



Access to Healthcare Services for Young People

A word cloud of healthcare-related terms. The words are arranged in a roughly cross-like shape. The words include: "GPs-running-late", "Communication", "friendly", "Appointments", "rooms", "Waiting", "Receptionists", "Confidentiality", and "polite". The words are in various colors (orange, red, black, yellow) and orientations (horizontal and vertical).

GPs-running-late
Communication
friendly
Appointments
rooms
Waiting
Receptionists
Confidentiality
polite

Executive Summary

Background

Healthwatch set up this task group in October 2013 to complement work already being done by the local authority and CCG. By talking to young people in the borough we were able to identify areas of concern around health services and compare and contrast them with what other members of the community are telling us.

We met with representatives from the Local Authority and CCG to ensure that our work was enhancing but not overlapping what they were already doing. All involved saw the benefit of the task group in addressing additional issues and reaching more young people in the borough.

Why should this be a priority for Healthwatch St Helens?

Healthwatch St Helens was aware that a lot of engagement was being done in the local area to give young people a voice in various aspects of their lives, through surveys via schools and health forums.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) refresh, 2013 tells us that people know that health is important but feel disempowered to do anything about it. We know from experience that young people don't feel as though they are taken seriously by health professionals and we wanted to give them a voice around this aspect of their lives.

Consultation method

Between October and December, 2013, young people from local colleges and training organisations gave us their views around health services when we held workshops in their classrooms. We followed this up in February and March 2014, with questionnaires that were designed by a young person which two young Healthwatch members asked their friends to complete, and were given to 6th form students and young carers to gather further evidence.

Conclusion

Many of the issues the young people identified mirrored what other people in the community are saying such as attitudes of GP receptionists, and appointment times. The consultation exercises highlighted that there are some issues emerging that are specific to young people, for example, some feel reluctant to see their GP as they feel disrespected and not taken seriously.

Healthwatch feels able to make recommendations to service providers about how they can improve their service in order to meet the needs of young people in the borough.

Introduction

Healthwatch St Helens set up the 'Support for Young People' task group in October 2013. We wanted to paint a picture of what matters to young people in the borough, to see what issues are specific to young people and also how they compare with what other people in local communities are telling us.

Healthwatch was keen to ensure that we were not replicating anything that the Local Authority and CCG were doing. We met with Julie Dunning (Public Health), Beth Collins (CCG) and Michelle Davies (Children & Young People's Services) and as a result were confident that what we were doing would enhance their work but not be duplication. All three saw the benefit of the Task Group in that it would focus on issues that were related to but did not overlap the work they were doing, as well as reaching additional young people in the community.

Why should this be a priority for Healthwatch St Helens?

Healthwatch St Helens was aware that a lot of consultation work was being done in the local area to give young people a voice in various aspects of their lives. This includes a Pupil Health & Well Being survey that included 4000 participants in 2013 which gives young people in full time education the opportunity to comment on their health behaviours and Health Forums organised by St Helens Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG).

Where the Local Authority and the CCG have focused on young people of school age, Healthwatch felt we should listen what young people aged 16-25 had to say. Our attention should also be on their feelings about the health services they access, what might be discouraging them from accessing services and what they think would make things better.

During 2010/11, St Helens LINK worked with some young people around their experiences of St Helens Walk-in Centre. The young people who took part had a range of experiences but the finding key was that they did not feel like staff were listening to them and taking them seriously.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) refresh, 2013 tells us that 41% people in St Helens know that health is important but feel disempowered to do anything about it. We know from the findings of LINK that young people feel they are listened to by health professionals and we wanted to give them a voice around this aspect of their lives.

Healthwatch believes that this task group can complement work already being done by the Local Authority and CCG and identify what needs to be done to make health care more accessible to young people in St Helens.

How did we engage with young people?

Between October and December, 2013, young people gave us their views around health services.

The young people were from:

- Shaw Trust
- St Helens College
- Carmel 6th Form College

We went into their classrooms and held workshops where we could tell them about Healthwatch and where they could tell us about their experiences. Many talked openly about their issues while some were more comfortable writing down what they had to say.

We followed this up in February and March 2014, with questionnaires that asked the same questions but were in two different styles, to give us an indication of whether a simple format or a more 'young people friendly' style, designed by a young person, would influence how willing young people were to complete them. Two young volunteers asked their friends to complete the questionnaires and 6th form students from Cowley International College as well as young carers filled them in.

The workshops and the questionnaires were based around the following:

- *What are your barriers to accessing health care?*
- *What bugs you about health services*
- *What puts you off getting healthcare?*
- *What matters to young people when accessing health care?*
- *What's missing from your health services?*
- *What could be done better?*
- *Do you know who to talk to about your health concerns?*
- *Do you know how to complain about a service?*
- *If you said yes to the last two questions, how did you find out this information? Who told you?*

We wanted to speak to the young people in language they could relate to but didn't patronise them.

What are young people telling us?

Some clear themes have emerged, with issues around waiting times for appointments, lack of communication, attitudes of staff and feelings of not being listened to or taken seriously. Some young people felt that GP practice staff are often abrupt, even rude, and treat them with a lack of respect because of their age. Many felt rushed during their consultation with a GP and think appointments need to be longer.

Lack of confidentiality is another issue. Some young people feel that reception staff ask too many personal questions, especially within earshot of other patients. Some felt that they have to explain too much to reception staff before they can get an appointment.

Young people placed importance on clean, welcoming waiting rooms that are pleasantly decorated, smell nice and do not feel dull and depressing. Given the level of mental health issues in the borough it is not surprising that young people emphasise the need for their surroundings to lift their mood.

Most comments made were focused on GP practices, however waiting times at A&E, and the high cost of dental treatment for young people over 18 who are not in full-time education were also identified as causing concern. Two young people said they don't go to their GP practice because of where it is located which indicates that awareness raising is needed around patient choice.

Some young people also revealed that not wanting to take medication stops them from accessing health care and some felt embarrassed talking about their health. Some identified the lack of women in general practice and feel that male doctors don't understand women's issues.

Young people in general were aware of a range of places they could go to access health care but few knew how to complain about a service. Most of the young people said before they became aware of Healthwatch they would not have known who to contact for support in raising a concern and signposting to other services.

Some other themes

GPs running behind

Automated telephone services - make it hard to book appointments

Opening times - don't want to miss college

Struggle to get GP appointments without having to take time off work.

Better signage in waiting rooms to clinics, surgeries etc

Rarely seeing the GP of your choice

Wanting to be treated as an individual

Hospitals don't give out enough information

Not feeling listened to

Worries about being judged

Feeling patronised

Doctors use medical terms and don't explain what they mean.

Worries about stigma

In your words...

"Doctors' receptionists need to be more polite and friendly"

"Some receptionists are friendly"

"Phoning you to say your results are back but not telling you if everything is OK just makes you worry more."

"It takes so long your ailment has gone by the time you get an appointment".

"Seeing different doctors means you have to keep explaining what's wrong again and again".

"The doctors don't put you at ease".

"Doctors don't make eye contact"

"My doctor just thinks I want time off college"

"Doctors talk to my family instead of me because they think I'm too young"

"Doctors don't consider your opinion even when you've lived with the same condition your whole life and know what works for you."

"Doctors are not sensitive or caring enough"

"Receptionists never answer the phone – when they eventually do all the appointments are gone."

"Sometimes the receptionists ask what's wrong with you out loud and I feel uncomfortable saying in front of a queue of people."

"Sometimes it seems a bit rushed and staff can be a little unfriendly."

"Sometimes doctors try and diagnose you before you've finished speaking."

"People could listen more and take me seriously when I have a concern or problem."

"My doctor is lovely and speaks to me as well as my parents."

Conclusions

From our consultation exercises it is clear that many young people have the same issues and concerns as other people in the community. There are also some other issues that are more specific to young people that mostly relate back to feelings of not being taken seriously and feeling disrespected.

In general, the young people mirrored what Healthwatch frequently hears from people across the borough around staff attitudes, waiting times for appointments and opening times at their GP practice.

Healthwatch feels that some of the reluctance to access health care could impact on these young people's health later on with, for example, failure to attend for cervical smears and access support for drug and alcohol misuse.

Recommendations

- **GP practices should implement customer service training for all staff.**

Healthwatch believes this is essential as it has been a recurring theme throughout the LINK project and remains a current issue today.

We are aware that the CCG is currently designing training for this purpose.

- **Healthcare providers should sign up to the ‘Young People Friendly’ initiative.**

This is an initiative to make GP practices, clinics etc *young people friendly*. The ‘Young People Friendly’ programme is based on the Department of Health ‘You’re Welcome’ quality criteria and focuses on 8 areas, including confidentiality, accessibility and appointments.

Services complete an online self-assessment toolkit which they then submit to ‘You’re Welcome’. If they are awarded the accreditation they go to Children & Young People’s services to get the ‘Young People Friendly’ branding.

The service is moderated on an annual basis around 3 criteria areas. Moderation will involve young people including mystery shopping where young people will observe how *young people friendly* a surgery/clinic etc is, next time they visit it.

Healthwatch feel this would help service providers to be supported in maintaining an environment that would encourage young people to attend and might also be more welcoming to other people in the community.

- **Consider whether reception staff can reassure patients as to the reasons behind asking for more information regarding their need to see a doctor.**

Healthwatch believes there needs to be better marketing about how the practices are aiming to maximise the number of appointments available. Explanation is required for patients around the triaging system and the need to establish whether an appointment with, for example, a practice nurse might be appropriate.

Healthwatch recognises that the triaging system is necessary but feels that better communication, confidentiality and sensitivity should be considered.

Recommendations with timescales

Recommendations	Person/s involved	Timescale
Customer service training for practice staff - Receptionist Training	Beth Collins - St Helens CCG	Training commissioned within 6 months
Sign up to the ‘Young People Friendly’ initiative.	Beth Collins - CCG Michelle Davies - Children & Young People’s Services Clare Aspinall - St Helens Knowsley Hospital Trust Elaine McDowell - St Helens Walk-in-Centre	Already agreed and to be progress by partners
Review whether triage communications can be improved in GP practices	Katie Power - St Helens CCG	Agreed in principle, needs clinical leadership within practices

What else is being done for young people in St Helens?

Public Health, St Helens MBC

- Voice of the Child Empowerment Committee - *“Function: Children and young people are listened to, practice is focused on their needs and experiences are influenced by their wishes and feelings or where they cannot represent their views themselves, those are advocated on their behalf”*
- Annual Democracy Debates which engage representatives from both Primary & Secondary schools
- Developing ‘Young People Friendly’ Award for sexual health settings
- Peer Listening programmes in Primary Schools. Peer advocacy and mediation approaches using the pupil voice

Clinical Commissioning Group

- Building relationships and working in Hope Academy, Sutton Academy and Cowley Language College to encourage the development of Health Ambassadors.
- Youth Forum

Children & Young People’s Services, St Helens MBC

The ‘*Young People Friendly*’ award - an initiative to make GP practices, clinics etc young people friendly.

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