

What we're hearing about primary care Surrey Heath

August 2023

About Healthwatch Surrey

One of the statutory duties of Healthwatch Surrey is to share Surrey residents' experiences of health and social care with the people and organisations who make decisions about those services. This report provides an overview of the themes regarding primary care services we've heard during community engagement in Surrey Heath in June 2023, along with other experiences we've heard through our Helpdesk service.

In cases of concern regarding patient safety, we immediately signpost the people involved to the appropriate body and we also escalate the case with the appropriate provider and/or commissioner.

If you would like to know more about a particular topic or service, please get in touch.

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Getting an appointment

We continue to hear from people who face challenges getting appointments with primary care services. A Surrey Heath resident submitted an experience through the Healthwatch England feedback service, to share their frustrations:

"On the phone for 2 hours then told that day's appointments were full and to ring again next day, told to ring 111 or go to A&E if urgent, so fed up I will now go to surgery and stay until

I'm seen.

Their phone system is bad at Frimley Green (Bartlett Group), [I] keep ringing and getting nowhere."

191992, May 2023

We also continue to hear from people who prefer to access GP practices by phone and have difficulty accessing appointments:

"I am with Frimley Green (Bartlett Group). I find the GP hopeless. It is hard to get an appointment, the phone queue is very long and you can't get a face to face appointment easily. I would usually either phone or go in person to get an appointment, I wouldn't use the app."

194262, July 2023

Another person we spoke to relied on their own medical knowledge to know when to call:

"My GP is Park Road and they have been good. I can make appointments quickly by calling up. It helps that I'm a nurse, so I know when I really need to be seen and when I don't – not everyone knows when not to call!"

194231, June 2023, Camberley

Remote appointments

We heard that sharing information and advice virtually can lead to confusion:

"I saw a clinical pharmacist for a heart check up and it was found that I had high cholesterol and was referred to my GP (Camberley Health Centre). I had a call from the GP, all my appointments were done over the phone which I didn't feel was ideal, as I think it took longer. I was given information in a text in the form of links to websites, which I then had to click through and access myself. I can just about use my smart phone but for me, I would have welcomed a printed information sheet on paper, as I found the amount of

information overwhelming. I wasn't sure what was relevant and what wasn't. I found it hard to pull together everything I'd seen and had to write notes as I only accessed the websites via my phone and I kept losing track of where I had seen something. The GP gave advice on exercise and diet and I am to organise a follow up in 6 months to see if I will need statins."

194482, July 2023

Support for families with young children

Positive experiences of Healthier Together

Parents with young children had good experiences in accessing appointments through the Healthier Together app:

"I am registered with the Bartlett Group. I use the Healthier Together app to make GP appointments for my toddler. I can add photos and symptoms and I find it very user friendly. Sometimes they get back to you within the hour."

194258, June 2023

"I am with [Bartlett Group]. I called for my daughter last week who has an ongoing breathing issue (related to asthma). I was number 30 in the queue at 8am. By the time I got to speak to someone there was no space left for her to be seen and I was told to use the Healthier Together app. I don't like doing this usually but I did do it this time and got an appointment for later on that morning. I later found out that they hold spots for under 18s. We saw a brilliant GP that was thorough and my daughter was given additional medication for her viral wheezes. I was very impressed and will definitely use the app straight away next time."

194233, June 2023

Access to urgent appointments

A resident shared an experience on behalf of her family, querying whether children were being assessed appropriately:

“My grandson [8] had been struggling to breathe and so his parents called [Camberley Health Centre], and an appointment was given for 3 weeks’ time. It seemed a long time to wait, as he was really struggling. My son went into the surgery to ask if he could be seen sooner and then an appointment was given for 4 days later. When they saw him, they found he had a chest infection and was put on a nebuliser and given antibiotics, but I felt he should have been seen even sooner. My son did feedback to the practice manager.”

194483, July 2023

Support from primary care following acute care

We heard from a parent who had found it difficult to access care for their child from Frimley Park following treatment and had to contact their GP for help:

“My daughter has been in hospital 4 times in the last year, the most recently being in February when she was in for 4 days and on oxygen. Our experience this last time at Frimley Park wasn’t great, the consultants didn’t seem to be speaking to each other and we had a lot of conflicting information. She got let out on the condition that she was seen 6 weeks later by a consultant and that she took her inhalers regularly within those 6 weeks. However, we didn’t get an appointment for 12 weeks and she ran out of medication. We had to go back to the GP (Bartlett Group) for a further prescription. We were finally seen and I now have her next appointment booked for Christmas time. We were sent to a hospital in Bracknell for the consultant appointment and that experience was much better than the one we had at Frimley.”

194233, June 2023

Lack of community support impacting parents’ mental health

We asked families with young children what improvements they would like to see. We heard that a lack of community support for parents is leading to them needing further support elsewhere:

“If I could make any improvements in the area I would get the children’s centres back. The health visiting team around here is not good. People feel that they can’t get hold of anyone, and when they do they feel rushed/dismissed. The experience is much more impersonal now – you have to weigh your own baby. This attitude to health visiting can affect a new mum’s mental health quite badly. There are no drop ins now – you are supposed to call if you need them but not everyone wants do this. With early intervention lost, you are likely to have more problems down the line with your mental health. It’s very short sighted.”

194233, June 2023

Stroke support following acute care

We spoke to a person who was unhappy with the support she had received from primary care, particularly with the communication about accessing walk-in appointments and also about their prescription:

“I had a stroke 6 weeks ago and I am still recovering.

I had a chest infection a couple of weeks ago, I booked an appointment at the GP, who sent me for a chest X-ray which showed I had a chest infection and that I would need some antibiotics. The doctor then told me that I would need to have a follow up X-ray to show that the chest infection has cleared. The doctor said that she would book this in for me.

I did not hear anything about the X-ray for a little while, and checked both the NHS App and the Patient Access app, to see if any appointments had been booked in. Eventually, I decided to submit an eConsult to [Upper Gordon Road Surgery], asking for details about the X-ray referral. I then received a reply to say that my X-ray was a walk-in appointment, but they left no information about where the X-ray would be taken, how to get there and so on.

So, I called up the reception to get this information, and

when they brought up the eConsult they said that I knew that it was a walk in appointment, because that is what the title read. I am certain that I did not put that down as the title, as I genuinely did not know what a walk-in X-ray appointment even was before I received the GP's response. The receptionists were rude and not helpful. I eventually was able to get all the information I needed, but it was not easy to get.

I have put in a complaint about the receptionists before, as the majority are rude and not helpful.

I have also had an issue with my prescriptions post stroke, as my consultant at the hospital changed one of my medications because of interactions between the old medication, and a medication I am now on post stroke. The consultant has written a letter to my GP, but they keep on prescribing the old medication that I cannot take.

I have received good post stroke care from the hospital, with regular visits from the nurses and the occupational therapist, but my GP does not want to know and has not supported me at all since I had my stroke.

When I raised these grievances with the GP, they said to me that 2 regular locums have left the practice, as well as one of the registered doctors, leaving the practice short staffed. I understand the GP is under pressure, but simple communication and treating people with respect is not difficult."

195377, July 2023

Long term conditions

We spoke to people receiving support for diabetes, who felt they needed to chase their GP practices to get results:

"I have a diabetes check every year and I monitor my own blood pressure and send the readings to the practice (Camberley Health Centre). [When I need an appointment] I do find the receptionists difficult to deal with. I try to see the same GP but in order to do this I have to wait.

I visited the GP back in November and they requested sample tests, I'm still waiting for the results. I rang the GP and he said he would contact me, but I'm still waiting."

194483, July 2023

"I moved here about 18 months ago and I haven't been very impressed with Park Road. I have type 2 diabetes and I am insulin dependent, since registering I have had to motivate contact with the surgery and follow up on my appointments relating to the diabetes."

194485, July 2023

Carers

We heard a positive experience from a carer, however they acknowledged they might need more support for their own wellbeing:

"I care for my husband who has dementia. I am registered as a carer with Frimley Green [Bartlett Group] and there is a very good nurse who gives help and advice. I have been really pleased with her help.

I don't really put myself first or give thought to my own wellbeing. Action for Carers have been very good with my husband though."

194256, July 2023

Provision of care and support in people's own homes

We were asked whether finger-prick blood tests can be offered in people's own homes, to help carers of people with dementia:

“My 100-year-old mother has advanced dementia and her care is provided by the family in her own home.

She has a cardiac pacemaker and has been prescribed Warfarin, so must have regular blood tests. My brother has been taking my mother to the GP practice for these tests and he has managed to mobilise her and minimise the emotional and psychological distress with the support of the practice staff and excellent practice nurse for many years. My mother found intravenous testing distressing so these tests are performed using a finger-prick blood sampling method.

It is now challenging for my brother to get my mother to the GP practice so we have been in contact with the district nurses, to ask if these tests could be done in my mother’s home. The district nurses have told us that they are not commissioned to provide finger prick blood testing in the home and can only do [intravenous] blood testing.

I believe [at home finger prick blood tests would] be ensuring that care giving at this stage of my mother's life, is focusing on preserving quality and dignity of life.”

195532, July 2023.

Accessing prescriptions

A resident shared that they don’t have any digital means to access repeat prescriptions:

“I pop in to Park Road for prescriptions and repeat prescriptions. I don't have a home computer or a smartphone, so I use the forms in the practice. I try to avoid going to [the GP practice] if I can, the parking is really stressful, and I would much prefer to go to [the other practice in the group].

My pharmacy 's been a bit chaotic recently, I think the main

person left. I usually put my prescription in about a week in advance and leave plenty of time in order to ensure I get my prescription.”

194230, July 2023

Referrals from high street opticians

We heard about good support and referrals working well:

“I use the Eye Care Shop in Aldershot as well and they referred me to the Community Health Eye Care. I had an appointment with them but my condition was too complex so I was referred again to Frimley Park Hospital. I have an appointment next week about my glaucoma and a cataract. I am really grateful to the optician for getting me into the system. They were able to correct my double vision.”

194251, July 2023

However, a person with diabetes was referred back to their GP and didn't hear anything further:

“I was referred by an optician to my GP about cataracts, heard nothing from GP [Park Road] so ended up having cataracts removed privately at the end of 2022.”

194485, July 2023

Mental health support

We heard from an older Surrey Heath resident who preferred to speak with his GP about his mental wellbeing and see the GP as the person to contact for help with their wellbeing:

“I do look after my mental health too. I've spoken to my doctor [Park Road] about my mental health I started when I had seen him about tinnitus. Since then, he sees me quarterly for a chat, he's my man he is, who I want to talk to, he's organised some medication for me too which helps me.”

194230, July 2023