- Patients who see staff (both medical and reception) as trying their best and going above and beyond are more likely to be understanding in relation to other aspects, such as waiting times, telephone queues or unexpected closures/ cancellations.
- Patients' experience with registering with a GP has been mixed; some found the reception staff helpful and the process straightforward, while others thought the process was lengthy and not user friendly and the staff unsupportive.

What we have learned

Booking

- ❖ Many patients perceive surgery booking systems as inefficient, lacking transparency and difficult to understand, particularly around emergency bookings. Because of the lack of transparency, some users perceive it as unfair or arbitrary.
- ❖ For many patients, booking an appointment over the phone is a frustrating experience, because of long waiting times and an unfriendly, error-prone system.
- ❖ Online booking is more popular, but patients cannot always make full use of it, for technical or administrative reasons.
- ❖ When telephone and on-line booking fail, a small number of patients report queuing outside the surgery before opening, sometimes in adverse weather. This can pose a risk to their safety and well-being.
- ❖ Where available, telephone and online consultations are popular with patients; only a small minority found them to be improperly followed through or unsuitable altogether.
- ❖ Some surgeries only allot 10-15 minutes time per appointment and enforce this strictly; some enforce a strict “one problem per appointment” policy. Both of these measures are unpopular with patients.
- ❖ Some patients have reportedly been able to book an emergency appointment within 24 hours, but many have not.
- ❖ For non-emergencies, a lot of patients report waiting lists in excess of two weeks.

LOCAL PEOPLE’S VOICE



- I have invariably been able to make an appointment fairly easily, and with helpful assistance from the receptionist/s. Sometimes this is done in person at the Surgery, and on other occasions I have made the appointment by telephone. By whichever method, the result has always been that I have been given an appointment.
- I always get a prompt phone call from the GP if I can't get a booking on the day, which has been very convenient.
- If you call the doctors surgery and use the automated appointment line and try to book an appointment with any doctor, you will not be given one (example) if you already have a nurse appointment so you then have to visit the surgery in person or go through the above telephone calls.
- They also allot 15 mins per appointment and want to kick you out as soon as they can. I'm truly shocked.

What we have learned

Booking (continued)

- ❖ Once in the surgery, some patients report being seen within 5-10 minutes, which is considered acceptable. Others, however, report 30 minutes- 1 hour waits before being seen. Such delays can lead to patients' appointments being shortened, or otherwise negatively impact the quality of treatment.

Recommendations

- ✓ Ensure online booking is functional and that patients are aware of its availability.
- ✓ Allow patients to book appointments with other than your named GP or with a locum GP online. Look into the possibility of allowing the booking of emergency appointments online.
- ✓ Allow patients to book double appointments (20 minutes) where they have multiple issues that are interrelated or if they have complex co-morbidities. This will avoid delays in the waiting room and reduce the need for multiple appointments.
- ✓ Improve the efficiency of telephone and on-line consultations and ensure they are followed through promptly.
- ✓ Improve the transparency of booking systems; raise awareness of the difference between emergency and non-emergency appointments, and realistic estimates of waiting lists for both.
- ✓ Discourage the practice of queuing outside surgeries outside of opening times by providing functional alternatives for booking and raising awareness of them.

LOCAL PEOPLE'S VOICE

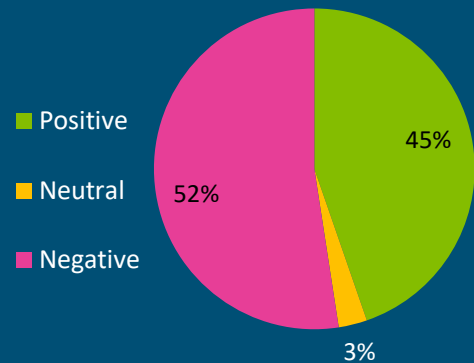
- The only downside was not finding out about the online appointments sooner, as once I was registered I could always get an appointment within the next few days.
- Doctors cannot listen all of your problems rather than only one in 10 minutes time--then you've been advised to get another appointment which will realistically won't happen within next 30-40 days even if you want that urgently).
- Reception advises to queue in person when the surgery opens at 8 am in order to get a same day appointment. I did that once, got there around 8.10am and there was already a queue of people in front of me. There were no appointments left when it was my turn. The receptionist said that patients usually start arriving at 7.30 am and queue outside.
- Do not accept new patients until each patient can be seen within a reasonable time. The usual response of "just book an urgent appointment" is not acceptable: non-urgent appointments are essential to prevent costly urgent conditions.
- 48-hour appointments? I should be so lucky!!! They are impossible to get.

What we have learned

Reception

- ❖ Patients are broadly happy with the attitude of reception staff, who they find to be helpful and approachable; staff members who are seen as going above and beyond their duty to provide service and those who have developed a longstanding cordial relation with patients are highly praised.
- ❖ A minority of service users report rude or unprofessional behavior from staff members.
- ❖ Patients who perceive staff as trying their best are more likely to be understanding in relation to other aspects, such as waiting times, telephone queues or unexpected closures/ cancellations.
- ❖ To ensure patients are booked with the appropriate medical professional or are given the right level of urgency, reception staff sometimes need to about the reason for their appointments. A small number of patients are uncomfortable with this and see it as a breach of privacy or illegitimate gatekeeping.
- ❖ Reception staff have an important responsibility to provide patients with relevant information. Staff members who do so efficiently are praised by patients.
- ❖ Overall, patients do not feel that they are receiving an appropriate level of advice and information. Some staff members have reportedly come across as lacking knowledge and some patients have received contradictory information.

LOCAL PEOPLE'S VOICE



- My husband and I have been visiting this Practice for almost 9 years and have always found the counter staff extremely helpful and friendly. Nothing appears to be too much trouble for them. They present a reassuring start to our visits and they even know our names. We commend them!
- All the receptionists are lovely, they work really hard and I can imagine it can get exhausting when it's very busy.... however, 3 main staff members I always see or speak with who are very kind and friendly.
- I was very unwell on Monday and came in to surgery to get an emergency appointment. Receptionist on the desk at 8.15 was understanding and very helpful and has provided me with a slot at 4.30. I was extremely grateful. I was seen on that date just slightly out of time but I understood that surgery is very busy and was grateful I got an appointment at all!

What we have learned

Reception (continued)

- ❖ Not all patients are aware of sign-in procedures when arriving for an appointment. Not understanding the necessity for signing in or the specifics of how to do it can cause delays in being seen for patients.
- ❖ When telephoning the surgery, some service users report being placed on hold for long periods of time (an hour or more).
- ❖ Some service users express dissatisfaction with the attitude and professionalism of staff answering phones.
- ❖ Some patients report communications issues between reception and medical staff or pharmacists blame reception staff for the dysfunctional phone lines.
- ❖ There are reports of admin errors made by reception staff, including failing to record bookings accurately or to sign patients in, losing records or not processing prescriptions correctly. There were also reports of staff not using patient record software confidently.
- ❖ Patients' experience with registering to with a GP has been mixed; some found the reception staff helpful and the process straightforward, while other thought the process was lengthy and user-unfriendly and the staff unsupportive.

LOCAL PEOPLE'S VOICE

- Staff have been very helpful and went beyond what's expected many times in the past. The only frustration is reaching them over the phone, otherwise a lovely place!
- It's often impossible to get through on the phone, particularly in the mornings (one time the phone line was engaged from 8am-9.30am)
- GP Surgery is not bad, I mean to book appointment online, because I had some problems entering the code to access the online appointment services.
- I attended the surgery to register as a new patient, and was informed that registrations are not done 2-3pm on Fridays (i.e. When I attended) and that I needed to come back after 3pm. This is not explained in the registration information on the practice website, which I'd checked before visiting.
- Trying to get travel jabs here is near to impossible - you book an appointment and specify the injection you need, but more often than not when you arrive at your appointment with the nurse who informs you that that particular vaccination is out of stock (they never think to call you to tell you this).

What we have learned

Reception

Recommendations

- ✓ Encourage reception staff members to develop warm, cordial relations with patients (e.g. introduce themselves and learn patients' first name). Celebrate and promote examples of good practice.
- ✓ Wherever feasible, offer patients the option to speak to a doctor or nurse on the phone when requesting emergency appointments. If patients need to provide reception staff with the reason they need an appointment, explain why the information is needed (to direct them to the appropriate medical professional) and reassure them of confidentiality.
- ✓ Ensure all staff members are confident managing bookings and looking up patient information; offer refresher training where needed.
- ✓ Review the software used for booking systems, to make it easier to use and less prone to errors.
- ✓ Visibly display reminders for patients to sign in at reception upon arrival; in multiple languages if the practice serves a diverse population.
- ✓ Offer patients the option of being contacted by SMS or email rather than telephone only.
- ✓ Introduce automated messages for patients on hold to communicate the patient's place in the queue and estimations of waiting times.

LOCAL PEOPLE'S VOICE

- I have waited in reception for up to 2 hours numerous times, simply because the reception staff forgot to sign me in. This is not acceptable.
- When I spoke I was treated like a child? The telephonist was repeating things over and over and informing me about irrelevant stuff like you had your last blood test 4 months ago etc. If they just obliged and made an appointment it would be so much easier and quicker. I know it may mean not involving in decision making etc., but the doctor should do that not the receptionist. When a patient has concerns the receptionist need not interrogate before deciding.
- For those who register GPs, they require two proofs of address, which is uncommon for most organisations in England. The staff there are not aware of the NHS regulation and depend on Google for further information.
- Practice looks run down unclean with bad attitude receptionist who don't smile. One of them speaks in such a demeaning manner. Practice used to be well managed not sure what has happened and where the old faces have gone.

What we have learned

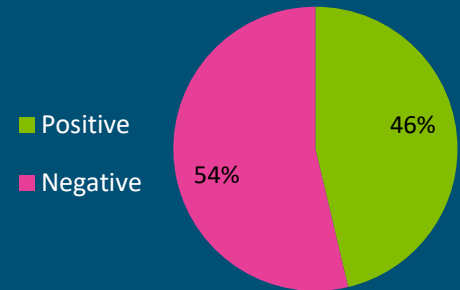
Diagnosis and testing

- ❖ Some patients report receiving an efficient service and being kept well-informed of their test results.
- ❖ Others, however, feel that their symptoms are dismissed by doctors; they report receiving misleading information or express doubt about GP's competence in interpreting their test results.
- ❖ Some report loss or delay of their test results.
- ❖ The experience of patients needing referrals to specialists for further testing or treatment varies; some surgeries handle referrals more efficiently than others. Doctors who refer patients promptly to specialists for further tests are praised by patients, while those who refuse to give referrals that the patient believes they need are criticised.
- ❖ A small number of patients report hygiene concerns or insensitive treatment from staff performing tests.

Recommendations

- ✓ Improve admin systems to avoid errors or delays in patient data processing.
- ✓ Allow patients access to their full medical records so they are empowered to make choices about their own care. Wherever possible, allow patients to access their test results online, through EMIS or another secure channel.
- ✓ Offer patients detailed explanations about their diagnosis and about any tests offered.
- ✓ When referrals are being made, ensure the process is smooth, fast and efficient.
- ✓ When referrals requested by patients are not necessary, offer detailed explanations for this decision.
- ✓ Train staff members in communicating with patients sensitively and respecting their dignity when performing tests such as STD screenings or cervical smears.

LOCAL PEOPLE'S VOICE



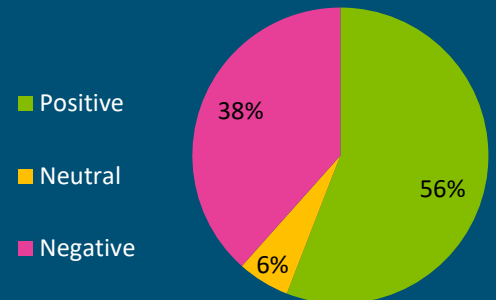
- I find that routine appointments blood tests are handled efficiently and the nursing staff who provide these services to me are always first class.
- I have always had kindness and respect and more importantly appropriate diagnosis and treatment, and when necessary prompt hospital referral.
- I have been at this surgery for over two years and have experienced many issues. I was once referred for a test that really was not necessary.
- So many times, I have had results lots, and letters not sent.
- The nurse was so awful with my smear test. They gave me no privacy to undress and didn't offer me anything to cover up with until I asked; even then it was like I was bothering them! The test was quick, and they were so uncaring. I was left feeling upset. Totally insensitive.

What we have learned

Clinical treatment

- ❖ Most patients see their doctors as supportive, caring and competent. Only a minority report rude or unprofessional treatment, or express doubts about their GPs' competence.
- ❖ Offering referrals promptly and communicating efficiently with other specialists is an important quality for a GP surgery, according to patients.
- ❖ Patients appreciate GPs who make them feel involved in their own care and empower them to make informed choices. Offering detailed information and explanations about the course of treatment they prescribe is also praised.
- ❖ GPs who take an overly authoritative approach and do not empower patients to make choices are criticised.
- ❖ While many would prioritise getting appointments promptly, seeing the same doctor regularly is important for some patients, mostly for reasons pertaining to continuity of care. Patients who are unhappy with the quality of the medical service overall see this as a bigger issue than those who are happy with it.
- ❖ Patients who perceive doctors and other staff members as going above and beyond their duty of care are more understanding in relation to other aspects such as booking, waiting lists and waiting times.
- ❖ Some patients, especially younger ones, only register with a GP when they experience acute health issues.

LOCAL PEOPLE'S VOICE



- ❖ After a useful discussion, the doctor suggested referrals for further tests. Later that day, I received a call from the same doctor who had decided the waiting list was too long for one concern, & so had requested a more urgent NHS appointment, which duly arrived in the post just days later. I'm very grateful & impressed by the extra time & thought shown, and the initiative and care the doctor took.
- ❖ My GP was very educative and informative when I went, thoroughly explaining my situation, and options that I had. The appointments with hospitals have been seamless.
- ❖ The Doctors are brilliant, and I have seen several and they have all been really attentive and don't make you feel rushed.
- ❖ I have never been treated this way before. Last time I went I was rushed out and the doctor didn't even wanna talk to me about changing my contraception pill they just said its fine even though I have been having problems on it. Worst service I have ever had and can never get an appointment even when urgent.

What we have learned

Clinical treatment

Recommendations

- ✓ Always offer patients detailed explanations about their care, in an easy to understand manner, in order to empower them to make informed choices.
- ✓ Communicate with patients in an empathetic manner and make them feel listened to.
- ✓ Improve transparency on how the practice operates and when a patient's request for either a certain course or treatment or a referral is not justified or not practical, ensure they receive appropriate explanations or referral to further information.
- ✓ Identify examples of good practice in surgeries where people report higher levels of satisfaction with the booking system, and share them across the network.
- ✓ When patients register with a GP while experiencing acute health issue, be flexible in allowing them to book emergency appointments and have these issues attended to before their appointment for a standard health check.
- ✓ Raise awareness, particularly among new residents, immigrants and the younger generations, of the importance of being registered with a GP regardless of general health and fitness level.
- ✓ Information request: how many of the practices offering online consultations can receive photo or video material for visual diagnosis purposes?

LOCAL PEOPLE'S VOICE

- My doctor helped me in overcoming my panic attacks and I am so grateful about that ...and being less nervous I was able to gain 7kg..something that I've always wanted to accomplish ,having been underweight for my whole life!! I would recommend it to anyone who is looking for a stable doctor...sometimes you have to wait a while on the day of the appointment but it is definitely worth it, it means that for the doctor you're not just a number...but the doctor treats you like a person !Love this health centre
- The GPs massively vary in quality and experience. One of them - junior - was useless and unsympathetic at giving me a prescription, the next day on the telephone a different doctor gives it to me as a repeat!
- Trying to get an appointment with a doctor you want to see is impossible, so I tried the online consultation where you can state which doctor you want to see your details. Form easy enough to complete and it does allow you to explain exactly what is wrong/of concern without the doctor interrupting and derailing the consultation to what they want (usually a target ticking exercise). An email explains when you will be telephoned and then absolute silence! You are left feeling of little worth and your concerns not worth a doctor's time. This total ignoring of you shows the lack of respect for you as an individual. You cannot get an appointment and your online query is discarded!

What we have learned

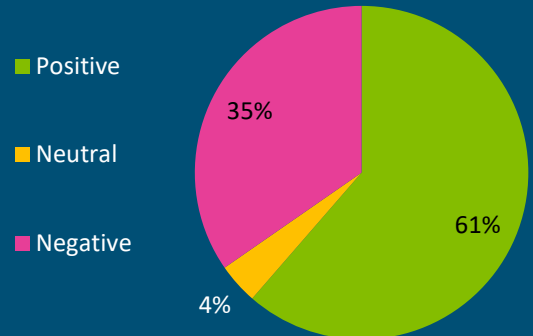
Clinical nursing

- ❖ Most nursing staff are perceived as skilled, kind and compassionate; they make patients feel at ease and relaxed.
- ❖ Only a small minority report rude or insensitive treatment from nurses. There are, however, a few reports of women stating they have been insensitively treated while receiving smear tests.
- ❖ Nurses and healthcare assistants pay a crucial role in supporting, informing and educating patients. Opinion on how well they provide advice and information is mixed.
- ❖ In some cases, nurses can offer advice or treatment to patients when other professionals are unavailable or don't have the capacity.
- ❖ However, this solution is not suitable in all cases. Some patients report seeing a nurse when they actually needed a doctor.

Recommendations

- ✓ Train nurses on communicating in an empathetic and non-judgmental way with patients, particularly around sensitive topics such as smear tests or STD screening.
- ✓ Identify, celebrate and share examples of good practice across the GP network.
- ✓ Raise awareness among patients about the kinds of treatment and support nurses can offer, as opposed to what a doctor is strictly necessary for.

LOCAL PEOPLE'S VOICE



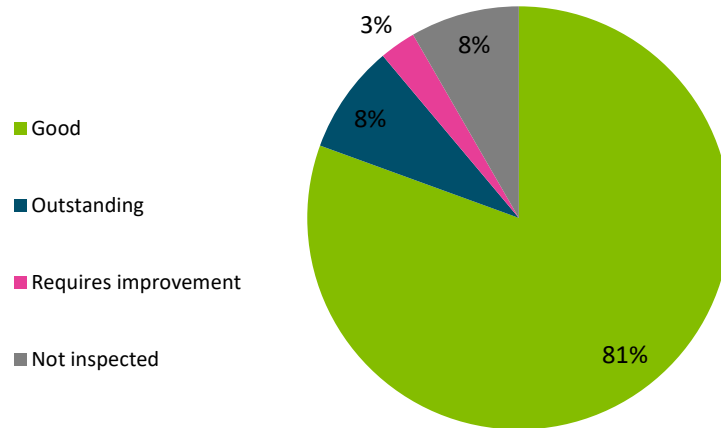
- The nurse is such a caring and attentive member of the staff, and is a professional who has excellent patient care skills and uses their lovely sense of humour to calm and reassure their patients. This member of staff is an exemplary nurse and should be recognised for their skill and hard work.
- The HCA explained everything well and was also really good at taking my blood! So I have come away feeling well looked after and happy.
- A special thank you to the nurse and health care assistants who changed my dressings and made me feel that things were going to get better when I was feeling very low. I was treated with such compassion and respect from everyone involved with my treatment. I can't thank you enough.
- It is difficult to get an appointment with a GP, in fact unless you specify you'd like to see a GP you automatically see a nurse and %100 of the time this has occurred for me they are unable to assist me and I have required a GP appointment.

Background

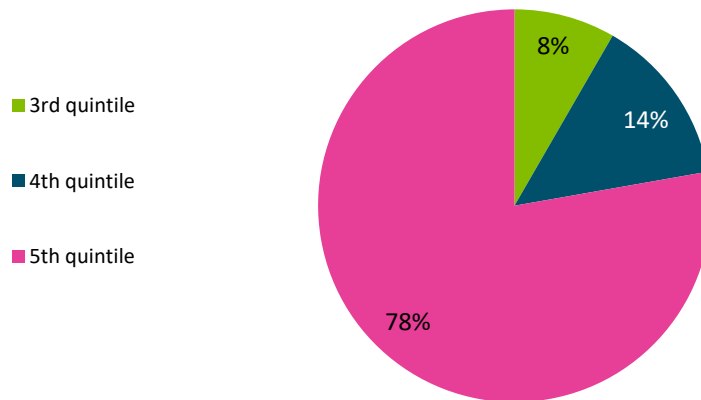
There are 36 GP surgeries in Tower Hamlets, divided between 8 commissioning networks. (Note: numbers on map do NOT correspond to numbers in anonymised codes.)



29 surgeries in the borough have been rated as “good” by the CQC and 3 as “outstanding” and 1 as “requires improvement”. Said surgery, which has previously held an “inadequate” rating, is the only one to have changed its CQC rating since our last report



Most GP surgeries in Tower Hamlets serve areas characterised by severe deprivation and inequalities. 28 surgeries are in areas with an Index of Mass Deprivation (IMD) in the 5th quintile (indicating the poorest areas in the country).



The average number of registered patients a Tower Hamlets GP surgery has is 8980.

The average number of GPs in a practice is 5.

The average number of patients per GP is 2071; however, the ratio can vary a lot; between 709 patients/ GP (Net5-3) to 6688 patients/GP (Net7-5).

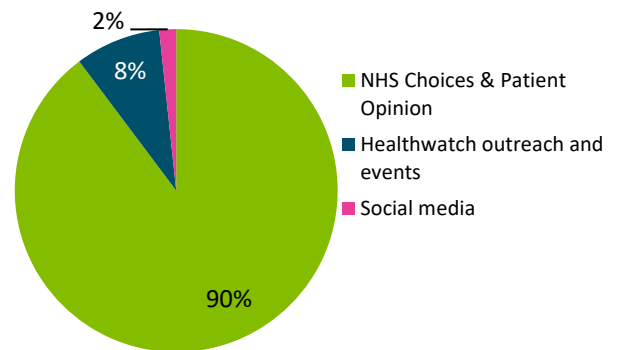
Methodology

Data collection

Between April 1 and September 30 2017, we have collected and analysed comments from a total of 332 GP service users in Tower Hamlets who gave feedback on their experience with their GP Practice, identifying a total of 1388 issues.

We have collected comments in a variety of ways:

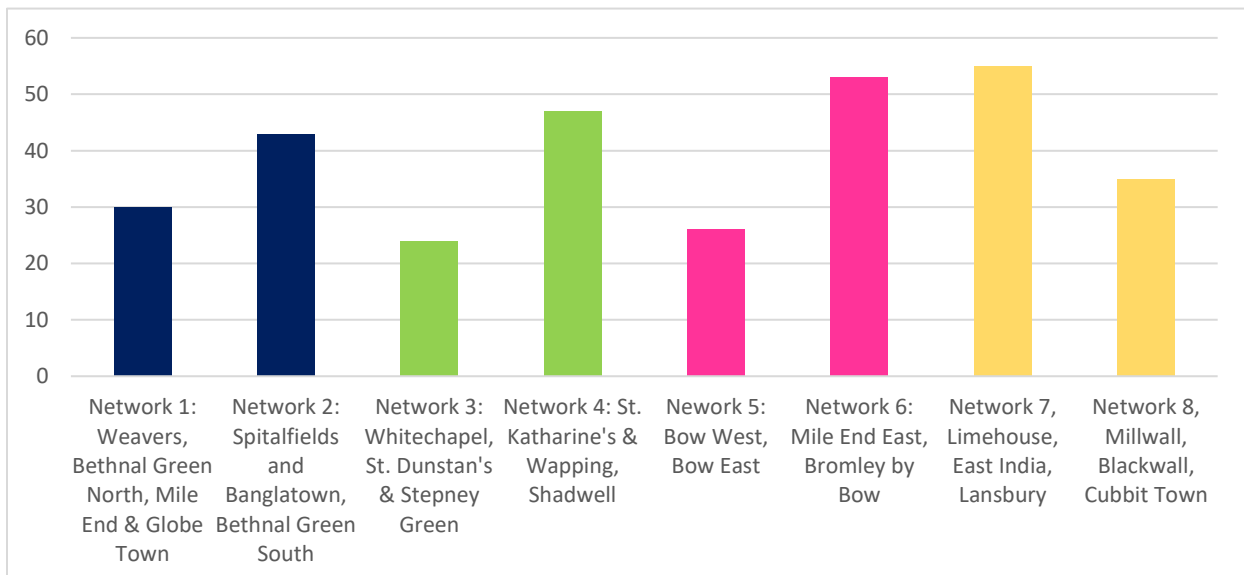
- ❖ Our volunteers engaged directly, face-to-face, with patients, asking for their feedback on the services they had received
- ❖ We coded patients' comments published on NHS Choices and Patient Opinion, as well as on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Nextdoor).



The vast majority of comments we receive came from **NHS Choices**.

Disclaimer: The data analysed is based on a partly self-selected opportunity sample, rather than a random or representative sample; therefore, it is not, nor does it claim to be statistically significant. The views represented in this report do not necessarily represent the views of Tower Hamlets NHS patients as a whole. Due to sourcing comments from NHS Choices/Patient Opinion, this report might represent a more negative view of NHS GP services than could be found by a study with a representative sample.

Most comments referred to the GP networks 6 and 7



The Coding

Service user comments have been coded using a nationally recognised coding matrix, which applies issue, care pathway location, and (positive, neutral or negative) sentiment. The same coding matrix and the same methods for aggregating data from multiple sources are used by ten other Healthwatch across England.¹

The Care Pathway

Care Pathway locations cover:

- ❖ *Transport* (ability to get to-and-from services)
- ❖ *Reception* (reception services including back-office)
- ❖ *Diagnosis/Testing* (diagnosis of condition, including testing and scans)
- ❖ *Clinical Treatment* (treatment received by trained clinicians)
- ❖ *Clinical Nursing* (care received by trained nurses)
- ❖ *Discharge* (discharge from a service)
- ❖ *Follow On* (supplementary services following discharge, including care packages)
- ❖ *Community* (community based services, such as social care, district nursing and community mental health).

Additionally, for the purposes of this report, *booking* (the process of obtaining appointments with a medical professional) and *waiting lists* (the length of time between making a booking and receiving an appointment) have been jointly examined as a cross-cutting theme, across the care pathway, in a separate section.

Quality assurance of coding is ensured through the Healthwatch Tower Hamlets Patient Experience Panel, a team of service users and volunteers based in the local community, who meet regularly to code all comments received by Healthwatch.

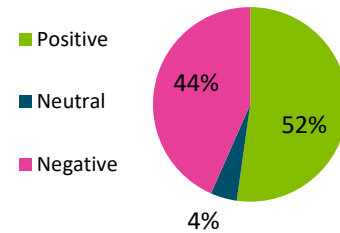
¹Hackney, Waltham Forest, Croydon, Doncaster, Kirklees, Cumbria, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and Somerset

Our insights

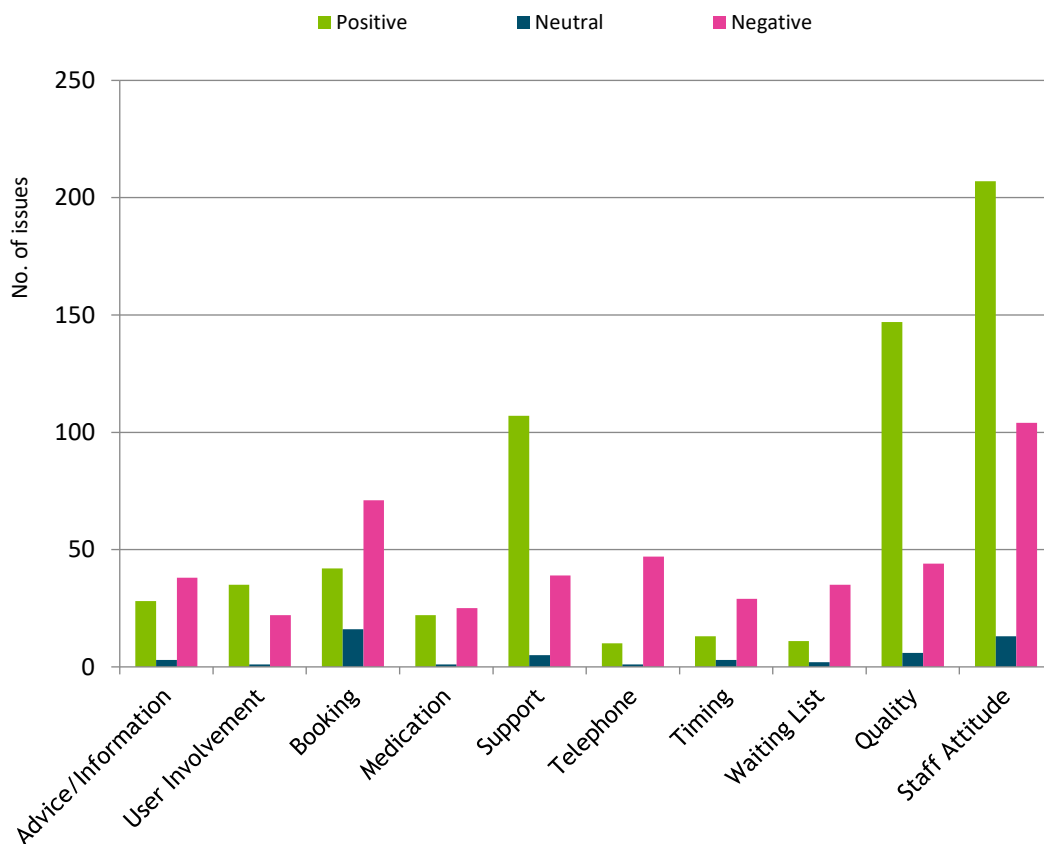
TOP OVERALL TRENDS

According to the comments, sentiment about GP's in the borough is **52% positive**, broadly similar to the situation in or previous report.

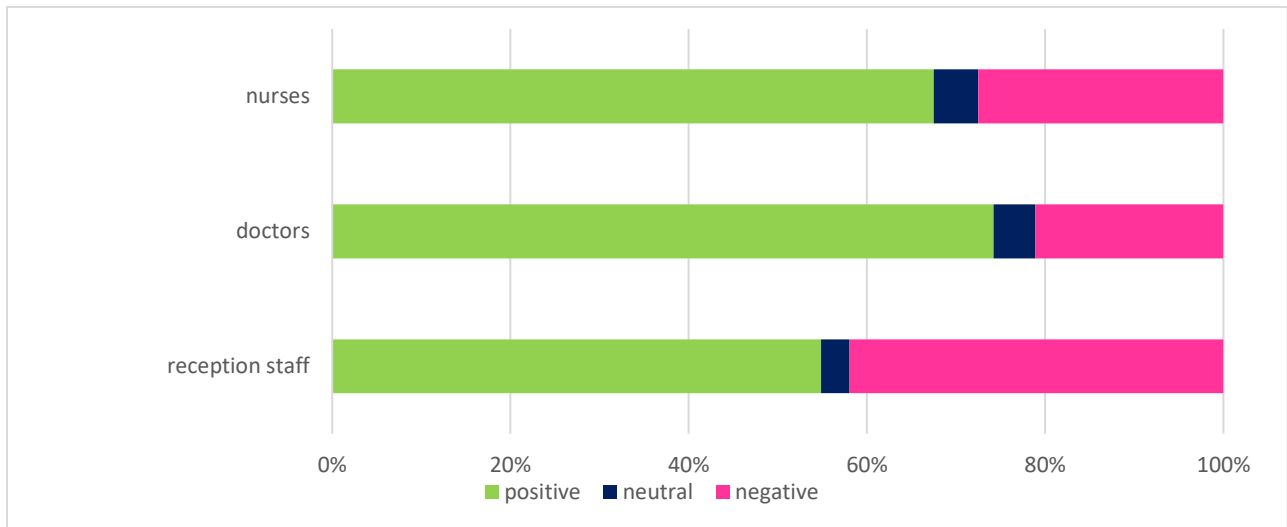
Patients are happy with the **quality of service provision**, the **attitude of staff members** and with the **level of support** they receive from their GP surgery, but are frustrated about the process of **booking appointments**. Sentiment about **advice and information** is also leaning negative



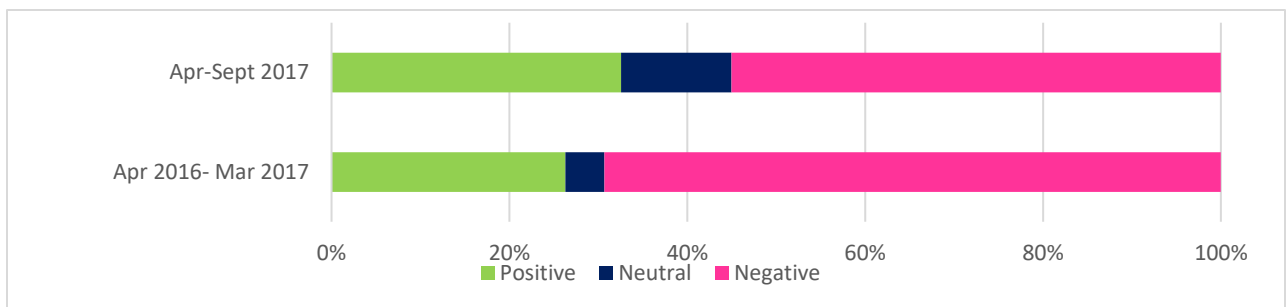
This suggests that GP services in Tower Hamlets are seen by residents as **high quality**, but **difficult to access**, and some people may feel kept in the dark about their care options.



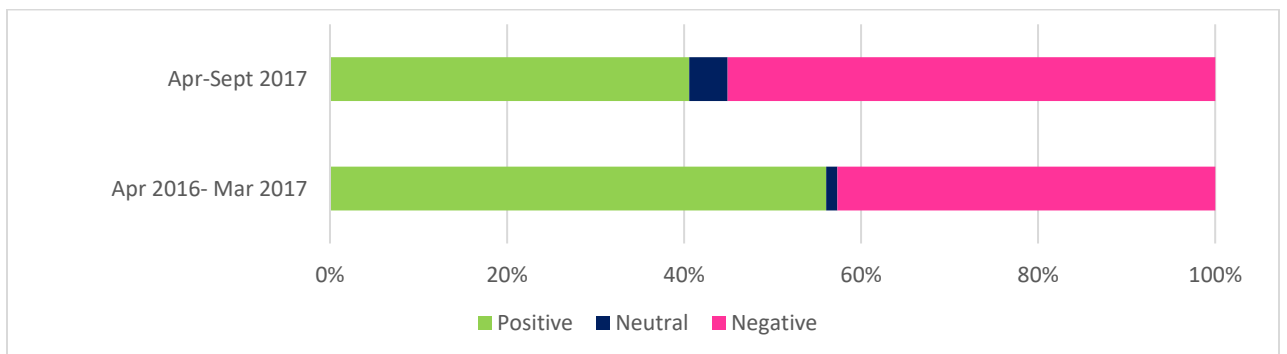
In terms of **staff attitude**, service users are more satisfied with the attitude of medical staff (doctors and nurses) than with that of reception staff.



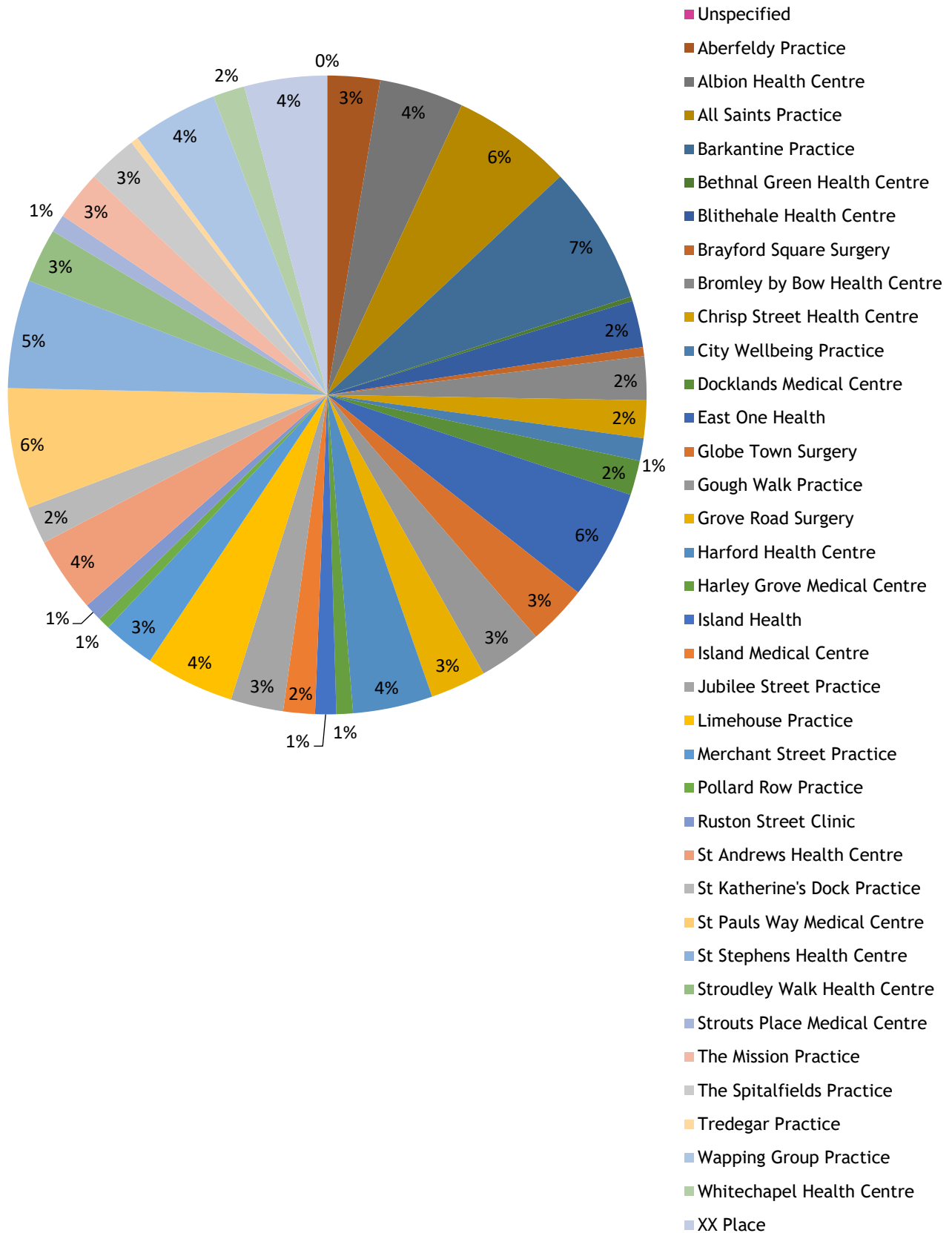
Compared to our previous report (April 2016 to March 2017), sentiment about **booking** has improved slightly.



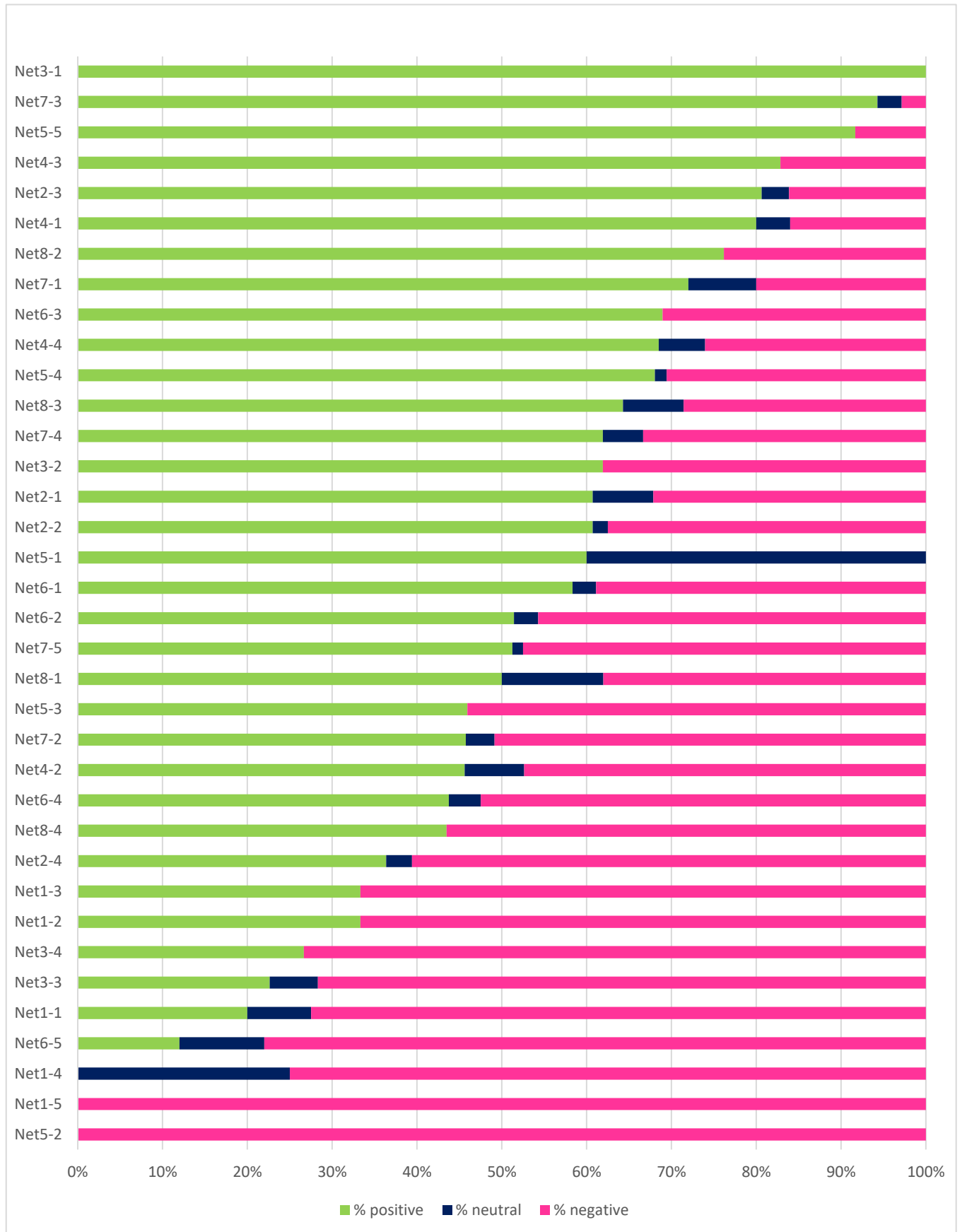
On the other hand, sentiment about **advice and information** has deteriorated slightly.

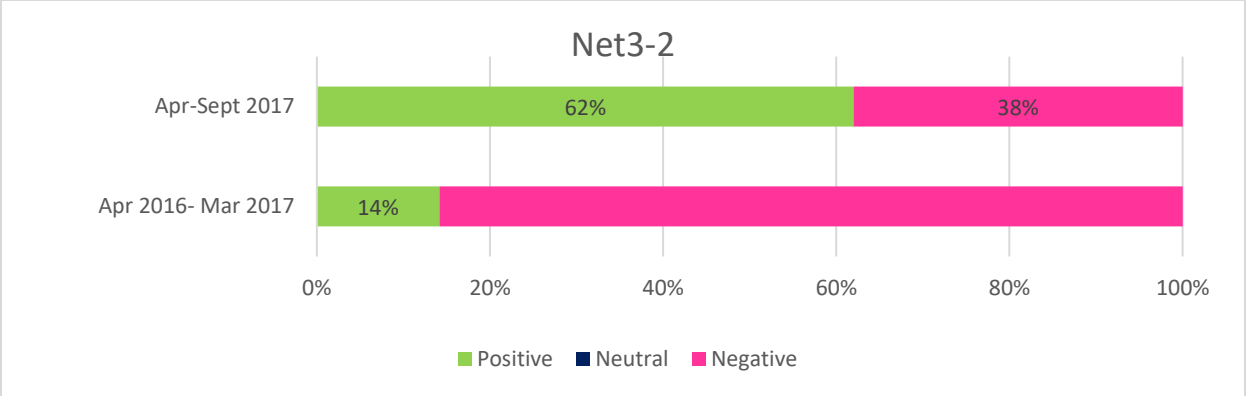
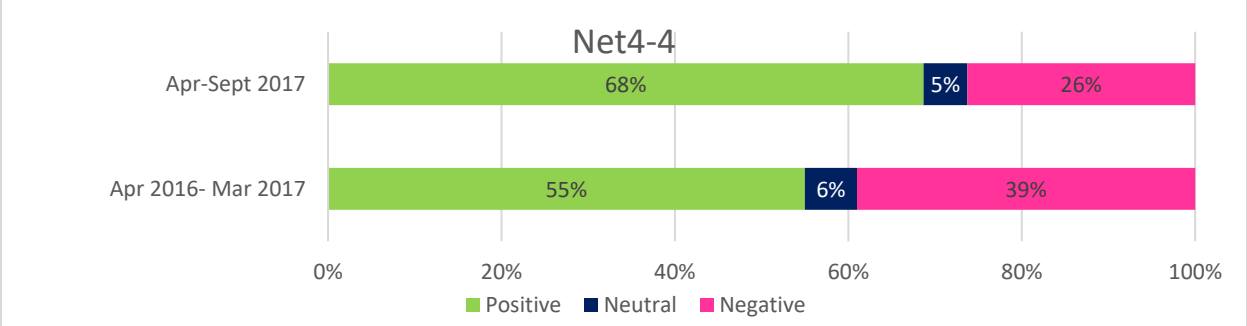
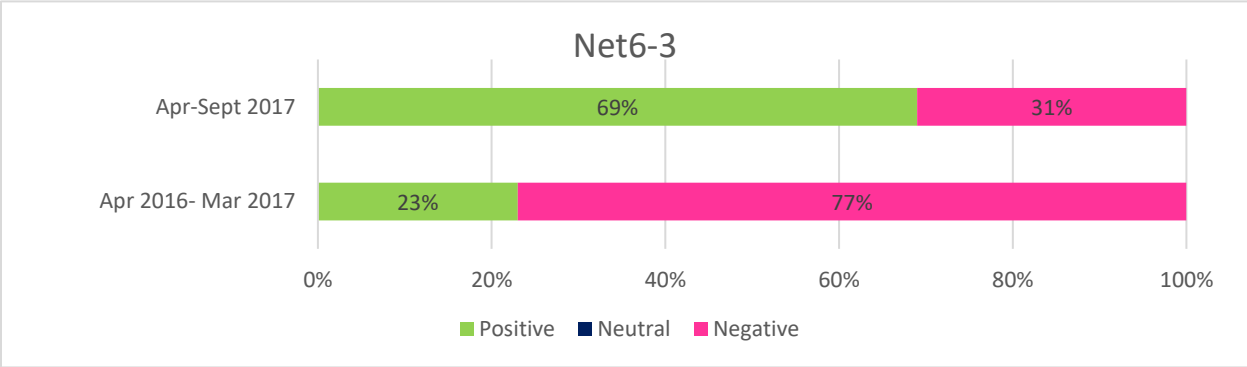


Comments by surgery

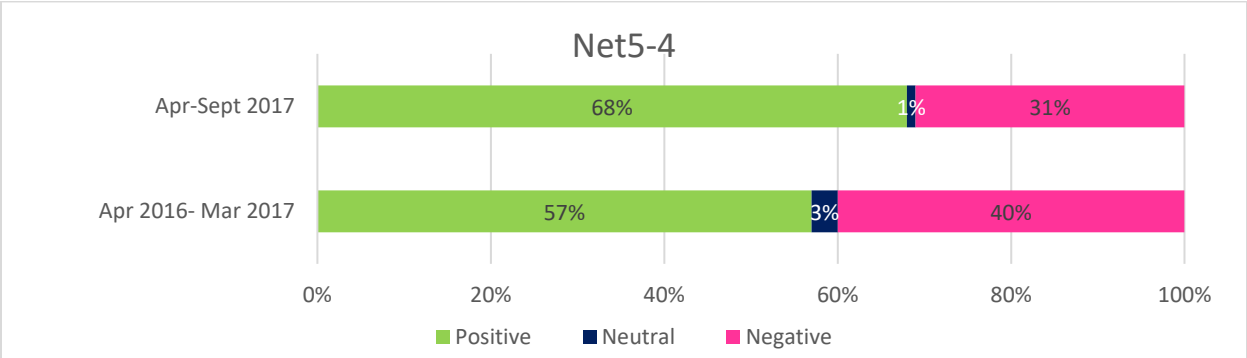


Ranking of surgeries by patient opinion

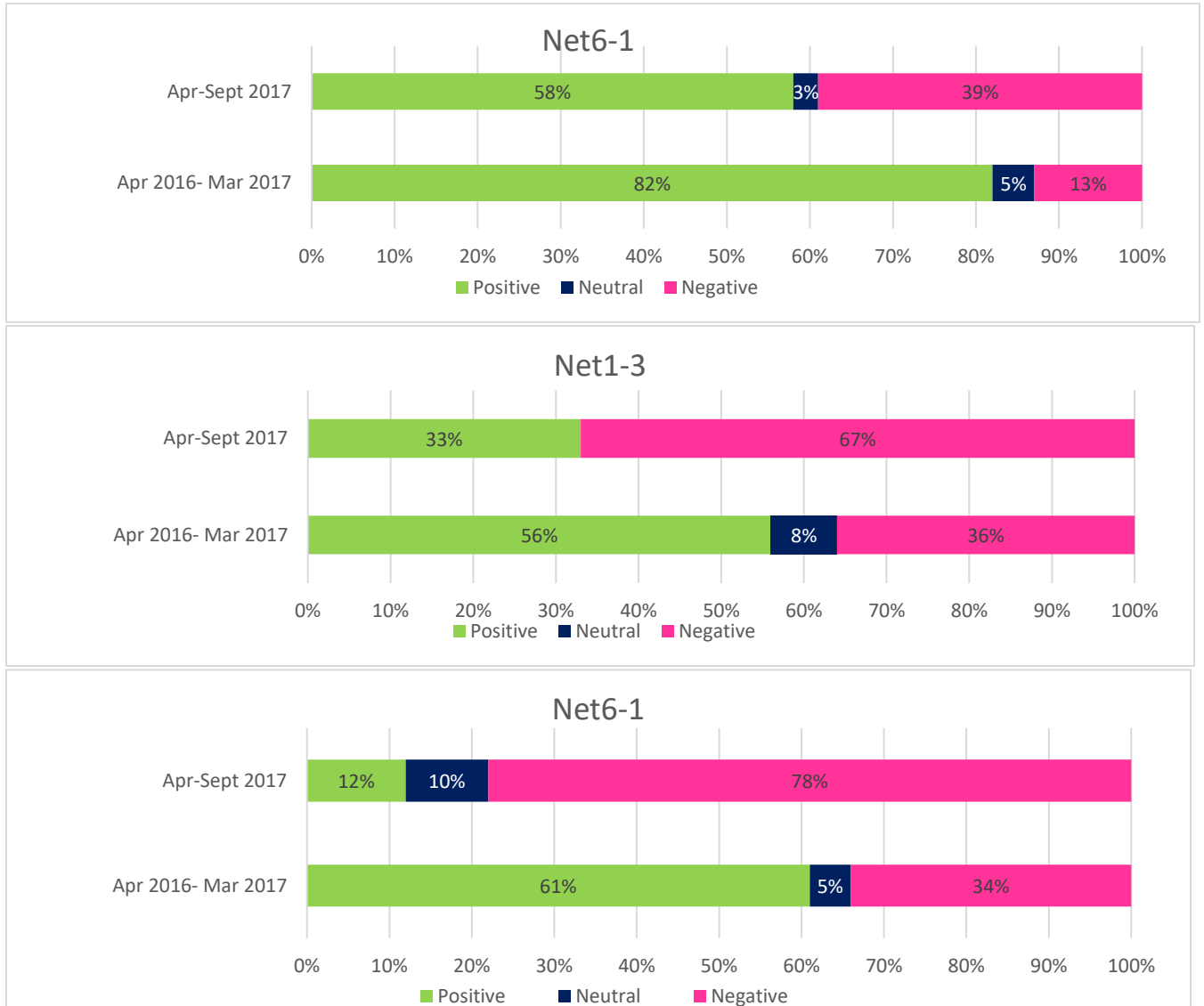




Since our previous report, patient opinion of some surgeries has improved



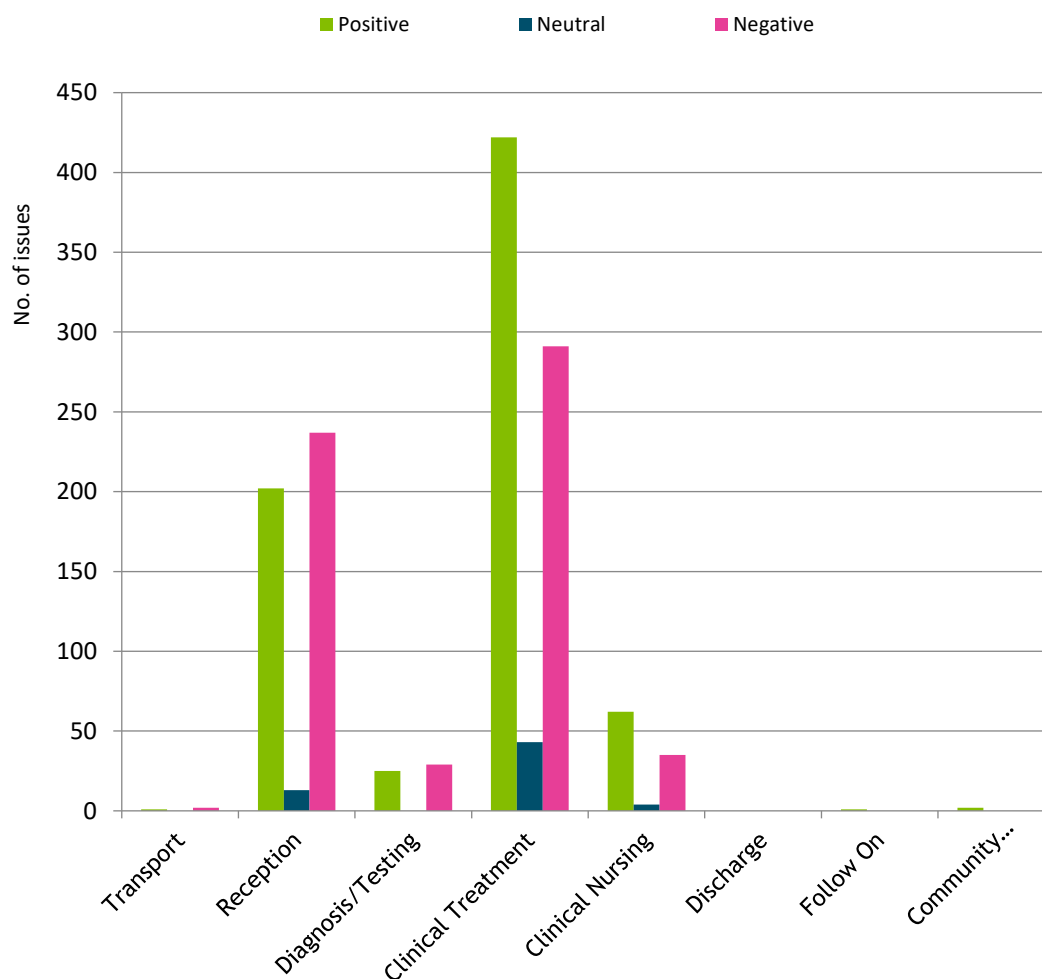
On the other hand, opinion about other surgeries has deteriorated:



THE CARE PATHWAY- A SERVICE USER'S JOURNEY

Clinical treatment is, by far, the most discussed aspect; and attitude towards it is broadly positive (56% positive). The most positively regarded aspect is **clinical nursing** (61% positive), partly because nurses are seen as more available and easier to book than doctors.

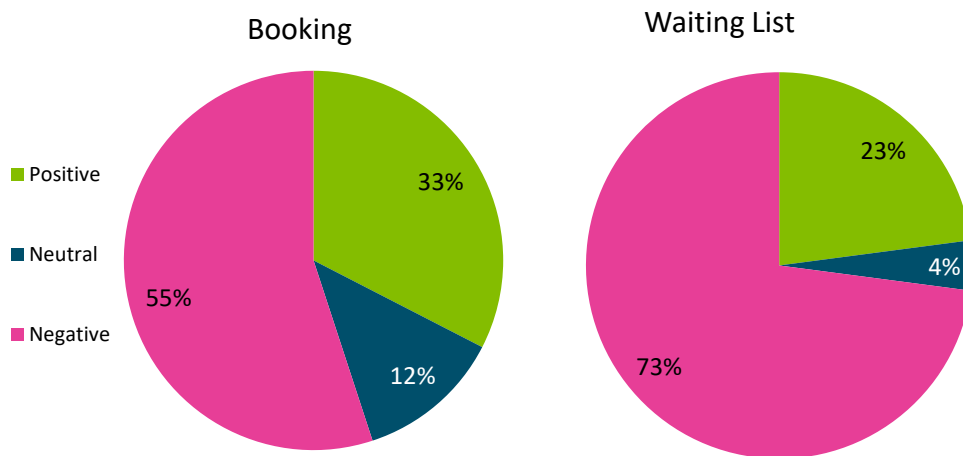
On the other hand, attitude towards **reception** and **diagnosis/testing** is leaning towards negative. Administrative errors, unpopular booking systems and a poorly run telephone play an important part in this relatively less satisfactory assessment.



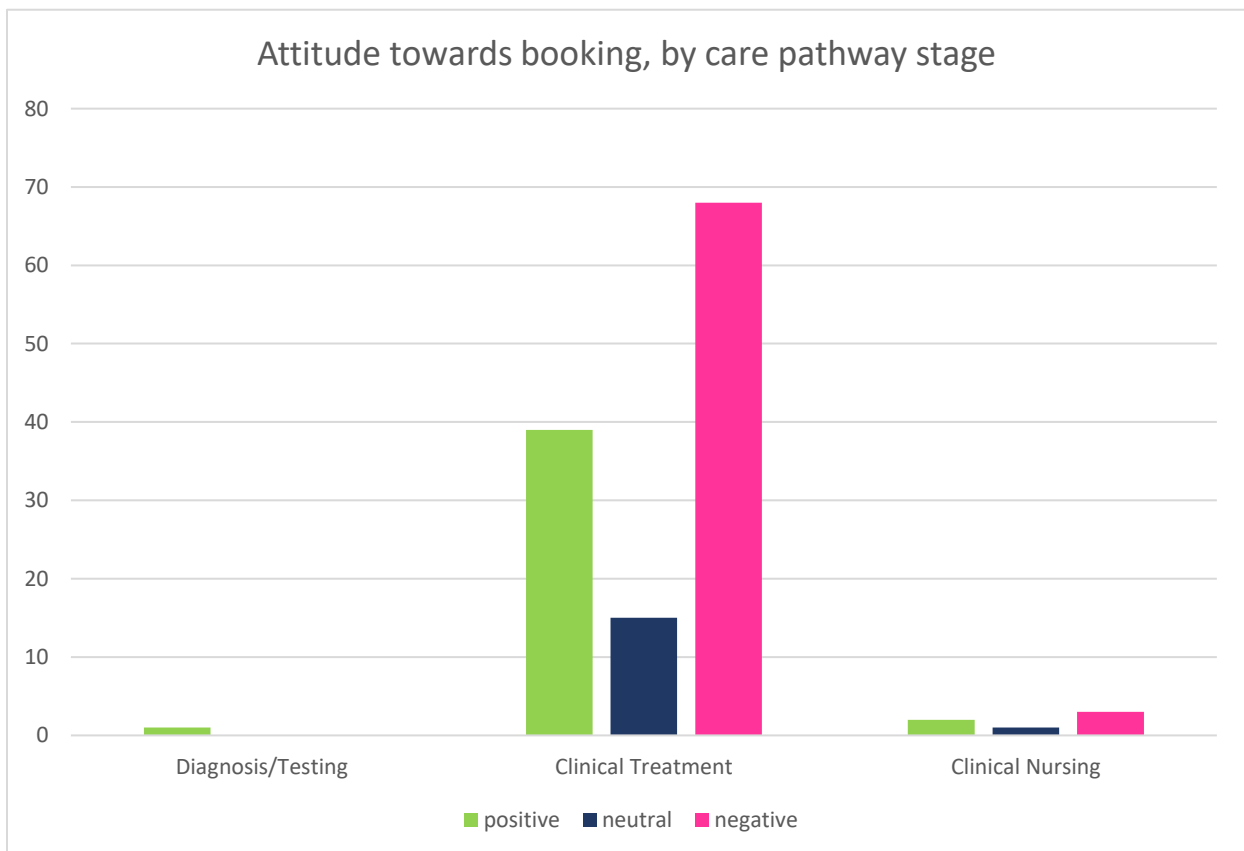
BOOKING AND WAITING LIST

Overall, **attitude towards booking is 55% negative**. Many service users find booking systems frustrating and user-unfriendly, but dissatisfaction is not universal.

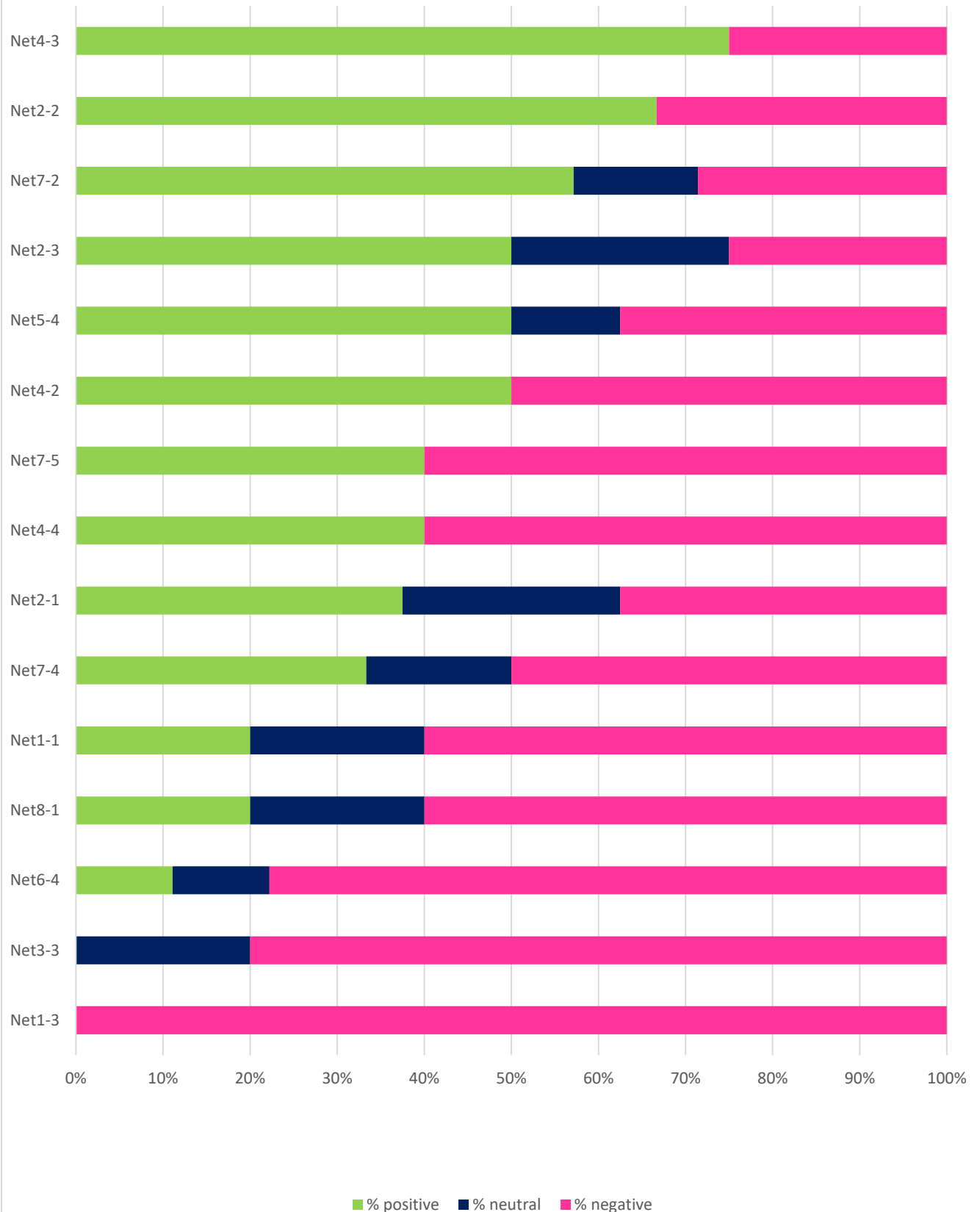
Attitude towards waiting lists is 77% negative. Many service users feel that they have to wait an unreasonable amount of time for appointments.



Most comments about **booking** and all comments about **waiting lists** referred to making arrangements to see a doctor.



Ranking of surgeries by patient opinion of the booking process



The Booking Process

Some patients perceive surgeries' booking systems as inefficient, lacking transparency and difficult to understand. Because of the lack of transparency, some service users perceive it as unfair or arbitrary.

- *It is very difficult to get appointment with the GP, when we get the appointment the GP is very good and doctors the only thing I am not good is the appointment by phone, it is never available*
- *Recently, I wanted to book an appointment for a non-urgent issue. I visited the online system (Emis Access) and found no appointments available. Assuming it was broken (since usually the page shows a list of available appointments), I looked around and found a new appointment booking system had been introduced (Evergreen Life), so I signed up for that as well. Still no appointments available with no explanation. I called the practice and waited 4 minutes while the phone rang before the receptionist picked up. I informed them that I wanted to book an appointment but that the online system wasn't showing any available. They seemed irritated by my question and informed me that "that's because there are no appointments available". Since offering appointments seems to me to be the core purpose and entire point of a GP surgery, I would have expected them to offer some apology, explanation, or advice for how else I can obtain this essential service. However, I had to ask several more (polite) questions before discovering that for some reason the "July appointments haven't been arranged yet" (this call was a week into July). I have no idea how the practice works internally, and it appeared I was not going to get an explanation of what had happened. [...] [The surgery should] 1. Use the "notice" feature of Emis Access (and the other platform) to inform patients why there are no appointments available on the booking screen. 2. Train your reception staff to understand the needs of patients and be polite on the phone. The receptionist should have explained the reason for the unavailability of appointments, steps the practice was taking to rectify the situation, and any workaround for the patient in need of medical care.*
- *I really can't understand the appointment system in this practice. I went in at 9 am to book an appointment for my son. They said they didn't have any appointments and that I could try at 2 pm when the appointments were released. I went in at 2. They said there was an appointment available for 2 weeks' time. Given that my son has had a persistent cough for 4 weeks already this did not seem to be a great option. I asked what the alternative was, and they said I could try and get a same day appointment if I came in in the morning. I'm certainly looking forward to going around in circles for a few days. Last time this happened he ended up in A&E for the night. Surely this is not the best use of scarce NHS resources. Not to mention what it does for my mental health.*
- *If you call the doctors surgery and use the automated appointment line and try to book an appointment with any doctor, you will not be given one (example) if you already have a nurse appointment so you then have to visit the surgery in person or go through the above telephone calls.*
- *When dealing with reception team it is very difficult to book appointments when you require. I was advised they cannot book appointments and at any point in the week and they would rather patients phone on the day for availability which they could not advise of. And when you do phone on the day the same jargon is provided, and no appointments are made available. In summary I have found trying to book appointments very difficult at this surgery, generally the wait time can be anything from 3-5 weeks.*

Booking emergency appointment is a particularly frustrating experience.

- *The surgery has now decided to do something that just does not make any sense, you now have to phone on the day for an appointment which can leave you feeling panicked that you will be unable to get one, you have to call at 8 am but you will still be at least 10-15 in the queue, which will take up to 25- 30 mins to get to the top. Think it's disgusting. I was so much better when you could just call and get one any time you want. It's just lazy and puts people in. Worrying way. Think it should return to how it was before. Patient.*
- *In trying to book an appointment online and pick up a repeat prescription I was unable to due to no availability online. When dealing with the reception team over the phone, I was advised they cannot book appointments and at any point in the week and they would rather patients phone on the day for availability which they could not advise of. And when you do phone on the day the same jargon is provided, and no appointments are made available. In summary I have found trying to book appointments very difficult at this surgery, generally the wait time can be anything from 3-5 weeks. When you do get an appointment it is common to have up to an hour delay to see the doctor. Reception team seem to always mention being short staffed when dealing over the phone however upon review within the surgery there's often multiple personal at the desk working at less than acceptable productive manner.*
- *Every time I wish to make an appointment it is always impossible, takes away my right to health care. Have to call up within certain times to make an appointment which is impossible if you're working at the time!*
- *On Monday I went to the surgery to try to get an appointment for the morning after but they couldn't book the appointment, so I was calling on Tuesday, on Wednesday and today. And I still didn't get an appointment... They always say to call 'tomorrow' but how can I get an appointment for tomorrow morning if I have to call tomorrow morning???*

Others, however, have had positive experiences with their surgeries' booking systems:

- *When I feel the need to visit the Surgery, I have invariably been able to make an appointment fairly easily, and with helpful assistance from the receptionist/s. Sometimes this is done in person at the Surgery, and on other occasions I have made the appointment by telephone. By whichever method, the result has always been that I have been given an appointment.*
- *Found it very easy to book an initial appointment regarding minor surgery on the same day of requesting. Follow up appointment to receive surgery was quick and painless, had a nice chat with the staff who were very friendly and professional. Found it easy to book an appointment to have my stitches removed one week later as recommended.*
- *Very helpful and ease of access. Am able to get an appt when I need to with the doctor I want.*
- *I have always got appointments fast enough to keep me satisfied. Sadly I've now moved out of the area and have had to change my practice but I would definitely re-join this practice if back in [Tower Hamlets].*
- *Earlier I used to feel the pinch of not getting same week or before and after work appointments but recently they have added new GP so I guess they have more appointments available which is a good thing.*
- *It seems much easier to get an appointment that suits me, and to see the same doctor, compared to what I hear about other practices.*
- *Ever since the new appointment update, it has been ridiculously easy to book appointments, the reception staff is always happy to help and always go the extra mile, the drs also do the same. Very happy with the way things are at the moment.*
- *Whenever I need to book an appointment I can.*

Opening times

Surgeries that offer appointments outside of normal working hours are praised:

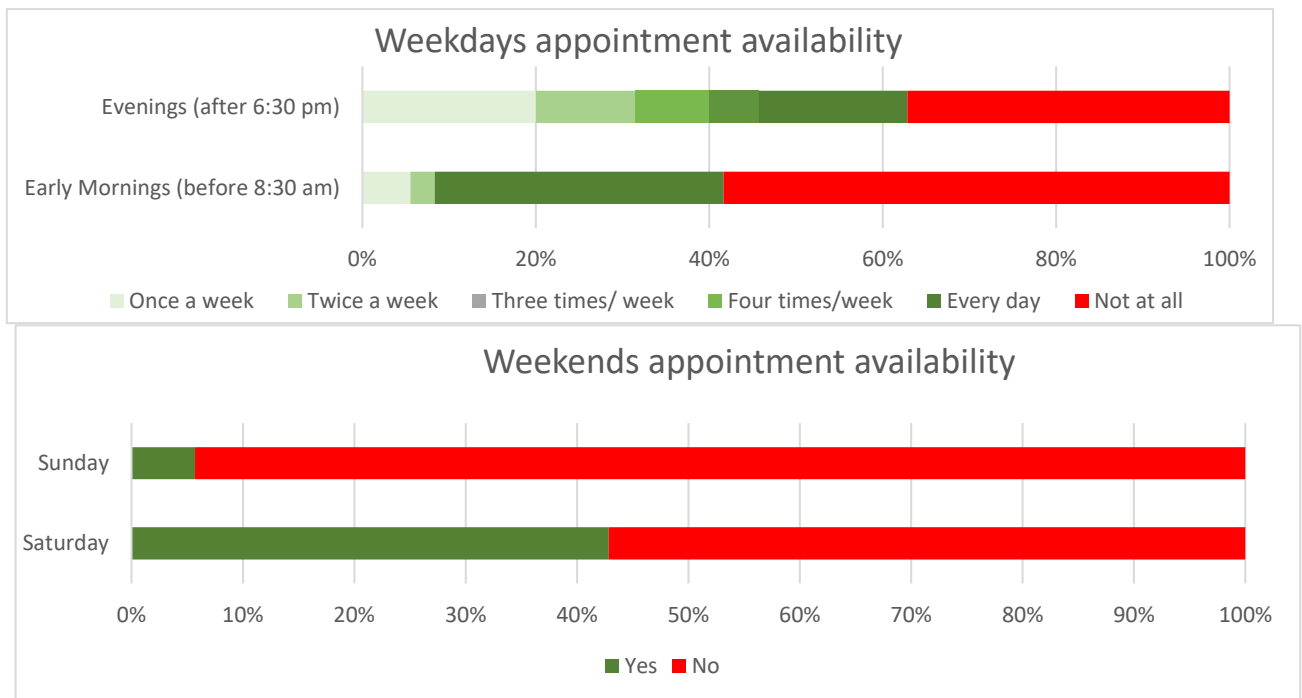
- Staff are professional, helpful and friendly whilst my GP has gone above and beyond with early appointments for vaccinations and evening appointments to serve those who work 9-5. A real asset to the local community.
- Great that they offer early morning, evening and weekend appointments.
- It's close to home, offers a wide range of appointment times into the evenings.
- The extended opening times of 8am-8pm and on Saturdays is extremely useful if you work full time.

However, not all types of appointments are available outside of normal working hours:

- Some special appointments can only be booked on week days and people who are working Mon-Fri have to ask for a day off to attend them.

According to data published on NHS Choices for each surgery's consultation hours:

- 15 out of 36 surgeries offer early morning appointments (earlier than 8:30 AM) at least once a week
- 22 out of 36 surgeries offer late evening appointments (after 6:30 PM) at least once a week
- 15 out of 36 surgeries offer Saturday appointments.
- Only 2 out of 36 surgeries offer Sunday appointments. Both also offer a walk-in centre service for people registered with different surgeries.
- Only 5 surgeries out of 36 offer no appointments whatsoever outside of normal working hours



Telephone booking

For many patients, booking an appointment over the phone is a frustrating experience, partly because of long waiting time and partly because of a generally user-unfriendly and error-prone system.

- *The surgery expects you to call in at 8am to book an appointment on the day. This is incredibly frustrating as most people call at this time and the line is busy until 9/10 am and by then you're told to call again the next day and the process of not getting an appointment just repeats. It'll make a huge difference if they had better customer service and reconsidered their appointment procedure by allowing patients to call and book an appointment in advance as the lines are busy at 8am as everyone is calling.*
- *Made an appointment for annual blood test. The day before, I picked up a mobile call from the surgery - with no message - figured it was cancelled due to hack - called back spent 12 minutes told 'you're second in queue' rang off - called back 'surgery is closed'. Called 9.30am the next day - 'you're first in queue' for 8 minutes - rang off as no answer!!! Went to 10.10am appointment ... told 'we've been calling you for days'.*
- *To book an appointment you have to call 08:00 am early morning and book appointment that could take a week plus they open 08:00 and when you call them to book the call goes to out of hours service.*
- *Staff have been very helpful and went beyond what's expected many times in the past. The only frustration is reaching them over the phone, otherwise a lovely place!*
- *The suggestion that she had was that is a need to have more phone line at GP; like that she won't need to spend too much time on the phone till she can have appointment.*
- *It's very difficult to get appointment with the GP, when we get the appointment the GP is very good and doctors the only thing not good is the appointment by phone never is available.*

The over-stretching of telephone lines may defeat the purpose of having a telephone-based booking system. In some surgeries, patients reportedly queue outside before opening, as they cannot get an appointment any other way. This indicates a dysfunctional booking system and may pose risks to patients' safety and well-being, particularly in cold or rainy weather.

- *Reception advises to queue in person when the surgery opens at 8 am in order to get a same day appointment. I did that once, got there around 8.10am and there was already a queue of people in front of me. There were no appointments left when it was my turn. The receptionist said that patients usually start arriving at 7.30 am and queue outside.*
- *Sometime appointments are difficult to get. Always busy on the phone so I usually go in. They know me there and they know if I'm there asking for an appointment then it's probably serious.*

Online booking

According to their websites, all 36 surgeries in the borough do offer the option of booking appointments online. The online booking service is popular with service users.

- *The only downside was not finding out about the online appointments sooner, as once I was registered I could always get an appointment within the next few days.*
- *I've registered to use the online booking system for appointments and repeat prescriptions and it works. I was able to see available appointments with my doctor for a routine matter and book a date and time that was good for me.*
- *Came in for an appointment in the afternoon nothing was available. Receptionist managed to sign me up or online access and now I can do everything online which is amazing.*
- *Yes, trying to get an appointment can be difficult but I guess booking in advance might help or usually it's quite easy getting an appointment through the online access system.*
- *The surgery's new online presence seems to be settling down, and as someone lucky enough to have easy access to the technology, it is very convenient to be able to book appointments online with my own doctor. While I have never found it difficult to make an urgent appointment with one or other of the practice doctors, being able to follow up longer term maladies with one's own doctor has not always been easy, and this is a great improvement. I wonder if these IT developments could be extended to include some kind of messaging system added to Patient Access. Obviously, doctors don't want to be drowned in emails, but I wonder sometimes if a short exchange of messages could on occasions resolve a problem without recourse to a time-consuming appointment. Just a thought.*
- *I like the telephone and online service and the staff are always friendly and seem to care.*

However, in some cases technical difficulties or other limitations (such as not having the option to book an appointment with a locum, or in some cases only being able to book nurse appointments) prevent patients from making full use of it.

- *GP Surgery is not bad, I mean to book appointment online, because I had some problems entering the code to access the online appointment services. I find it Quicker to visit the GP face to face or then book over the phone.*
- *The new online registration for patients to be able to look at their medical history and book their own appointments online is yet another joke as you very rarely are able to get an appointment at all this is due to only being able to book the online appointment with your own usual doctor.*
- *In trying to book an appointment online and pick up a repeat prescription I was unable to due to no availability online.*
- *Absolutely NO doctor appointments available online either (but nurse appointments are available)*
- *It's close to home, offers a wide range of appointment times into the evenings. They can run behind sometimes but that's more due to patients taking up more time than allotted. Could also do with being able to make more appointments online through patient access.*

In practice, some surgeries have online booking systems that aren't functional or aren't known to the public.

- *You can't book an appointment by physically going to the centre neither by online as I have an account and I couldn't book online appointment when I went to ask they said that I can only book by phone early morning.*
- *No mention of being able to book on line or being able to email the GP which I thought was now supposed to be available across the Borough*

Emergency appointments

Some patients have reportedly been able to book an emergency appointment within 24 hours.

- *[responding to tweet that was claiming Tory cuts made it "impossible" for Londoners to get a GP]:* "not entirely true. Got GP appt this week within 24 hrs in Isle of Dogs surgery.
- *As a parent with a small child I have found it incredibly easy to get an urgent appointment for the child - first in terms of a rapid call back from the doctor, and then, if they deem necessary, with an appointment booked for that day.*
- *One day my son had high temperature and I called very late to see doctor, they tried their best to book my son to see the doctor, from the phone I can feel they were take care of my son very much, I am so appreciated.*
- *I have never found it difficult to make an urgent appointment with one or other of the practice doctors*
- *My GP is excellent. I like their booking and triage system- if you need to be seen on the same day it can happen- not with your own doctor, because your doctor may not be working that day... but any doctor.*

Emergency appointments are not, however, readily available in all surgeries.

- *It is hard to get appointment by phone or when you walk in. It is difficult to get emergency appointment.*
- *Requested an appointment - informed no telephone consultations available and next appointment available in 2 weeks, asked how does the registration online work, informed it is the same (next appt in 2 weeks) The working population get no support from a practice like this, hardly visit the practice and each time I have tried to arrange an appointment my experience has been the same... Horrible!*
- *On Monday I went to the surgery to try to get an appointment for the morning after, but they couldn't book the appointment, so I was calling on Tuesday, on Wednesday and today. And I still didn't get an appointment... They always say to call 'tomorrow' but how can I get an appointment for tomorrow morning if I have to call tomorrow morning?*
- *48-hour appointments? I should be so lucky!!! They are impossible to get.*

Availability of emergency appointments is also not a substitute for routine appointments with unreasonable waiting lists.

- *Do not accept new patients until each patient can be seen within a reasonable time. The usual response of "just book an urgent appointment" is not acceptable: non-urgent appointments are essential to prevent costly urgent conditions.*

Waiting lists

Some patients report waiting 2-5 weeks to an appointment.

- *I have found trying to book appointments very difficult at this surgery, generally the wait time can be anything from 3-5 weeks.*
- *Since the move to the new surgery. To get an appointment is minimum two weeks, by that time one's ailments would have worsen.*
- *Forget about getting an appointment next week or even next month.*
- *At last, I was able to get an appointment but, since it's a 'routine' appointment (it's not, I'm sick!), the first slot available is in two weeks!*
- *The patient went to the Practice with the intent to book an appointment, but the waiting list is 1 month.*
- *I had been trying to get an appointment for had a long time and for this medical centre, you cannot get an appointment in two weeks. It is a miracle if you get one. It is always somehow full.*
- *Sometimes there's quite a delay to get an online appointment (earliest available can be 3weeks away) but the service I received at the practice has always been excellent from reception staff to nurses to GPs.*
- *They don't have many permanent doctors and the wait for an appointment is regularly 2-3 weeks. One time I had waited my 2 weeks and got a phone call half an hour before I was due an appointment to say that the doctor wasn't coming in so I no longer had an appointment. Quite often you can't get an appointment with the same doctor because they don't know when or even if they will be back.*

Others are seen faster:

- *[responding to tweet that was claiming Tory cuts made it "impossible" for Londoners to get a GP]: "not entirely true. Got GP appt this week within 24 hrs in Isle of Dogs surgery. Seen within ten mins of appt time.*
- *It's easy to book an appointment online, by phone or in the surgery and I can usually get an appointment at a time that suits me, in a couple days.*

Waiting times

Once in the surgery, some patients report being seen within 5-10 minutes, which is considered acceptable.

- *Seen within ten mins of appt time.*
- *My appointment with nurse and doctor we pretty much on time not needing to wait more than 5mins.*

Others, however, report 30 minutes- 1 hour waits before being seen.

- *When you do get an appointment, it is common to have up to an hour delay to see the doctor.*
- *20 - 30-minute waiting after arriving for an appointment. They should inform people of delays and have a more accessible service for appointments.*
- *After having an appointment with the GP at 11 am, she needed to wait another half an hour at the door to be seen by GP. She was disappointed because she had to go to GP so many times till she can be seen by a specialist.*
- *Overall this surgery is very good, and the level of care I received here is excellent. My only grumble is that it takes a significant amount of time to actually be seen by my GP from when my appointment is scheduled. I have been visiting this practice for 4-5 years and I'm usually waiting about 1hr-1hr30 each time I have an appointment. I do get an apology by my doctor and an excuse that there are about 2000 people on the books for them to see. Which of course I understand but I do think this waiting time is a tad ridiculous. A scheduled 10-minute appointment becomes close to 2 hours from start to finish.*
- *On the day when he had the appointment, he waited to be seen by doctor for 1 hour.*
- *To get an appointment is minimum two weeks, by that time one's ailments would have worsened and then the 20 - 30-minute waiting after arriving for an appointment.*
- *Last 4-5 visits I made, every time I have been called to see the doctor after 35 to 40 minutes than my given appointment time. (then doctors try to prove that they were so busy with other emergency patients. -it happens every time I visited.*
- *If you were sick or your kids, you will see a nurse not a medical doctor you may wait 2 hours as well.*
- *I used self-sign in appointment. Appointment was 16:10, we arrived at 16. Straight on screen popped out information: 36 minutes delay. When we not using self-sign thingy, we don't even know there's a delay, staff do not inform you. I phoned in the morning, gotta appointment with a nurse. There's always delay. This is shocking how this place is not respecting other people's time.*

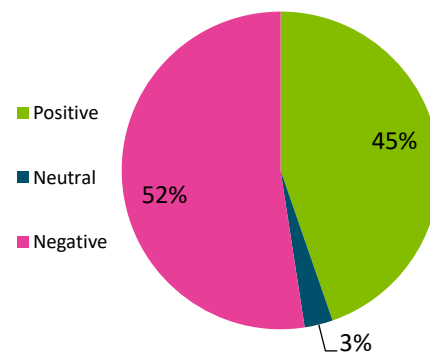
Such delays can lead to patients' appointments being shortened, or otherwise negatively impact the quality of clinical treatment.

- *I have had no problems with this surgery, having been registered with them about 2 years they have always been helpful. The only downside I have to say is sometimes you are waiting what feels like ages to be seen and can tend to override your appt time so you are delayed being seen but that's not every time.*
- *I had a first thing in the morning appointment booked so I don't get late to work. I arrived ahead of time but 40 minutes later no one was calling me in despite checking in etc. I was extremely angry to find out that the reason for the massive delay was the doctor's chit chat in the clinical room with a group of people who looked like 5-6 family members as people of all ages were involved who left around 40 minutes after my appointment was scheduled for. No apologies, no justification, no nothing from the GP who then spent the whole 4 minutes assessing my health condition which was ultimately ignored, and I had to spend hundreds of pounds in a private practice. Totally unacceptable!*
- *A particular locum doctor refused to see me after my ten minutes were up even though I was seen 35 minutes after my appointment time (this is often the case, I've always waited a minimum of 20 minutes after my appointment time)!*
- *In the day when I have an appointment I wait to be seen by doctor over 1 hour. Doctor quickly asked me about the problem that had and gave only paracetamol with no other investigation.*

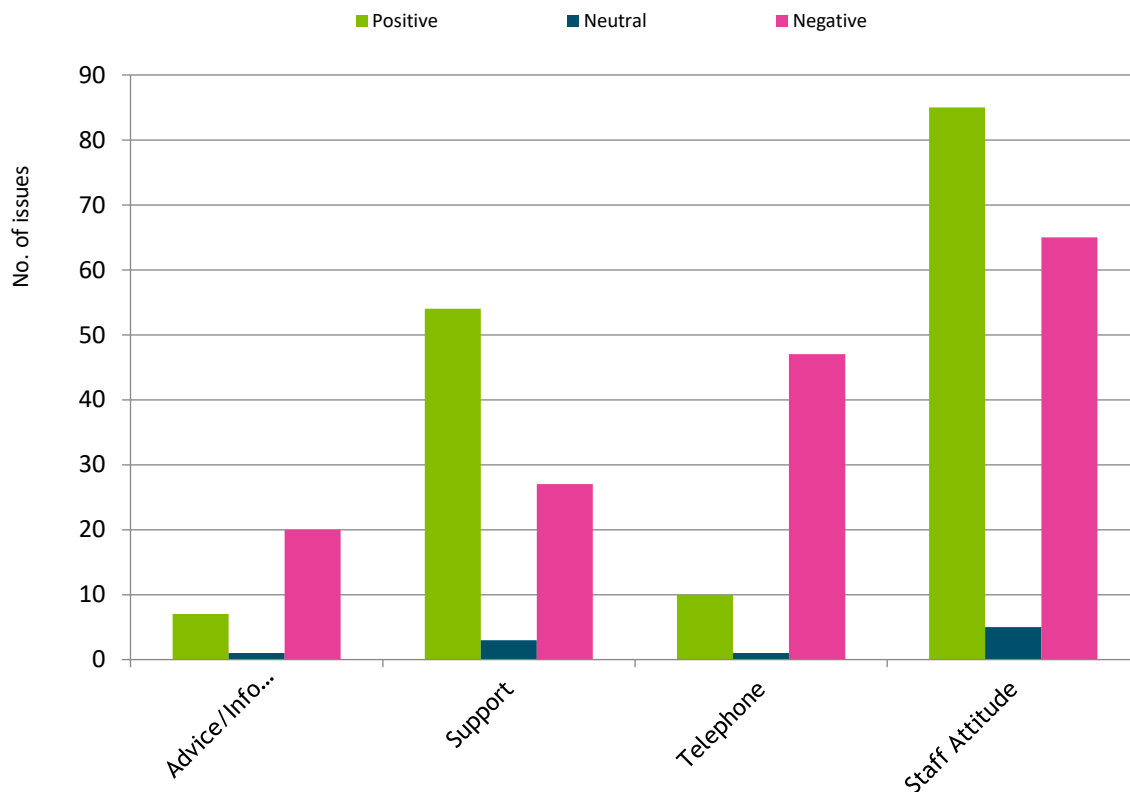
RECEPTION

Overall sentiment about reception is mixed (52% negative).

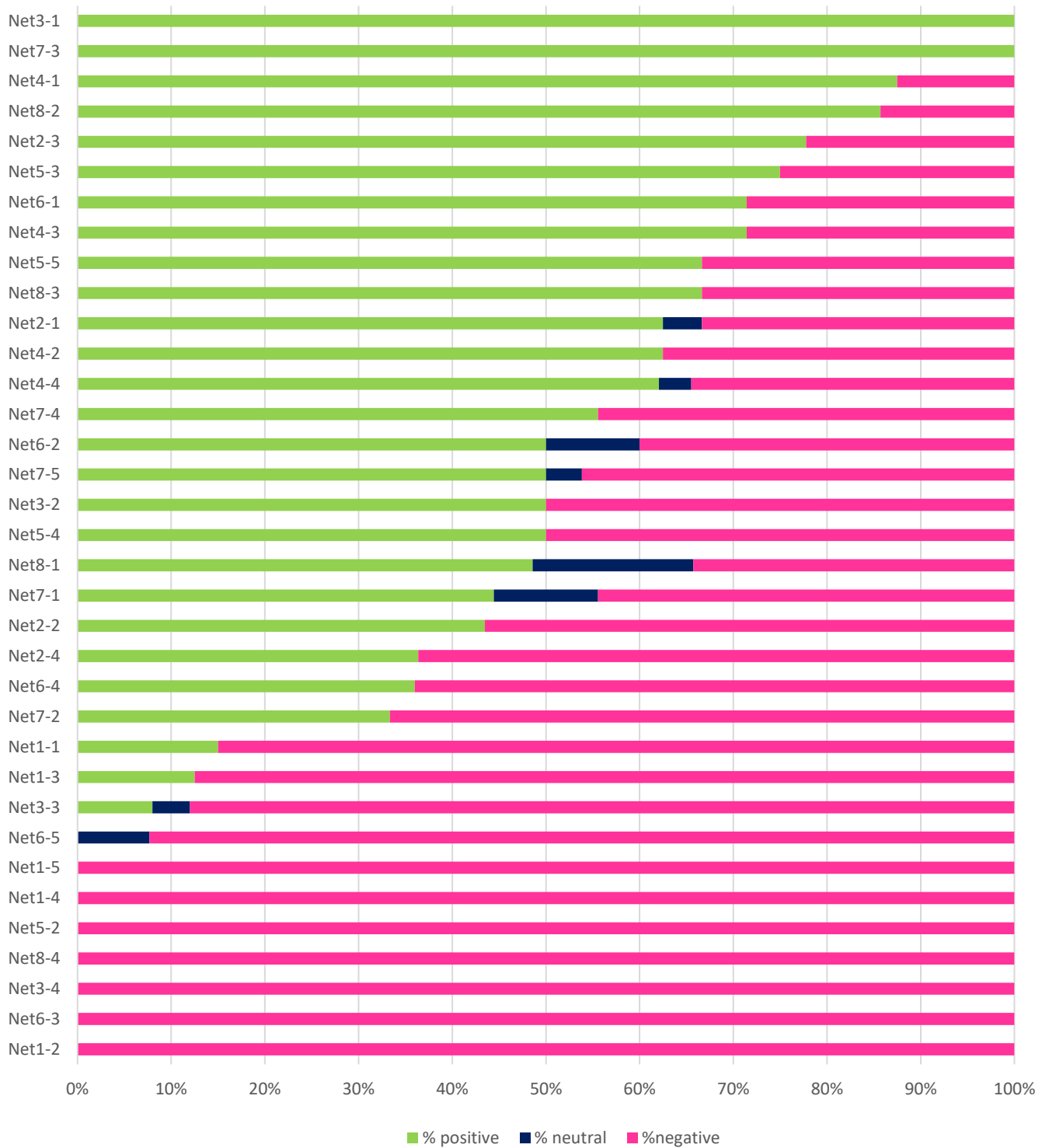
Service users are mostly happy with the level of support they receive, and attitude towards staff attitude is also leaning positive. They are, however, dissatisfied with the running of telephone lines and the insufficient level of advice and information.



Dealing with the surgery in order to book appointments or ask for information, particularly by telephone, can be a frustrating experience for some service users. Not knowing how long of a wait to expect on the phone, when they could reasonably expect to be seen or how the booking system works is a problem for patients. Better transparency in this respect could improve patient opinion.



Ranking of reception services, according to patients



Some service users report being placed on hold for long periods of time

- *I have been on the phone for an hour trying to book an appointment, but my call has not been accepted. I believe that [my surgery] had a better level of service before they introduced the automated phone service and queueing up on the phone line. The current service is terrible as no one picks up. Waiting for someone to pick up for an hour is absolutely ridiculous. The GP staff are great, but the telephone service is letting them down as well as the patients.*
- *Reception asks people to call to make an appointment or to book online but it is impossible. I have tried plenty of times, the line it is not opened. One day I decided to hold for one hour to have the confirmation of what I'm writing here, usually I hold 20 min without having any answer.*
- *It took 33 mins to speak to someone. Holding forever!!! I was 8th in the queue*
- *Been in a queue for 50 minutes so far and still waiting for someone to answer the phone. This is an absolute joke, especially as the recorded message has the cheek to say 'why not beat the queue and consult a doctor online' which is what I did 4 days ago, on behalf of my son, and haven't heard back from them.*
- *The telephone system is a total joke, told by reception call at 08:30am can't get through told I'm in position queue one yet hanging on for up to 45 mins, then when you eventually get through all the morning appointments have gone, only to then be told in person do the above all over again at 14:30pm only to get the same response.*
- *It's often impossible to get through on the phone, particularly in the mornings (one time the phone line was engaged from 8am-9.30am)*

Some service users express dissatisfaction with the attitude and professionalism of staff answering phones.

- *For someone to answer the phone is a 45-1hour wait. Once I get to the first position after waiting so damn long the line gets cut off! Telephone line is absolutely ridiculous; the wait of the calls is unbelievably bad. When calls are answered reception, staff sounds tired and not willing to help. Appointments are one month later which is disgusting. People don't have time to call at specific time and wait around on the phone because reception staff don't know how to answer calls correctly. Service is really poor.*
- *I called today in the morning for my ill father at 8.50am I was second in line and thought great it'll get answered quick how wrong was I it took them 12 mins to answer my call even though I was second in line. Is there only one person answering the calls. When they did answer, and I was saying hello they said I can't hear you I will move to the next call and that's it they hung up without waiting I wait for 12 mins for my call to get answered and I get hanged up within 5 seconds. What service is this? What if an elderly person made that call and you just hang up. How not caring and understanding. Old staff really need training. New staff are always better than them. When called back luckily a caring receptionist picked up I know it's someone new as I've been with this practice far too long. Please train your reception they may think they know everything apart from how to be compassionate caring and just being polite. Make the caller feel comfortable.*

A small number of patients blame reception staff for the dysfunctional phone lines.

- *Switched off line from 1230 - 3pm on phone, they seem to take extended lunch hours even though these aren't advertised on site so can never get over them.*
- *The phone lines are a disgrace. I've witnessed reception staff chatting away whilst the phones are continuously ringing.*
- *Reception team seem to always mention being short staffed when dealing over the phone however upon review within the surgery there's often multiple personal at the desk working at less than acceptable productive manner.*

Not knowing how long of a wait to expect on the phone is a problem for patients. Surgeries that have introduced “on hold” messages that give patients information about expected waiting times have been praised.

- *I find the staff and clinicians extremely professional and competent at the surgery. The phone system alerts me to my place in the queue, so I don't feel I am waiting on hold for ages.*

When surgeries need to reach patients, relying exclusively on telephone is not practical for some:

- *She was concerned about receiving calls from her GP. They phone her to make an appointment and she was not available to answer call. GP never called back. She thinks GP should send text, email or other form of communication asked of phone call only.*
- *There is a long wait for appointments, so I booked one 2 weeks ahead. Around 1 week before, they called me to say it was cancelled, with no explanation, so I booked another. On the day of the appointment, I arrived at the surgery to be told my appointment was cancelled again! The staff member who told me this also stated, defensively, "We called you twice this morning". I had been at work and so missed the calls.*

Registration

Patients' experience with registering to with a GP has been mixed; some found the reception staff helpful and the process straightforward, while other thought the process was lengthy and user-unfriendly and the staff unsupportive.

- *The staff were lovely and helped me register with ease and my first appointment went smoothly with friendly smiles all round.*
- *My first time going here they catered to my needs by registering me and also letting me see a doctor on the same day.*
- *I came to the practice today to register my nephew and the reception team were extremely helpful, friendly and engaging. It was a very refreshing for my family.*
- *They didn't bother sending me a confirmation to let me know that I was registered.*
- *Took a while to register me.*
- *I had all the necessary documents, but the receptionist wouldn't give me a pen. OK. Fine. They only had one and another person was using the other. Then my status triggered many questions. I live in Wapping. I had the bank statement to prove it. I haven't registered anywhere else because I haven't been sick since moving to the UK. I do travel a lot - but my residence remains in Wapping (I have the lease to prove it). Clearly there was a desire to try to exclude me from eligibility - to no avail. And then "your health check-up will be on 16th". Well, no, it won't, because I don't want a health check-up and because I work and am busy and can't just drop everything for a date and time you specify (as though I am lucky to be offered it). I just want to see a doctor for a condition I have now.*

Registration schedules are impractical for some patients:

- *I attended the surgery to register as a new patient, and was informed that registrations are not done 2-3pm on Fridays (i.e. When I attended) and that I needed to come back after 3pm. This is not explained in the registration information on the practice website, which I'd checked before visiting. The receptionist explained that it is a busy time as there is a mother and baby group on, but on the face of it there were 3 members of reception staff talking among themselves when I turned up and no other patients wanting attention, no phones ringing etc. Given that 'registration' at this stage involves 5 minutes of inputting a few details and handing out some forms, as I found when I returned later, it seems ridiculous that the receptionist couldn't be more flexible.*

Admin, planning and communication

There are some reports of admin errors made by reception staff, including failing to record bookings accurately or to sign patients in, as well as losing medical records or not processing prescriptions correctly.

- *I have waited in reception for up to 2 hours numerous times, simply because the reception staff forgot to sign me in. This is not acceptable.*
- *I dropped by the surgery last week to book an appointment with the GP. The receptionist told me to come back at 15.30 for an appointment. When I came back, they said I had missed the appointment and they insisted the appointment was 15.10. This morning I called the surgery to book an appointment with the GP. The receptionist was quite short with me, but I ignored it. They booked me for 14.10 today. When I went there at 14.10, the receptionists told me that I was not booked in. There were three people on duty on reception that morning and they didn't know which one I talked to. It's ridiculous that surgery staff treat people with such disrespect.*
- *I have been a patient since 2009 and have been informed by a particular individual that my file has been lost in central filing and that I have to chase it up myself. Having failed in doing so, this particular individual has been claiming that they have been chasing it up for the past 8 years, yet this has still not been resolved! Every time I go in to remind them, they say they will call me back, have I ever received a call back? No!*
- *Reception makes so many mistakes such as they register you but not log in so you wait too long until you start to think that something is wrong and they still don't confess their mistake.*
- *This surgery has not been able to trace my medical records despite me constantly asking them about them since 2015 they tell me this is not their issue nor the surgery's!!*
- *The surgery faxed my prescription to a pharmacy I used two years ago at a time when I did not request that my prescription be faxed.*
- *The administrative staff here are terrible, frequently messing up and very unhelpful.*
- *Every time I need a prescription they screw it up. Every time. Without fail. Every time. It's unbelievable. And then they aren't even helpful or apologetic about fixing it. I have had numerous mishaps with my repeat prescription, to the point where it is almost laughable.*
- *I attended the practice on 15 August to collect my 'repeat' prescription for high blood pressure medication. There was no prescription there, even though I collected it previously in June without a problem. The receptionist informed me I would have to leave and call again to re-arrange the 'repeat' prescription. I asked for the on-duty doctor to write out a prescription instead. No! Couldn't be bothered to take 2 minutes to do that. Non-urgent apparently. In fact, it took them longer to refuse this request than it would to have actually done it: This is just one example of the consistently appalling levels of care and lack of quality I experience at this practice.*
- *There is no sensitivity, no response and so many times I have had results lost, and letters not sent. [After having to re-book an appointment, I ran late to] When I was told that the doctor cannot see me and that I had to book another appointment. I asked for the soonest appointment but was told it was not until next week. However, the other receptionist picked up the phone and told the patient on the phone that there is an appointment for tomorrow. However, the patient turned it down and I was then offered it.*

There were a few reports of reception staff not using patient record software confidently

- *[Some receptionists] seem not to know how to search patient's details on the system and complain they can't read hand writing which isn't perspective of other staff. Whenever I see them handling I genuinely feel uncomfortable.*
- *On a telephone conversation with someone who also was very unhelpful. They tell me that they cannot check information regarding my mother's appointment which I needed because they "have already closed the previous page on their computer system" and they made the excuse it would be too much for them to open up that page again to give me that information. Which in less than a minute they were able to do for me when I insisted I will wait until they gave me this information. We pay our taxes not to receive inhuman treatments.*
- *The doctor couldn't work the computer to print out my prescription. The reception staff couldn't do it either; we had to get it send direct to the chemist.*
- *I was making an appointment with my GP recently they asked me if I was still living in the Borough. Perhaps I hadn't been for a while. There was no problem getting an appointment. Went into the practice at 11 am. Receptionist was nice. I asked if we could have an appointment after school. She looked at the screen and said that there wasn't any. Then looked again that there was. Got one within a week.*

Some patients report communications issues between reception and medical staff.

- *Booked an appointment over the phone with a Receptionist as it was "very important" (quote Doctor's note). At the appointment the Nurse says that this is not what the appointment was booked for and that they could not continue. Really? You can imagine my frustration at getting time off work to attend an appointment which isn't so important after all! Going around in circles again! I tried calling the doctors to rebook the appointment and was advised by an automated message to email GP web direct to which I receive another automated email advising that a Doctor would call me by 6.30 pm the next day. I did not receive the call until two days later. As I had missed the call, I again called the Practice to be told by the Receptionist that a Doctor would call me back. When I do get a call back it is a Nurse who upon my reasons for an appointment states that this is not their domain and a Doctor would call me (phone line goes dead). I then get a call from the Receptionist who hurriedly confirms that an appointment has been booked (which I confirmed twice). At my appointment the Nurse then advises they cannot conduct the appointment in full as they are not trained in all aspects and that I should return yet another day; apologising for the misinformation given by the Receptionist! Delayed not once but twice! There is clearly a breakdown in communication between the Nurses and Receptionists who then think it's alright to send patients on a wild goose chase.*
- *Trying to get travel jabs here is near to impossible - you book an appointment and specify the injection you need, but more often than not when you arrive at your appointment with the nurse who informs you that that particular vaccination is out of stock (they never think to call you to tell you this info to save you the wasted time of coming in).*
- *Having visited this practice over the past couple of years I usually have a very good service. However, in only trying to get a repeat prescription (a very simple task) I have called the practice multiple times, spent 3 hours in the walk-in centre only to be told I couldn't be helped (after the receptionist on the phone assured me I could be) and have had the most terrible patient manner from the doctors I have spoken to. The doctor I experienced this time in particular was very rude, and accused me of lying about what the receptionist had said to me. It is a shame, because the receptionists and the nurses are lovely, only to be let down by rude, hostile and dismissive doctors.*

Communication with pharmacies can also be an issue:

- *I am on medication which I need to take every day so I am always in need of repeat prescription arrangement. Every time I order repeat prescription online it is not sent to the pharmacy for collection and I just have to come to the practice to collect the printed prescription before carrying it to the pharmacy. Pharmacy gets rejected every time they reorder for me by the practice and I have to reorder again and again and collect the prescription from the practice instead of having the process fully automated it created unnecessary hassle. When I address it with the practice, they tell me they changed something, and everything should be working properly, but for two years it has not been fixed, regardless of them telling me it was.*

Staff attitude and support

Patients are broadly happy with the attitude of reception staff, who they find to be helpful and approachable.

- *My husband and I have been visiting this Practice for almost 9 years and have always found the counter staff extremely helpful and friendly. Nothing appears to be too much trouble for them. They present a reassuring start to our visits and they even know our names. We commend them!*
- *The reception team have always been so welcoming, from my first venture into the building in 1999 to helping me move over to a new practice ensuring I had enough prescriptions to see me through.*
- *One day my son had high temperature and I called very late to see doctor, they tried their best to book my son to see the doctor, from the phone I can feel they were take care of my son very much, I am so appreciated. And every time I visit, all the staff are very friendly and helpful!*
- *The reception staff were very helpful, professional and the HCA I saw made me feel very relaxed. They were very warm and compassionate.*
- *The reception staff are always polite and welcoming when I come in to the surgery, even when they are being spoken to in a derogatory fashion by patients, they remain calm and over the years you get to know staff and to people like me with, with problems it helps to have a friendly face help you out. One member of staff is a credit to this surgery they are professional and methodical, but more importantly kind and compassionate and goes out of their way to help me and others. Thank you for making my visits happy.*
- *I have always been treated in a caring and considerate manner in all my dealings with both Medical and non-Medical staff.*
- *I have been at this surgery for over a year now and have always found the reception staff to be very friendly and often go out of their way to help you, which for me makes this is an outstanding surgery.*
- *I went to my surgery today and returned home with an excellent experience at the reception. I must appreciate the very friendly person who served me at the reception. I wish all the reception staffs should be like them in every GP Practices.*

Some reception staff members are seen as going above and beyond their duty to provide service, and they are highly praised for their customer service skills.

- *The reception staff were very cheerful and helpful in sorting out lots of things, like phone consultations, additional dressings from the nurse and repeat prescriptions.*
- *The practice receptionists treat me professionally, politely and with respect. They do everything they can to help within the constraints of the finite limits on the resources available to them. As a recent example, one of the receptionists understood the importance of a letter which had been promised by one of the GPs. Although dictated, it was in a secretary's in-tray, awaiting typing and signature. The receptionist took the initiative in expediting the preparation of the letter and calling me to let me know that it was available ahead of the date initially offered.*
- *Outstanding service provided by the receptionists. Over a month ago, I went to the health centre. That's when I got to meet one of the reception staff. They were keen to answer all my questions, yet their service went beyond my expectations. They were extremely professional yet so caring and passionate for their work. My review goes towards for their excellent job and attitude not only on that day but after every day I visited.*
- *All the receptionists are lovely, they work really hard and I can imagine it can get exhausting when it's very busy.... however, 3 main staff members I always see or speak with who are very kind and friendly.*

Service users who have developed a longstanding cordial relation with the reception staff also value it highly.

- *I have been registered with other surgeries before, but none compared to the excellence of this one. Over the years, I have found that when I am not well, or I need advice or request a repeat prescription, it's a joy calling my surgery. I am not afraid that I will be met with a hostile response. I know them all by their voices and they all know me. Sometimes they would say, 'let's ask your doctor to call, they might be able to help you'. My, what a heck of a team my practice has, none can compare. I congratulate all the staff at this surgery for handling their responsibilities with such high regard and respect for the patients, and I am a proud member of the community who has that privilege of being under their care.*
- *The reception staff are amazing, they are very friendly, helpful and always make an effort with the patients they are all very compassionate. They don't make you feel like they are just doing their job, but they actually enjoy it and they care about the patients and in my case they will always ask if my kids are ok, if I had a problem last time I came if that got sorted out which is lovely.*
- *I love this surgery. One of the only ones left that run the same as they did years ago. I know all of the staff by name and they know me. They take time to get to know their patients and I have never had a bad experience here.*

Some patients report rude treatment from staff members.

- *Today I spoke to one member of staff who was rude and feisty over the phone. Customer service is so important, it's what makes the patients feel at ease when they come in to the surgery. If the front desk staff were polite and had the very basic of good customer service, then it'll only help the patients. Nothing to lose here!*
- *The worst part of this place is the people at the reception. They are rude, have no manners, lack people skills, unfriendly, inconsiderate and have no compassion. It doesn't matter if you talk with them over the phone or face to face. They are simply just rude. I wanted to book an emergency appointment for my 3-year-old sister and the person on the phone started questioning about an appointment we had forgotten to attend last month. The receptionists are appalling; they are always very rude and never give accurate information regarding appointments or medical services that is available. They do not even talk to patients in a human way, it's degrading.*
- *Bad manners & disgraceful attitudes from some of the reception staff is disgraceful some of the staff have no eye contact with you, seem bored, and more interested in chatting to each other, non-welcoming, some of the receptionist should not be in the job at all. This must be addressed immediately as first impressions stick.*
- *I had the unfortunate luck of being served by a receptionist who clearly doesn't have basic customer service skills, no greeting not even a smile. To the practice manager please take some advice, sit in your reception area once in a while and see how your staff behave towards others or better still send your staff on a communication/ customer service course.*
- *The reception staff are ridiculously rude. I have been unwell and trying to register and the staff there have been nothing but rude, inconsiderate and uncompassionate.*
- *Practice looks run down unclean with bad attitude receptionist who don't smile. One of them speaks in such a demeaning manner. Practice used to be well managed not sure what has happened and where the old faces have gone.*
- *Absolutely rude member of staff! Every time I came in they are too busy talking about what they done over the weekend. It feels like it's the WI (women's institution). I stand in line and it feels I am invisible. They don't ever take any notice of me, until I start talking. Then they make it feel like it's a burden to help me. I am looking to move practice. It's all gone downhill!*
- *Exceptionally rude receptionists from the minute you walk in.*
- *Went into the surgery, not a single acknowledgement. Sat down, given a stern warning that other patients are waiting, and my time is limited to a strict 10 minutes. Ironically, this reading of my rights took over a minute.*
- *I called my Practice today to book an appointment and I was incredibly shocked with how rude the receptionist was. I haven't really had any problems with booking appointments and usually the staff are ok. But honestly today I was very disappointed. I asked about seeing a female doctor and the receptionist said "NO" with a lot of attitude.*

Patients who perceive staff as trying their best and going above and beyond are more likely to be understanding in relation to other aspects, such as waiting times, telephone queues or unexpected closures/ cancellations:

- *Sure, sometimes it takes more than five minutes to get a call answered or a week to get an appointment - but what do we expect? The NHS is busy, understaffed and stretched in every way. We should all be a bit more patient. In my experience, the Practice goes over and above delivering the best service - emergencies are dealt with promptly, answers are given courteously, and things are always resolved.*
- *Hard to get through to the staffs on the Phone but once you do they are a star.*
- *Despite the fact that the Walk in Centre was closed due to maintenance work, I received first class customer service from the receptionist. The receptionist was friendly, charismatic and provided a very personalised service and ensured I had organised alternative medical due before I left the facility! Customer service at its finest!*
- *I have been with this surgery for years and years and I really don't understand all this negativity some people are leaving. To be honest the fact that this practice is still trying to help out a number of patients is fantastic! Yes, sometimes they struggle but we as patients should help the Practice too by keeping calm and co-operating with the staff. I really appreciate this practice as they do try and help their patients.*
- *Reception team are amazing every time I go in they are always helpful and so friendly and try and help in every way possible. Yes, I understand sometimes it is difficult to get an appointment but if you listen to the receptionist and contact the surgery when they advise maybe it will be that little easier instead of starting an argument with them or perhaps explain to the reception team what the problem is then they will try their best to help or advise you in the right direction. A lot of the times when I'm waiting in the queue all I see and hear is people raising their voice and swearing at the receptionist? Is that acceptable. Last time I went to the surgery 2 weeks ago the receptionist went out of their way to help me and I am really appreciative of that. Overall, I think this is an amazing surgery, everyone works really hard and are super friendly.*
- *Yes, it can try one's patience to wait in a telephone queue to book an appointment at 08:00 in the morning but I am often impressed by the speed with which I move up the queue as the staff deal with the preceding callers. My own experience of the staff who take these calls is that they are always polite and sensitive despite the pressure that they must be under in handling the volume of calls at this time in the morning. It must be frustrating for them too when the volume of callers exceeds the number of appointment slots available, presumably governed by the number of GPs rostered.*
- *I was very unwell on Monday and came in to surgery to get an emergency appointment. Receptionist on the desk at 8.15 was understanding and very helpful and has provided me with a slot at 4.30. I was extremely grateful. I was seen on that date just slightly out of time but I understood that surgery is very busy and was grateful I got an appointment at all!*

On the other hand, those who perceive staff members as being rude express more frustration with other aspects as well:

- *Every-time I need to call the Surgery, it is a least a 5 min wait on hold to then get a sassy, shirty response from the reception team.*
- *This practice is very unwelcoming, took over 8 minutes for a member of staff to answer the phone, when the phone was answered no polite greeting given, just a grumpy sounding staff!*
- *The receptionists are rude, uninterested, and generally useless - you are lucky when they so much as answer the phone.*

To ensure patients are booked with the appropriate medical professional or level of urgency, reception staff sometimes need to ask patients about the reason for their appointments. A small number of patients are uncomfortable with this and see it as a breach of privacy or illegitimate gatekeeping.

- *The receptionist asks over the phone what medical problem I have and as an NHS worker I believe this is unprofessional and breaches confidentiality. I was upset by this, since I had already waited a couple of weeks. I asked if anything could be done to squeeze me in soon. To my amazement, another receptionist said to me, "If you tell me what the problem is then I can see if we can get you seen." Symptoms might be of a personal nature - mine were - and I find it incredible that I was expected to tell them to a member of the non-medical staff in the middle of the waiting room.*
- *The receptionists will try and diagnose you even though they're not qualified to do so.*
- *When I spoke I was treated like a child? The telephonist was repeating things over and over and informing me about irrelevant stuff like you had your last blood test 4 months ago etc. If they just obliged and made an appointment it would be so much easier and quicker. I know it may mean not involving in decision making etc., but the doctor should do that not the receptionist. When a patient has concerns the receptionist need not interrogate before deciding.*

Advice and information

Reception staff have an important responsibility to provide patients with relevant information. Staff members who do so efficiently are praised by service users:

- *Really helpful receptionist who went the extra mile to make sure I had all the necessary information for my care today.*
- *Reception staff were always great and helped when I had a question.*
- *Staff went above and beyond their duty to help me and contacted me frequently with updates.*

When patients' requests are, for various reasons, impossible to grant, offering clear, transparent explanations has a strong positive impact on patient opinions.

- *I walked in to get more painkillers after running out of those gave me for the post-surgery pain. The receptionist was really helpful and booked me an appointment with the pharmacist letting me know that I may not get the prescription. The procedure requires 2 days. The pharmacist was really helpful explaining to me the why they couldn't repeat the prescription it (addiction risks) and suggested to me a valid and safer alternative. I walked out happy and satisfied with the care and understanding received.*

Some staff members have reportedly come across as lacking knowledge.

- *For those who register GPs, they require two proofs of address, which is uncommon for most organisations in England. The staff there are not aware of the NHS regulation and depend on Google for further information.*
- *I called today to speak to a specific person, first I was transferred to the wrong person and I had to call back, when I called again and spoke to a different person who was rude, unresponsive to what I said to the point I had to say "Hello!" because I wasn't sure they heard me, they then put me on hold several times for long periods of time with no notice or explanation, I was unsure if it was a mistake. They then asked me repeatedly why I wanted to speak to that person and said they weren't available, and said it like they weren't sure. I asked if I could leave a message, but their manner was so rude and unprofessional I didn't have confidence that it would be passed on so I decided to call back later and wait until I got hold of a more helpful staff member.*
- *Reception it is useless, they simply don't know why they are there and what they are supposed to do.*

Some patients report receiving inaccurate or contradictory information from reception staff members.

- *All I wanted is my last prescribed medicine which were two co-codamol tablets, when I phone the centre I was told that I needed to get there and ask for them in reception but when I went there they told me I needed an appointment with a Dr then I was told to call next day and a Dr would call me back which they did not. So, when I call back again to find out what happened I was told that I needed to get to centre again as no one would call me as I needed to be seen in person. I'm going around in circles which it has been very frustrating and to make matters worse once I was been seen but not by a Doctor I was told that I could not get that tablet as they don't issue those tablets. Why couldn't they just say that in the first place???*
- *I find staff provide conflicting opinions and are often rude.*
- *Have been told the wrong information by different receptionists on phone and in person so I've had to chase and chase to finally get right information - wasting months of my time and £20 deposit I paid for a letter when it turns out it's their policy not to give out letters, but they didn't bother to tell me! Madness.*
- *I went to the surgery and asked to speak to a health visitor, they gave me completely the wrong information and said they weren't there. I later called, and they said they were there. It was a clinic time, so they defiantly would have been there.*
- *The staff and doctors are not properly trained, they provide conflicting advice which has been a sore point as it has increased the amount of admin on my end. They show no sense of accountability when I raise issues and show no signs of improvement.*
- *Reception it is useless, they simply don't know why they are there and what they are supposed to do.*

Not all patients are aware of sign-in procedures when arriving for an appointment

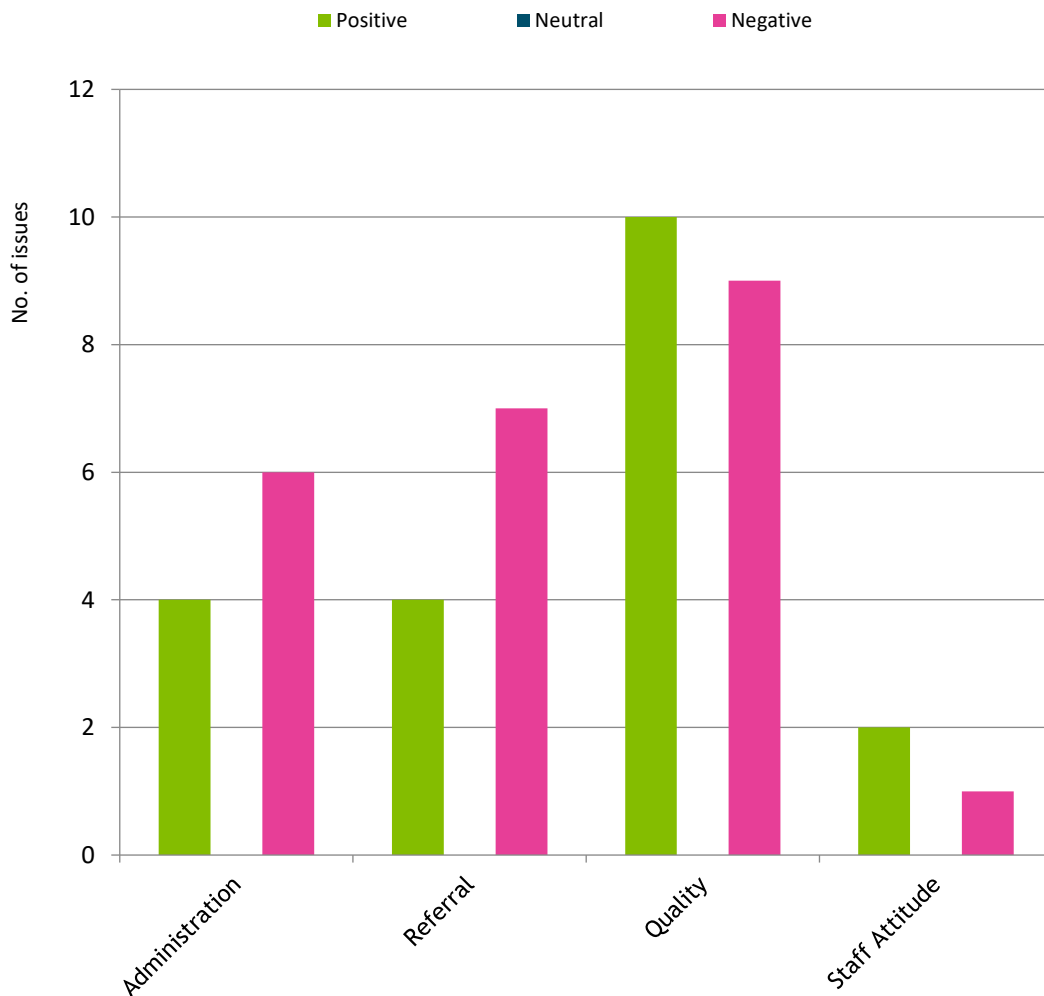
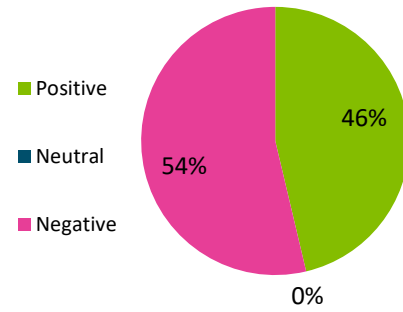
- *I was waiting upstairs for the doctor to call me in but nothing was happening 45 mins later. I went to reception to ask why they had not called me in and I was advised that I did not check in, so it was assumed I did not arrive which is ridiculous because self-checkin kiosks were all broken and no one from staff advised me to check in at reception so basically I wasted time and my health problems were not solved then.*
- *I am educated, I am a working woman who moved to London recently. I can speak and understand English but obviously, I am not familiar with the healthcare procedures and I am also new to London I do not know any hospital or anything. I had an appointment on Friday but I did not know that I should be checking in and I was the only one in front of them waiting and they did not even care to ask why I was here instead they were chatting with their co-workers. I waited there more than half an hour and I asked about my appointment after that they said that I should be checking in. This cost me an hour waiting and after that, I saw the doctor.*

According to GP surgeries' websites, all surgeries in the borough currently offer patients the option of ordering repeat prescriptions online, and 13 practices (36% of total) offer the possibility of viewing one's medical records or test results through an online system.

If promoted and adopted more widely, this could offer patients more independence in managing their own conditions .

DIAGNOSIS AND TESTING

Overall sentiment about diagnosis and testing is **54% negative**. Opinion about the quality of service provision is mixed; but attitude towards admin issue and referrals is leaning negative; which points towards communication between medical professionals and planning being less than optimal.



Some service users report their test results being lost or delayed.

- *So many times, I have had results lost, and letters not sent.*
- *I finally got registered and couldn't see the doctor for a few weeks but managed to go to the walk-in clinic and the doctor there recommended blood tests. I went back to my practice and booked the blood tests. One of the results was lost or misplaced and had to go back in for another test. Now I have done the test and have to wait another week to see/speak to the doctor. There is a reason why I have gone through this process, I am unwell and just want to know what's going on. If the blood tests had not been lost I would know what's going on so why not make it a priority to give me feedback since it's not really my fault they got lost in the first place. I am frustrated, really ill and feel let down!*
- *I have had blood test results lost twice!*

Some patients report having to pay in order to obtain their test results or medical records.

- *Unfortunately, the receptionists are always unfriendly and rude. They have access to blood results, they can tell if they are okay or not, but I wasn't allowed to have them unless I paid 10£*

Some patients report receiving misleading information or express doubt about their GP's competence in interpreting their test results.

- *Biggest waste of my time ever, what good is a doctor that can't read your MRI results! Spoilt my day.*
- *I called regarding my test results they said everything is fine. After two weeks I received a letter saying they were not fine. Took me 3 weeks to book with the GP and the receptionist was horrible.*
- *Number of times I've been incorrectly diagnosed. Latest experience was with my son. On Monday, he was diagnosed with Chicken Pox, on Tuesday, only 1 day later, a GP at Guy's Hospital Urgent Care told me "This rash is definitely not chicken pox". How can a GP not know what Chicken Pox rash looks like?!*
- *I went to [my practice] twice. Both times I was misdiagnosed. The first time, the doctor told me I had a viral infection and therefore didn't need antibiotics, but then I ended up with a severe ear infection because they were in fact wrong. I was then seen by a second doctor who looked at my ear and told me I had a hole in my ear! Take into account I am already deaf in one ear, they gave me this diagnosis then said they were 100% sure I'd lose my hearing. Naturally I've since gone to another doctor and glad that I am perfectly fine. Honestly, if a doctor doesn't know the answer it would have saved me time and effort and needless worry if they hadn't said anything at all!*
- *I have visited the GP 4 times in less than a month and they have all prescribed multiple different medications to treat a problem they keep diagnosing incorrectly. More so they won't even look at. It was shocking to see the doctor google information about my symptoms in front of me!*

On the other hand, other patients report receiving an efficient service and being kept well-informed of their test results.

- *My GP is really excellent - I've seen the doctor several times recently and really appreciate their care. The doctor makes sure they know what's relevant in my medical history; keeps me informed about test results etc. and explains what things mean. The doctor is really thorough and makes me feel fully involved in decisions about my treatment. And has a lovely manner.*
- *I find that routine appointments for flu jabs and blood tests are handled efficiently and the nursing staff who provide these services to me are always first class.*
- *I was given an accurate diagnosis and have seen real improvement. They give treatment as needed and do not try to convince you that you need multiple treatments per week (unless necessary) in order to drive revenue. I appreciate this type of honest approach, as I'd previously fallen prey to these tactics in the past with other practitioners.*
- *Had a health check-up as part of the new patient registration that included a blood test as well... I had some bad experience with blood tests, so I was a bit concerned, but the doctor said they are very good and I should not be scared. When the doctor took the blood, I couldn't even feel it, they were very quick and experienced. The doctor was very helpful and nice throughout the whole check-up and informed me about different services they have. The waiting time was only like 5mins and the GP is very clean and looks very nice.*
- *Had very good experience with a staff name for blood test, they are very skilled in taking my blood as a healthcare worker myself this nurse is very skilled, and it is a treat to have them in the practice. I believe that the nurse will make it easy on the little and the elderly ones.*
- *Excellent treatment today from the HCA (apologies I do not remember their name). Very professional and friendly, excellent at taking blood, appointment on time, very reassuring.*
- *I saw Dr- very nice and very thorough in their assessment. I feel like I'm in good hands!!*
- *I feel staff involve me in the care of my children & explain everything that they are looking out for & trying to improve within the health of that particular child. Even when I request testing (stool/urine samples) and it isn't necessarily essential to do at that point; doctors are still willing to give me reassurance through its results.*

Doctors who refer patients promptly to specialists if further tests are needed are praised by patients.

- *I had an urgent referral which the hospital was not responding to. My symptoms worsened and so I went to see the doctor who immediately sorted out all the tests for me and got in touch with the Registrar at the hospital. The swiftness and concern with which the doctor handled my case was highly commendable. It was the best experience I had seeing a GP. When I called last week with a small, stored-up list of queries/concerns (yes, I know you shouldn't), the doctor I saw couldn't have been more patient, thorough & helpful. After a useful discussion, the doctor suggested referrals for further tests. Later that day, I received a call from the same doctor who had decided the waiting list was too long for one concern, and so had requested a more urgent NHS appointment, which duly arrived in the post just days later. I'm very grateful and impressed by the extra time and thought shown, and the initiative and care the doctor took.*
- *I've been with the practice for about 4 years. I have had a few worrying health issues the past 2 years. I was always taken seriously, and the doctors made sure I was referred to tests and specialists. I have always got appointments fast enough to keep me satisfied.*
- *I had a mole scare and they organised a dermatologist the same week. My GP is helpful and always does their best, the nurses are excellent, and the reception staff is polite and prompt. I am very happy with the Practice - well done for being such a great medical facility.*
- *I have always had kindness and respect and more importantly appropriate diagnosis and treatment, and when necessary prompt hospital referral.*
- *The service is excellent and extremely efficient; they always refer patients to the right specialists when appropriate. The team are always helpful and friendly. All the patients are treated with dignity and respect. There is also always a warm and welcoming atmosphere.*

There are, however, cases of referrals not being handled efficiently.

- *This so called medical professional's expert advice consisted of taking a photo of what I asked them to examine on my phone and zooming in on it to show me. Not a single medical term used, just a kind of close up show and tell of what I asked them to look at. Again, ironically, given they suggested I needed a referral to specialist and was supposedly under a strict time limit, they spent about 4 minutes doing this even though I asked them to put the phone away. So then I brought the conversation back to the next steps of the referral process only to be told they would not do it today as I was out of time and I would have to come back in 2-3 weeks when another slot becomes free. I have to take mornings off work to make medical appointments, so this is extremely inconvenient and disgraceful when you compound it to everything already mentioned. How utterly unacceptable to be told I need a referral for a biopsy or a scan only to then be told if I want it to happen I must "come back" as I'm out of time when they've spent 5 mins total either on my phone or telling me how little time we have before they even ask me what I'm there for. After realising I would have to leave as they would not do my referral letter I asked to book me in for another appointment to come back and finish our appointment as they suggested. However, they said I had no time for that either and told me to leave so I did so. I called up later in the day to find out whether I could rebook my appointment and was told I couldn't until they had confirmed whether or not they would be willing to refer me post appointment and send a letter to me with details. This is because they didn't want to waste an appointment when it had already been established I would be referred. Fair enough, but when I called them up a 2nd and then 3rd time over the next 2 days to find out if I had the referral or not they still hadn't spoken to the doctor concerned.*
- *I have been at this surgery for over two years and have experienced many issues. I was once referred for a test that really was not necessary.*

There are also reports of patients having requests for referrals denied.

- *A month ago, I had a car accident which caused me some injuries on the back specifically in the spine I have seen three different doctors and asked them to refer me to have MRI scan, but they never bothered, so I'm just wondering what kind of doctors are they??*
- *The doctor ignored my request for a referral to see a specialist about my very swollen knee that has happened 3 times in the 11 months and instead gave me a print out of exercises to do! I went to a walk-in clinic when it got so bad I couldn't walk unaided, and the nurse said I needed to see a specialist and get an MRI that it needed to be checked for the underlying cause. And not to exercise it when it was so badly swollen. I went back to the same doctor with a request letter the nurse and they simply told me the nurse didn't know what they were talking about. That they couldn't refer me this time. To wait until the swelling had gone down.*

Some patients feel that their concerns are being dismissed by doctors.

- *I waited for two weeks for an appointment, then one hour in the waiting room to be seen. The doctor quickly asked me about the problem and gave only paracetamol with no other investigation.*
- *I visited the walk-in centre on the advice of the NHS (111). 1 hr later I saw my name on the screen and went to the room to receive a very frosty greeting from the GP; they said my name had appeared "five times" (I was looking at the screen and saw other names appear, but could have missed mine once or twice). The GP also said their colleague had been calling out for me - total nonsense as the waiting area was completely silent and I was one of two people in it. Following the rant, which inspired no confidence or reassurance, the GP asked what they could do for me. I explained the issue and, not before telling me the advice given by 111 was "no good" and implying I should have ignored it, did a few checks and told me to keep an eye on it. Had considered registering at this surgery but after this experience I certainly won't be.*
- *The doctor did not even look up at me as I entered the room. Showing a deep and bloody hand wound I had suffered, I was ordered to wash it myself, despite the duress and pain I was suffering, and without asking whether I had already done (which I had, but the wound was so deep that the blood continued to seep). My treatment and diagnosis were brisk and hasty. I was informed that nothing was wrong. Yet, when I challenged this, I was prescribed antibiotics and told that if my wound has not healed overnight, I should see someone again (albeit not the following day, as the clinic is closed on Sundays). I felt like a mere number and not a patient or human being. No care, consideration or thought appeared to be placed into this diagnosis. In fact, my time would have been better spent spending five minutes on Google which (rightly, following a second opinion I sought elsewhere) informed me that the wound was indeed severe and needed treatment.*

A small number of patients report hygiene concerns.

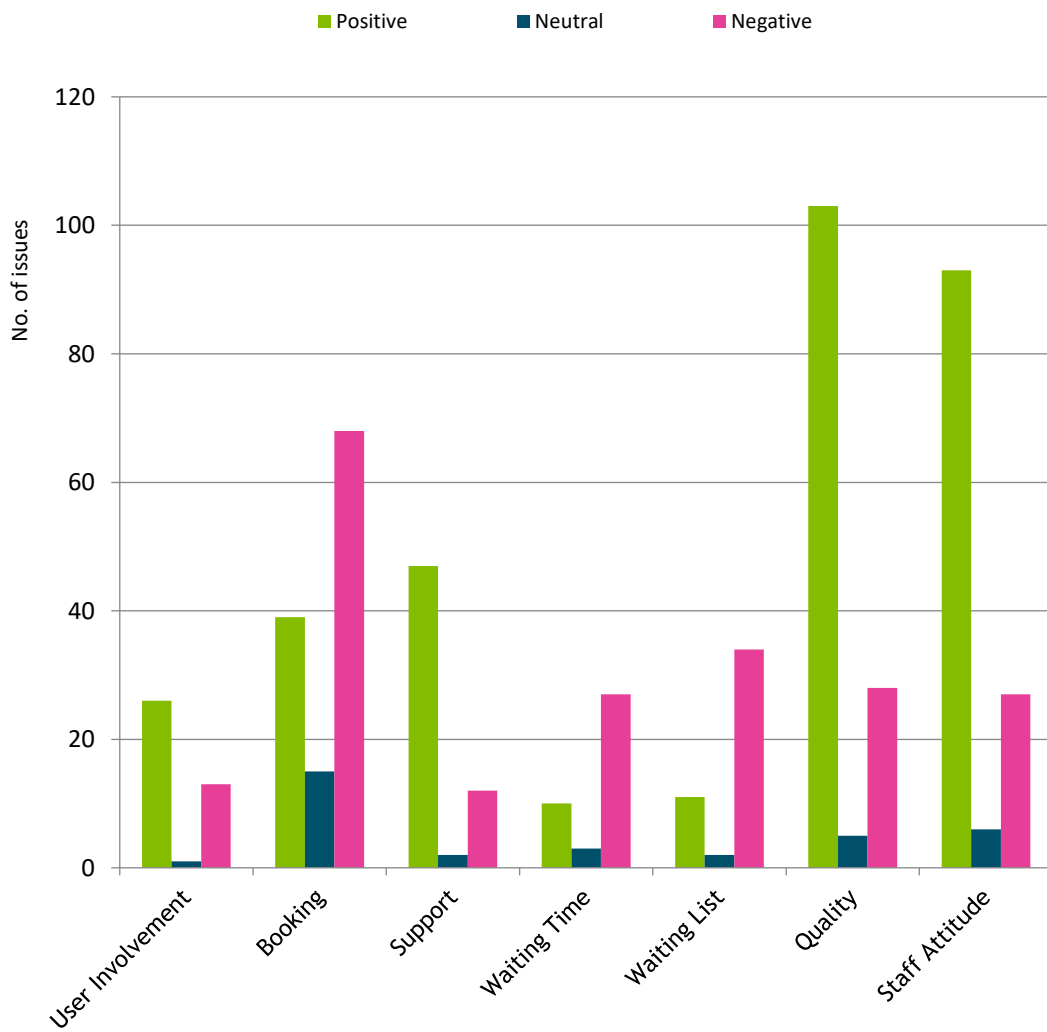
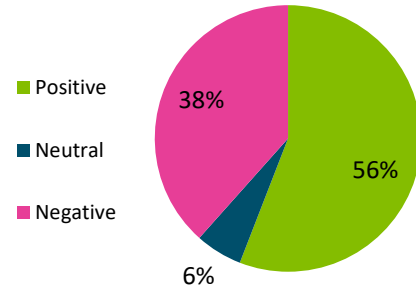
- *The medtech who's about to extract my blood did not even bother wiping first with alcohol the area to be punctured.*
- *Mostly everyone in this practice is awful including the blood test staff who didn't wear any special clothing to carry out the tests. I refused to have it.*

A small number of patients report insensitive treatment from staff performing tests.

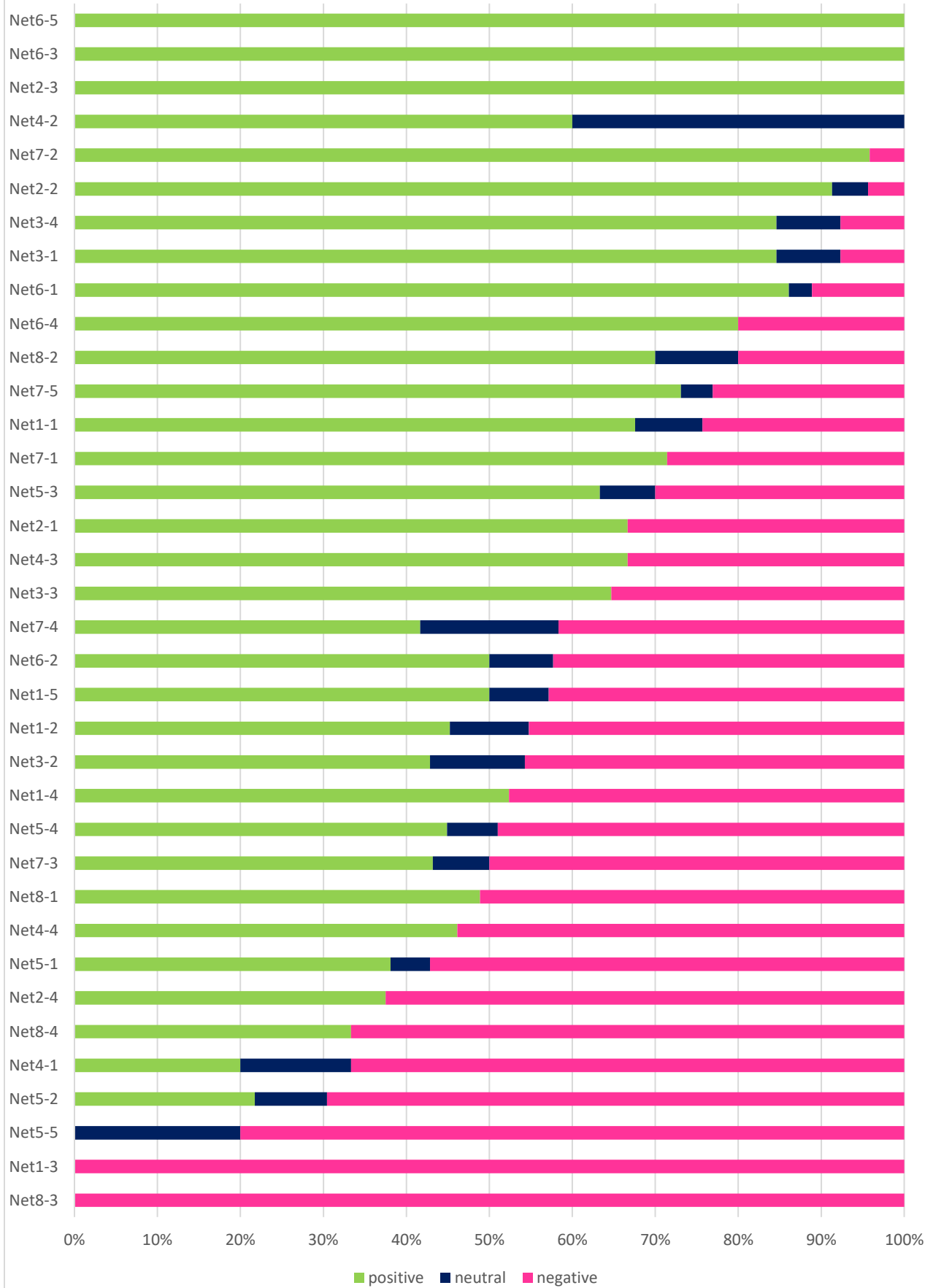
- *The nurse was so awful with my smear test. They gave me no privacy to undress and didn't offer me anything to cover up with until I asked; even then it was like I was bothering them! The test was quick, and they were so uncaring. I was left feeling upset. Totally insensitive.*
- *I suffered degrading treatment by a doctor at one appointment which I complained about.*
- *I also shockingly received grief from the nurse for having a smear test. I am the right age to have it in this country and have friends who have had irregular cells, and this was my first test to make sure everything is okay, so to get such a horrible attitude from a 'health professional' towards something that could find cancerous cells I don't even know what to say.*

CLINICAL TREATMENT

Overall, sentiment about clinical treatment is **56% positive**. Service users perceive clinical treatment offered by Tower Hamlets GP surgeries as *being of very good quality, but difficult to access*. They are satisfied with the attitude of medical staff, the level of user involvement and support they are receiving; but they are also frustrated with the booking process, long waiting lists and long waiting times for appointments.



Ranking of clinical treatment, by patient opinion



Telephone and online consultations

According to surgeries' websites, 31 surgeries (86% of total) offer patients the option of an online consultation, or of contacting their GP online with medical questions.

Where available, telephone and online consultations are popular with many patients:

- *I always get a prompt phone call from the GP if I can't get a booking on the day, which has been very convenient.*
- *I love their new e-consult system which allows me to seek basic medical care and treatment without having to attend the surgery - such as receiving a prescription based on symptoms described online. The doctors take ample time in the appointment to discuss issues and yet I am usually seen on time (or within reasonable time from appointment time, e.g. 5-10 min).*
- *They run a system whereby the doctor calls you back to discuss the issue before giving you an appointment. I was dubious at first, but A. I can always get through to them on the phone, B. The doctor never fails to call me back within a few hours maximum, C. This means, if you don't actually need an appointment, like just to ask for advice or request a prescription, no-one wastes their time - including the doctor!*
- *The appointment booking system whereby you speak to a nurse/doctor before getting an appointment on same day if necessary is excellent. I have always received a call back within the time period advised and either received an appointment at a convenient time or the issue was dealt with via referral/prescription over the phone.*
- *They have a good call back system, so you can ask for a telephone appointment. Having been a doctor that's a good thing, I don't like wasting my colleagues' time.*
- *I always get a prompt phone call from the GP if I can't get a booking on the day, which has been very convenient.*
- *GPs often prescribe treatment over the phone which is so helpful.*
- *I've recently needed a lot more appointments due to pregnancy and now for my baby. I've been V impressed with the telephone appointments. A GP has always rung back within an hour or so. I'm very happy that most of the GPs are happy to prescribe over the telephone (if it's safe to do so) as it makes life so much easier.*

Others, however, are concerned about situations where phone or email appointments are unsuitable, or not properly followed through.

- *Telephone conversations with a doctor is difficult especially when it's something that has to be looked at such as an ear infection.*
- *Most of my appointments have been on the telephone, which is fine but there is a lack of follow up. This means I have to explain my situation to a new doctor each time.*
- *Trying to get an appointment with a doctor you want to see is impossible, so I tried the online consultation where you can state which doctor you want to see your details. Form easy enough to complete and it does allow you to explain exactly what is wrong/of concern without the doctor interrupting and derailing the consultation to what they want (usually a target ticking exercise). An email explains when you will be telephoned and then absolute silence! You are left feeling of little worth and your concerns not worth a doctor's time. This total ignoring of you shows the lack of respect for you as an individual. You cannot get an appointment and your online query is discarded! Thank you so much for making me feel a waste of space and my concerns of no regard.*

Allotted appointment times

Some GP surgeries enforce a strict “one problem per appointment” policy. This is unpopular with patients.

- *She is complaining about the short time of visit GP; she says that she does not have enough time to talk about the problems that worry her. Doctor tells her that she needs to talk just about one problem per visit.*
- *Communication from the surgery is poor; doctors' attitudes don't instil confidence in patients either. I have been told to keep appointments to discuss one thing only due to time limit of appointment.*
- *Sometimes it is very difficult to explain issues as the DR doesn't want to listen for more than one health problem. Previously I didn't experience this.*

Some patients find that the allotted appointment times are too short.

- *They also allot 15 mins per appointment and want to kick you out as soon as they can. I'm truly shocked.*
- *Doctors cannot listen all of your problems rather than only one in 10 minutes time--then you been advised to get another appointment which will realistically won't happen within next 30-40 days even if you want that urgently).*

Patients who perceive doctors and other staff members as going above and beyond their duty of care are more understanding in relation to other aspects such as booking, waiting lists and waiting times.

- *I was very unwell on Monday and came in to surgery to get an emergency appointment. Receptionist on the desk at 8.15 was understanding and very helpful and has provided me with a slot at 4.30. I was extremely grateful. I was seen on that date just slightly out of time, but I understood that surgery is very busy and was grateful I got an appointment at all! Doctor has listened to my needs and has acknowledged I am unwell with a chest infection and issued a very needed medicine and a medical certificate. I am very grateful to the doctor and the reception staff for helping me get better. Excellent service, it's great to know I'm a patient [this surgery] and always being cared after. Thank you.*
- *Ease of getting an appointment varies wildly from next day to 2 weeks' time, but I understand the surgery is under pressure to recruit (given London house prices this is perhaps no surprise, and not something they can fix!). There is still one walk in service in the borough however who will see you immediately, so in a non-A&E but urgent situation this isn't a problem.*
- *I have been with this surgery for years and years and I really don't understand all these negativities some people are leaving. To be honest the fact that this practice is still trying to help out a number of patients is fantastic! Yes, sometimes they struggle but we as patients should help the Practice too by keeping calm and co-operating with the staff. I really appreciate this practice as they do try and help their patients. I must say my doctor is so understanding that even waiting 4 weeks to see them is probably worth it. Yes, trying to get an appointment can be difficult but I guess booking in advance might help or usually it's quite easy getting an appointment through the online access system.*
- *Sure, sometimes it takes more than five minutes to get a call answered or a week to get an appointment - but what do we expect? The NHS is busy, understaffed and stretched in every way. We should all be a bit more patient. In my experience, the Practice goes over and above delivering the best service - emergencies are dealt with promptly, answers are given courteously, and things are always resolved. My GP is helpful and always does their best.*
- *Doctors give time, when I know they have precious little, and are conscientious in following things up with calls and further appointments when necessary. Access to specialists when I have needed it has been good and energetically managed.*
- *After my regular GP had retired I saw a new GP today, who has been a pleasure to deal with. Despite an initial mix-up in my appointment once that was resolved which the GP kindly assisted*

on I was able to get my appointment at the end of the day. Service provided by the doctor was very good, I would be happy to see again.

- My doctor helped me in overcoming my panic attacks and I am so grateful about that ...and being less nervous I was able to gain 7kg..something that I've always wanted to accomplish ,having been underweight for my whole life! I would recommend it to anyone who is looking for a stable doctor...sometimes you have to wait a while on the day of the appointment but it is definitely worth it, it means that for the doctor you're not just a number...but the doctor treats you like a person !Love this health centre

Communication; user involvement

Communication between staff members in regard to patients' treatment medication can be problematic.

- All I wanted is my last prescribed medicine which were two co-codamol tablets, when I phone the centre I was told that I needed to get there and ask for them in reception but when I went there they told me I needed an appointment with a DR then I was told to call next day, and a Dr would call me back which they did not. So, when I call back again to find out what happened I was told that I needed to get to centre again as no one would call me as I needed to be seen in person. I've been going on around in circles which it has been very frustrating and to make matters worse once I was seen but not by a Doctor. I was told that I could not get that tablet as they don't issue those tablets. Why couldn't they just have said that in the first place??? There is no communication at all between the staff, a very poor system running through the network.
- After waiting for 2 weeks for appointment with the GP twice, twice we requested both the GPs we saw to refer [my mum] to the relevant specialist that she is under already but got discharged as she moved addresses. So, she needed a new referral closer to her current address. Third time saw another GP who tells us that no referral has been made and they don't even have the full medical records from the previous GP. The last GP we saw has promised to make the referral so let's see. They were also very nice and treated my mum as a person and her patient compared to the first two GPs who didn't even bother making any sort of communication with my mother who is the patient and as she speaks no English and treated her like an object!
- Recently moved to this surgery. I take 175 mg of Levothyroxine and have taken this dose for ten years. However, as I was new to the surgery I had a blood test done, made an appointment and spoke with a doctor who said I could remain on this dose. So far, all okay...Unfortunately this conversation was not added to my notes. When I rang the surgery for a new prescription I was told my recent blood test was abnormal and I would need a telephone consultation with a doctor. The doctor on the phone said some other doctor I have never spoken to had randomly guessed I should be on 100mg and written this in my notes as my notes from the previous practice were not there. The doctor said I need to take a new blood test and make me see another doctor to get a full prescription for my medicine. The doctor from this phone call wrote a prescription for enough tablets to last me 16 days when taking my normal 175mg dose - I have not been able to get the blood test and get an appointment see another doctor within these 16 days so I have now run out of medicine. The surgery won't give me a new prescription because they say I should be taking 100 mg and therefore should have enough. I have been taking this medication responsibly for 20 years have never missed a dose and have had regular blood tests to check the dose is correct. A combination of arrogance and not respecting the patient now means I will be without medication for a few days and feel very frustrated, angry and humiliated by the treatment I have (or rather haven't) received.
- The GPs massively vary in quality and experience. One of them - junior - was useless and unsympathetic at giving me a prescription, the next day on the telephone a different doctor gives it to me as a repeat!
- I attended the practice on 15 August to collect my 'repeat' prescription for high blood pressure medication. There was no prescription there, even though I collected it previously in June without a problem. The receptionist informed me I would have to leave and call again to re-arrange the 'repeat' prescription. I asked for the on-duty doctor to write out a prescription instead. No! Couldn't be bothered to take 2 minutes to do that. Non-urgent apparently. In fact, it took them longer to refuse this request than it would to have actually done it: This is just one example of

the consistently appalling levels of care and lack of quality I experience at this practice. I work in the NHS myself, treating cancer patients at a London hospital, and we would never treat a patient the way this place does.

- *She was concerned about receiving call from GP. They phone her to make appointment and she was not available to answer call. GP never callback. She thinks GP should send text, email or other form of communication asked of phone call only.*

Offering referrals promptly and communicating efficiently with other specialists is an important quality for a GP surgery, according to patients.

- *After a useful discussion, the doctor suggested referrals for further tests. Later that day, I received a call from the same doctor who had decided the waiting list was too long for one concern, & so had requested a more urgent NHS appointment, which duly arrived in the post just days later. I'm very grateful & impressed by the extra time & thought shown, and the initiative and care the doctor took.*
- *The GP's aren't reluctant to help with specialist referrals and medication and I have had nothing but outstanding practice and professionalism.*
- *I have always had kindness and respect and more importantly appropriate diagnosis and treatment, and when necessary prompt hospital referral.*
- *The service is excellent and extremely efficient; they always refer patients to the right specialists when appropriate.*

Patients appreciate GPs who make them feel involved in their own care and empower them to make informed choices.

- *I love this doctor surgery. All the GPs and nurses I see here are always friendly and professional. They always involve you in planning your care or treatment. They take time with you. They do not rush you when you have more than one concern likes some practises do.*
- *I saw a particular doctor for a smear test. I can't thank them enough for the support, advice and care they provided me with. They both went above and beyond the care I thought I'd received and I'd recommend them and [the practice] to anyone who can attend. They are a wonderful person and Doctor.*
- *Surgery staff went above and beyond their duty to help me and contacted me frequently with updates.*
- *My GP is really excellent - I've seen the doctor several times recently and really appreciate their care. The doctor makes sure they know what's relevant in my medical history; keeps me informed about test results etc. and explains what things mean. The doctor is really thorough and makes me feel fully involved in decisions about my treatment. And has a lovely manner.*
- *I love this doctor surgery. All the GPs and nurses I see here are always friendly and professional. They always involve you in planning your care or treatment.*
- *I feel compelled to write to you to thank [my GP surgery] for the truly excellent treatment and care I received during the time of my life-changing illness, which began in the spring of last year. In particular, I would like to single out all the doctors for special praise, as they were integral in identifying and supporting my needs after a failed discharge from UCH in May last year. Had [my GP] not been on my case to identify and diagnose my need at a crucial time then I think I possibly would have died. I had lost three stone, not eaten for nearly a week, not got out of bed, the result of which made me highly confused and completely distressed. It was [their] persistence and insistence on a home visit at that critical time which I think saved my life. This ensured I was taken back immediately to UCH and readmitted for further investigation and treatment of my complex, multiple chronic conditions. Since my final successful discharge from UCH I have received attentive monthly contact and support from the doctors at the surgery, which has helped my healing of both body and mind wholeheartedly and spiritually.*

On the other hand, those who take an overly authoritative approach and do not empower patients to make choices are criticised.

- *Two years ago, I asked to refer me to a therapist because of some personal issues I had. Because the waiting list was long, I called the practice again if they can put me in priority. Then that doctor, suggest giving medication. I told the doctor that I'm not feeling comfortable to take medication before I see a specialist and the doctor got offended that I dismiss their abilities. I replied that I didn't try to patronise the doctor, but I expressed to them that I prefer to use counseling and if it doesn't work we can consider it because this kind of medication is strong and addictive!*
- *Specialist prescribed medicine that the GP changed and put my health at serious risk. The doctor thought they knew better and would not listen. The doctor was wrong. Pathetic service.*
- *I have never been treated this way before. Last time I went I was rushed out and the doctor didn't even wanna talk to me about changing my contraception pill they just said its fine even though I have been having problems on it. Worst service I have ever had and can never get an appointment even when urgent.*
- *I was the 1st appointment of the day and the Dr was late, of course. When I spoke of my issue and asked about possible referrals for a second opinion it was just not an option. And no possible help offered except they could think of no reason for the issue, nor anyway to help me. When speaking of another concern they were also dismissed out of hand.*

Some doctors offer detailed information and explanations about the course of treatment they prescribe.

- *I have found both the Doctors and the coordinating staff have always been patient, clear and accommodating. I highly recommend this clinic as an example of how the NHS can run.*
- *GP I visited today is new to this practice but was very professional and caring. Doctor took the time to explain details and took on board what I think before suggesting treatment for me.*
- *During my appointment, the doctor gave me clear information and prescribed medication that cleared up my issue within a week. I would feel very confident using this service again.*
- *My GP was very educative and informative when I went, thoroughly explaining my situation, and options that I had. The appointments with hospitals have been seamless.*
- *During my appointment, the doctor gave me clear information and prescribed medication that cleared up my issue within a week. I would feel very confident using this service again.*

Some don't, which leaves patients feeling unsupported, or like their concerns are being dismissed.

- *Baby has re-flux, vomits a lot with acid. The mum feels she is not getting enough help for the baby. She would like to more help and support better. But the GP doctor doesn't give her good advice, not explaining clearly what she should do. The doctor says it's normal and things will get normal and she doesn't feel that way.*
- *They never explain too much and only said I had to get another appointment, which is really unacceptable.*
- *Once I moved here to this GP and got my first appointment, I felt hopeless and the doctor's behaviour was so rude????!*
- *The doctor was telling me some medical term and I just ask what does it mean? The doctor shouted at me and replied, how do I know???? Well if the doctors doesn't know, then should have tell me whom should I contact??? Or why would they be my GP, if the doctor can't make their patients explained or doesn't know what they are doing???? Definitely got some attitude and behavioural problem!*
- *I have passed out twice in 4 days and the GP took my blood pressure and said "it's just one of those things". No offer for further tests, no advice, nothing. But the good thing is "I'm less likely to have a heart attack or stroke with low blood pressure". Oh good, thanks Doc... Seriously unhappy. My old doctor would never say this to me!*

Quality of care, support and staff attitude

While many would prioritise getting appointments promptly, seeing the same doctor regularly is important for some patients, mostly for reasons pertaining to continuity of care. Patients who are unhappy with the quality of the medical service overall see this as a bigger issue than those who are happy with it.

- *Had a great experience dealing with a condition over the past year and a half. The best thing was always to go back to the same doctor who understood what to try next and then what to do after any treatment or tests. I was never left in a situation where I didn't know what the next step was.*
- *I have requested an appointment asking to have my GP instead of a locum, and when I have attended - guess what: it was locum, that of course was not known and couldn't help.*
- *I have had a terrible experience from the start with this practice. In the space of a few months, I still do not have a named GP, can barely get to see a locum, had a terrible rude experience with a locum.*
- *Never see the same doctor so asked same question over and over every time, she is not happy taking longer and longer, some doctors seem to be very matter of fact even though there are some wonderful ones.*
- *It would be nice to see the same GP each time one visits and over the years the practice has lost some of my preferred GPs through retirement and career progression. That said, I have always been treated with the utmost professionalism by whichever GP has telephoned me or seen me.*

Most patients see their doctors as supportive, caring and competent.

- *Excellent GP, no complaint about them, they are caring and very helpful.*
- *The GPs aren't reluctant to help with specialist referrals and medication and I have had nothing but outstanding practice and professionalism. The Doctors here have been amazing in supporting me and getting me referred to the right places when I needed it!*
- *We owe a lot to them in particular our registered GP. They are kind and caring and top it up with a huge sense of humour. We actually enjoy our visits there!!! It's more than a 5 star Practice In more ways than one.*
- *This is the best family health practice that I have ever had, they are always there to help you in any way they can.*
- *Midwives exceptional and extremely kind. Doctors excellent - two are the best in the surgery. Thanks for your excellent service.*
- *I have had numerous visits to this surgery on and off or various reasons especially during my pregnancy. The doctors went beyond their duty to help me. My husband was also thinking of joking seeing my experience. Can't rate these doctors enough!*
- *Great treatment by a doctor today. Very efficient management of a complex issue. Many thanks for all your effort much appreciated.*
- *This surgery is the best I've ever been to. I have a number of complex health conditions, so a good GP surgery is vital to keep on top of my health and I spend a good deal of time liaising with this surgery one way or another! They are obviously extremely busy, but I am always treated with dignity, compassion and respect by the staff here.*
- *I found the Doctors and staff answering your call very polite and extremely helpful.*
- *The doctors and nurses here are the very best. I find them to be very calm and patient. They listen and really do care. They are the best team of doctors I have ever known.*
- *I recently registered as a patient and from day 1 they showed to be very empathetic and professional. I have only been to the practice for a simple sports injury, but both the staff and doctor treated me very well and seemed to genuinely care for my wellbeing.*

Doctors who listen to patients without making them feel rushed are particularly praised.

- *The Doctors are brilliant, and I have seen several and they have all been really attentive and don't make you feel rushed.*
- *We were seen by unfamiliar face. They were a new Doctor. We spoke of my mum's illness and we have never felt so comfortable talking to them. Not only were they doing their duty, but they were really caring and tried to help as much as they can in the little time we had. To be honest they took the extra mile. They would thoroughly tell us what is needed to be done in steps. They take time listening and doesn't say I have another patient to see, time is up or make another appointment.*
- *When I called last week with a small, stored-up list of queries/concerns (yes, I know you shouldn't), the doctor I saw couldn't have been more patient, thorough & helpful. After a useful discussion, the doctor suggested referrals for further tests. Later that day, I received a call from the same doctor who had decided the waiting list was too long for one concern, & so had requested a more urgent NHS appointment, which duly arrived in the post just days later. I'm very grateful & impressed by the extra time & thought shown, and the initiative and care the doctor took.*
- *They take time with you. They do not rush you when you have more than one concern likes some practises do.*
- *The doctors are brilliant. They are very nice and make me feel very comfortable and welcome.*
- *When I called last week with a small, stored-up list of queries/concerns (yes, I know you shouldn't), the doctor I saw couldn't have been more patient, thorough & helpful.*

A minority, however, experience a lack of support or rude, insensitive treatment.

- *I have major problems with my back and I saw a doctor that didn't even touch me and their answer to my problem was "what do you want me to do". After the incident, I ask not to see that doctor again. Few months later when I book an appointment they made me see the same doctor again!*
- *Last week I ask to see a doctor because I have numbness in my genital area. NHS website suggest that's probably is because I'm riding a bike however suggest seeing my GP. The doctor I saw made me feel really uncomfortable for being a gay man. First the doctor was uncomfortable asking me if I am a gay or a straight man in 2017!!! Second of all the doctor created an awkward situation about asking me my sexual partners and activity! Even though I told the doctor that I'm always using protection and I had only 2 times sex since the last time I had an STI check-up (which I have frequently) the doctor told me that this is an STI and I have to go for a check-up. After that the doctor asked me to undress and from far away the doctor told me to check my penis. The doctor was feeling very uncomfortable and the doctor didn't even touch me, but the doctor asked me to point my penis on different directions! I haven't felt uncomfortable for my sexuality for a really long time and I expect from educate doctors to respect people for who they are.*
- *The GPs although they give the right advice according to medication but lack care in their treatment towards their patients. It almost feels like the GPs are in a rush to get home with the lack of attention they provide to patients.*
- *The GP followed me to the Pharmacy and in front of everyone there started talking loudly about my illness with no respect for privacy... I felt ashamed and humiliated.*
- *Once I moved here to this GP and got my first appointment, I felt hopeless and the doctor's behaviour was so rude????! The doctor was telling me some medical term and I just ask what does it mean? The doctor shouted at me and replied, how do I know????Well if the doctors doesn't know, then should have tell me whom should I contact??? Or why would they be my GP, if the doctor can't make their patients explained or doesn't know what they are doing???? Definitely got some attitude and behavioural problem! Come on, you got a better treatment from a corner coffee shop while u buying something!*
- *I have been to this GP surgery for years and I am usually very happy with the service as all the doctors are very nice, however, after today I felt the opposite as I was not treated with respect. I went to visit the GP surgery today to get my symptoms checked and the doctor I had was being very mean. The doctor was asking me irrelevant questions as well and also intimidated me too. This made me feel very uncomfortable and upset.*

There is a small number of patients who express doubt about doctors' competence.

- *Number of times I've been incorrectly diagnosed. Latest experience was with my son. On Monday, he was diagnosed with Chicken Pox, on Tuesday, only 1 day later, a GP at Guy's Hospital Urgent Care told me "This rash is definitely not chicken pox". How can a GP not know what Chicken Pox rash looks like?!*
- *They treat me like I am stupid. With skin reactions from more than a year, I've been told to drink water.... I showed the doctor what kind of reactions I have and still - that I drink need to water. Told the doctor that I drink water, I take vitamins, I moisturise my skin etc... Swollen eyelids, red points on Chest, dry eyelids, 4 times a month cold sore. I showed all my reactions and still was treated like stupid. These tips I can get from 10yo child, but thought that doctor can treat patient but more seriously.*
- *I've been with this surgery for 6 years. Limited options to change because of catchment area. I'm asthmatic and had a severe chest infection from October 2016 to January 2017. Was hugely disappointed that throughout this period despite repeated requests to see a GP, I saw a medical student once and a nurse. The nurse was very quick to pick up an earlier x-ray had shown a partial lung collapse even though the GP spoke to me over the phone and said my results were fine! Hugely worrying for a doctor to miss this.*
- *Specialist prescribed medicine that the GP changed and put my health at serious risk. The doctor thought they knew better and would not listen. The doctor was wrong. Pathetic service.*
- *Never get an appointment and when you do the knowledge of the medical staff is poor and they are run off their feet, so feels like they are rushing you in and out.*
- *I have passed out twice in 4 days and the GP took my blood pressure and said "it's just one of those things". No offer for further tests, no advice, nothing. But the good thing is "I'm less likely to have a heart attack or stroke with low blood pressure". Oh good, thanks Doc... Seriously unhappy. My old doctor would never say this to me!*
- *I have visited the GP 4 times in less than a month and they have all prescribed multiple different medications to treat a problem they keep diagnosing incorrectly. More so they won't even look at. It was shocking to see the doctor google information about my symptoms in front of me!*
- *I have suffered from Bells Palsy since the birth of my last child. My GP has been very bad at providing support and I continuously feel that I am the one that is informing them about the condition*

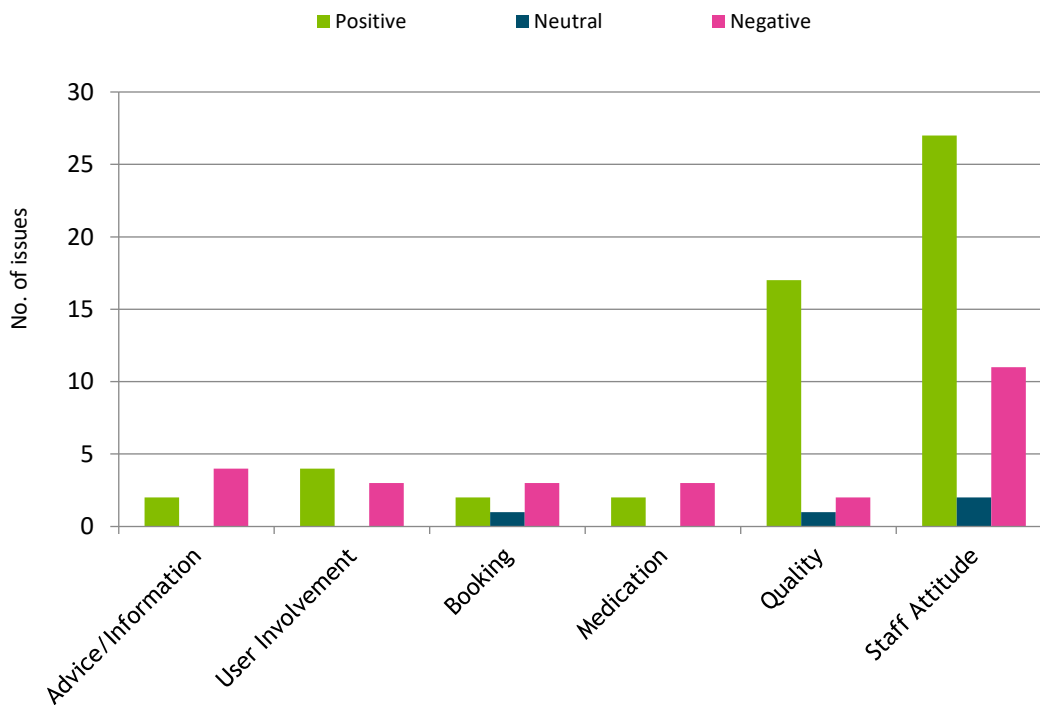
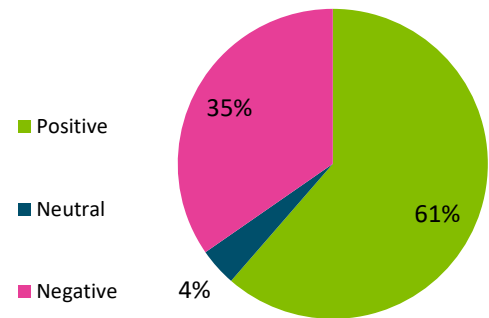
CLINICAL NURSING

Overall sentiment about clinical nursing is **61% positive**; more positive than any other aspect of the care pathway.

Practice nurses in Tower Hamlets are particularly praised in regard to *staff attitude*. They are seen as *caring, competent and approachable*.

On the other hand, a small number service users are less pleased with the level of *advice and information* they get from nurses and about issues around *medication*.

Booking appointments with nurses is less difficult than with doctors, but opinion of it still leans negative.



Most nursing staff are perceived as skilled, kind and compassionate; they make patients feel at ease and relaxed.

- *The reception staff are friendly and efficient, and the nurse is amazing! They were so helpful and friendly and an incredible asset. I am so used to people that don't listen to your problem or can't wait to get rid of you. They are doing a great job!*
- *Midwives exceptional and extremely kind.*
- *I had very good experience with a staff name for blood test, they are very skilled in talking my blood as a healthcare worker myself this nurse is very skilled, and it is treat to have them in the practice. I believe that the nurse will make is easy on the little and the elderly ones.*
- *The nurse is such a caring and attentive member of the staff, and is a professional who has excellent patient care skills and uses their lovely sense of humour to calm and reassure their patients. This member of staff is an exemplary nurse and should be recognised for their skill and hard work.*
- *The reception staff were very helpful, professional and the HCA I saw made me feel very relaxed. They were very warm and compassionate.*
- *A special thank you to the nurse and health care assistants who changed my dressings and made me feel that things were going to get better when I was feeling very low. I was treated with such compassion and respect from everyone involved with my treatment. I can't thank you enough.*
- *I just had my NHS Health Check. The HCA was extremely professional and courteous. They explained everything well and was also really good at taking my blood! So I have come away feeling well looked after and happy.*
- *The HCA is lovely, the surgery definitely need to get more staff like that!*
- *I've been with this clinic for a couple of years and have only been a small number of times, but the nursing staff are especially caring*

Only a small minority report rude or unprofessional treatment from nurses.

- *The nurse was rude, did not make you feel comfortable and the sense of hygiene was so bad.*
- *The nurse is very aggressive and show zero tolerance, empathy to patient. The nurse makes you feel uncomfortable and not very welcome. The nurse doesn't communicate and isn't giving you enough information about your situation. The nurse was so rushing while they were treating me. We visit whole family St Andrews and had same experience from them. The nurse brings the reputation of this clinic. The nurse makes you feel that you are not valuable.*
- *The nurse I saw was incredibly rude. The nurse did not bother to say hello or even look at me when I entered the room, the nurse kept their back to me while they did something on the computer and waved at a chair rather than ask me to sit down. Their manner remained unpleasant throughout the appointment. I can't bear the thought of having to see the nurse for something like a smear test. I will be seeking to register with a different surgery.*
- *The administrative staff here are terrible, frequently messing up and very unhelpful. The nurses are even worse. Complaints are not listened to.*

There were several reports of patients receiving a smear test complaining of the nurse's insensitive treatment:

- *I shockingly received grief from the nurse for having a smear test.. I am the right age to have it in this country and have friends who have had irregular cells and this was my first test to make sure everything is okay, so to get such a horrible attitude from a 'health professional' towards something that could find cancerous cells I don't even know what to say.*
- *The nurse was so awful with my smear test. They gave me no privacy to undress and didn't offer me anything to cover up with until I asked; even then it was like I was bothering them! The test was quick and they were so uncaring. I was left feeling upset. Totally insensitive. If this was your first time or were nervous this could be a dreadful experience. Ladies please be wary, I think the procedure should be as dignified and as caring and experience as possible.*
- *I have also had a bad experience with a nurse who was quite rough during a smear test a couple of years ago, and spoke to me with a really rude tone. Not a nice experience.*

Nurses and healthcare assistants pay a crucial role in supporting, informing and educating patients:

- *The doctor and nurses they have a positive attitude and give a clear information how the patient need to take the drugs that he received.*
- *I just had my NHS Health Check. The HCA was extremely professional and courteous. They explained everything well and was also really good at taking my blood! So I have come away feeling well looked after and happy.*

In some cases, nurses can offer advice or treatment to patients when other professionals are unavailable or don't have the capacity.

- *[During my pregnancy] I had a whooping cough vaccine- my nurse [from my GP surgery] booked it for me. The midwife did ask me if I had done it, but she hasn't actually recommended it. The reason why the nurse recommended it- I was thinking of going to India and I went to see her, to see what the recommended travel vaccines were. And in that conversation, she said- "You should have your whooping cough vaccine done". But the midwife didn't explain to me the pros and cons about it.; not now and not for my previous pregnancies.*
- *I'm asthmatic and had a severe chest infection from October 2016 to January 2017. Was hugely disappointed that throughout this period despite repeated requests to see a GP, I saw a medical student once and a nurse. The nurse was very quick to pick up an earlier x-ray had shown a partial lung collapse even though the GP spoke to me over the phone and said my results were fine! Hugely worrying for a doctor to miss this. Alas, I went back with a similar infection today and the nurse was so quick to examine me thoroughly, advise me, send me for a chest x ray and prescribe antibiotics and a steroid inhaler I so badly needed. The nurse also advised me to sign up to NHS Prepayment which saved me a small fortune in prescription costs today. The nurse is absolutely first-class - professional, knowledgeable and polite. The nurse is fantastic at their job and I am so thankful they work at this surgery.*

However, this solution is not suitable in all cases. Some patients report seeing a nurse when they actually needed a doctor.

- One nurse spent 10 minutes googling for medication names, and the pharmacy pointed out errors in 2 out of the 3 prescriptions the nurse gave. I lost confidence about the professionalism of the practice having nurses instead of GP in the walk-in centre and accuracy of the treatment they give.
- If you were sick or your kids, you will see a nurse not a medical doctor you may wait 2 hours as well. I was very sick one day and after seeing one nurse in the same practice I then had to go to private GP for treatment, and thanks God I saw a GP because I was having shingles and the nurse just gave me pain killers.
- It is difficult to get an appointment with a GP, in fact unless you specify you'd like to see a GP you automatically see a nurse and %100 of the time this has occurred for me they are unable to assist me and I have required a GP appointment. This then means I have to wait yet again for another appointment. I find staff provide conflicting opinions and are often rude. I feel when I attend I am an inconvenience to the staff.
- Booked an appointment over the phone with a Receptionist as it was "very important" (quote Doctor's note). At the appointment the Nurse says that this is not what the appointment was booked for and that they could not continue. Really? You can imagine my frustration at getting time off work to attend an appointment which isn't so important after all!
[...] [After submitting a request for a telephone consultation] when I do get a call back it is a Nurse who upon my reasons for an appointment states that this is not their domain and a Doctor would call me (phone line goes dead). I then get a call from the Receptionist who hurriedly confirms that an appointment has been booked (which I confirmed twice). At my appointment the Nurse then advises they cannot conduct the appointment in full as they are not trained in all aspects and that I should return yet another day; apologising for the misinformation given by the Receptionist! Delayed not once but twice! There is clearly a breakdown in communication between the Nurses and Receptionists who then think it's alright to send patients on a wild goose chase. It is not the patient's responsibility to check if the Nurse is well trained in all areas. Apparently, I should have checked this at the time of booking the appointment! Frankly not good enough.

A small number of patients express doubt about the nurses' professional competence.

- I visited the nurse practitioner last month to have some blood tests done. I went in the room and they were already wearing gloves and apron while using the computer. When I noticed that they didn't have any intention to wash their hands or change their gloves before taking my blood I had to ask them to do so. It's the second time that this happens to me with the same nurse. This is not acceptable. Infection control and patient safety should be a priority. I was very disappointed.
- I've done several times blood test in this practice; the nurse never cleaned my skin before putting the syringe needle into my skin. And never cleaned their hands before doing blood test. The nurse doesn't need to clean their hands?
- The doctors and nurses I have dealt with have been horrible, alarmingly getting out a medical dictionary in front of me to look up a medication I take and telling me I should try a different medication instead which is completely unrelated and doesn't treat my symptoms.

What Happens Next

Under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 Healthwatch Tower Hamlets has a statutory duty to:

1. Promote and support the involvement of local people in the commissioning, the provision and scrutiny of local care services.
2. Enable local people to monitor the standard of provision of local care services and whether and how local care services could and ought to be improved.
3. Obtain the views of local people regarding their needs for, and experiences of, local care services and importantly to make these views known.
4. Make reports and recommendations about how local care services could or ought to be improved. These should be directed to commissioners and providers of care services, and people responsible for managing or scrutinising local care services and shared with Healthwatch England.

In line with these duties a copy of this report will now be circulated to the following organisations.

- ❖ Tower Hamlets GP Care Group;
- ❖ Tower Hamlets Clinical Commissioning Group;
- ❖ Tower Hamlets Health Scrutiny Sub Committee;
- ❖ Tower Hamlets Health and Wellbeing Board;
- ❖ The Care Quality Commission;
- ❖ Healthwatch England.