

Mystery Shopping Report

Bury GP practice registration information

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Executive Summary

The aim of this mystery shopping exercise was to determine whether, when registering new patients, GP practices in Bury were following the guidance produced in 2016 (revised in February 2021). The aim was to record these experiences initially to get an overview of the local practices. The feedback was gathered in February and March 2021.

Following this exercise Healthwatch Bury has produced this snapshot report.

There are 29 GP practices in Bury, Healthwatch mystery shoppers managed to contact 28 of those surgeries.

We found that majority (93%) of the GP practices Healthwatch mystery shoppers spoke to advised patients to go into the surgery to pick up the registration form to take home for completion or go onto the GP surgery's website and download a copy from there.

Over half of the GP practices initially said that some form of ID is required to register with the GP practice. In general GP surgeries asked to see for a proof of address, passport, birth certificate, driving license, bus pass, prescription form etc. Practices can have a policy in place to ask patients to provide identification, but they cannot insist on seeing it to register them. Seeing some form of ID will help to correctly match a patient to the NHS central patient registry and enable quicker access to any previous medical notes.

Key findings

1. 61% (17 out of 28) of the GP practices initially said that some form of ID is required to register with the GP practice. 4 out of those surgeries specifically asked for a photo ID.
2. Almost all practices specified that the patient is required to live within the surgery's catchment area
3. Three mystery shoppers were advised to ring 119 for further advice regarding vaccinations. 68% of the surgeries (19 out of 28) said the vaccine would be arranged by their GP once the patient had been registered or they would be allocated to a vaccination centre.



Our recommendations:

- **No ID needed** - GPs to register patients without ID or address in line with Primary Care contract. Ensure staff are aware of the processes and requirements to enable them to register patients that do not have ID.
- **Use NHS Standard Information** - GPs could use registration information from the NHS website. By using nationally recognized guidance from NHS England will reduce variation in standards amongst practices.
- **Offer practice address to register** - GPs should use practice address for those with temporary address or no fixed address.
- **Keep up to date with vaccine information and processes.** Ensure all reception and practice staff are aware of the processes involved in getting people vaccinated. Have printed information to refer to and give out where necessary.



Background

Under the regulatory terms of the General Medical Services contract, practices must contractually register patients on application and can only turn them down if:

- the commissioner has agreed that they can close their list to new patients
- the patient lives outside the practice boundary
- they have other reasonable grounds

There is no requirement under the regulations for a patient to prove identity, address, immigration status, or give their NHS number to register, or receive an appointment. If a patient tells the practice their details, but cannot provide photographic identification, or proof of address, it cannot be considered as reasonable grounds to refuse registration.

Practices can have a policy in place to ask patients to provide identification, but they cannot insist on seeing it to register them. Seeing some form of ID will help to correctly match a patient to the NHS central patient registry and enable quicker access to any previous medical notes.

To meet equality laws, the ID Policy must be non-discriminatory. Under the terms of their primary medical services contracts, GP practices cannot refuse an application to join its list of NHS patients on the grounds of race, gender, social class, age, religion, sexual orientation, appearance, disability or medical condition.

Further context:

[Primary Medical Care Policy and Guidance Manual](#)

[Leaflet for asylum seekers and refugees](#)

[Leaflet for gypsy, traveller and Roma communities](#)

[Leaflet for homeless patients](#)

[Information for visitors from abroad about using the NHS](#)

Information from NHS England

‘A patient does not need to be “ordinarily resident” in the country to be eligible for NHS primary medical care -this only applies to secondary (hospital) care. In effect, therefore, anybody in England may register and consult with a GP without charge.

Where a GP refers a patient for secondary services (hospital or other community services) they should do so on clinical grounds alone; eligibility for free care will be assessed by the receiving organisation.

It is important to note that there is no set length of time that a patient must reside in the country in order to become eligible to receive NHS primary medical care services.

Therefore all asylum seekers and refugees, students, people on work visas and those who are homeless, overseas visitors, whether lawfully in the UK or not, are eligible to register with a GP practice even if those visitors are not eligible for secondary care (hospital care) services.

The length of time that a patient is intending to reside in an area dictates whether a patient is registered as a temporary or permanent patient. Patients should be offered the option of registering as a temporary resident if they are resident in the practice area for more than 24 hours but less than 3 months.’



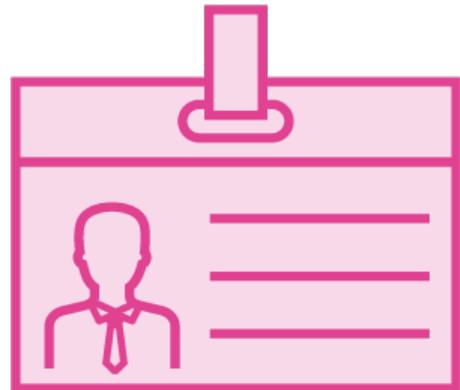
England

Methodology

There are 29 GP Practices in Bury. To understand patient experience of surgeries, we focused on the phone lines & websites as it was felt these were the two places a patient would go to for advice during COVID-19 pandemic.

Healthwatch Bury volunteers anonymously telephoned practices to enquire about how to register without ID, housing or immigration status info. This helped us to produce a snapshot of services provided across the borough.

Two Healthwatch Bury volunteers contacted GP Surgeries in Bury as 'mystery shoppers' and one volunteer contacted the surgeries on behalf of Healthwatch Bury. In this context, mystery shoppers engaged with health and social care providers, posing as service users or friends of service users. This enabled them to assess how well the providers perform in terms of customer service and information provision. Calling was not specific to one time of the day and it is important to note that this will not provide a comprehensive overview of how each practice registers people without a fixed address. However, our findings can be helpful in directing areas of further research.



Findings

The volunteers had a set of standard questions that can be seen below as well as the responses from the surgeries. Healthwatch mystery shoppers could not get hold of one practice out of 29 practices in Bury.

1. Did the practice advise on how to register? If so, what information did they give?

- 93% (26 out of 28) of the practices Healthwatch mystery shoppers spoke to were advised to come into the surgery to pick up the registration form to take home for completion or go onto the GP surgery's website and download a copy from there.
- 1 practice specifically mentioned that the GP practice's address could be used to register the patient should they not have a permanent address.
- 1 practice did not advise further how to register and one GP surgery's receptionist referred to practice manager via email but no response was received.

2. What did the practice say was required for the patient to register?

- 61% (17 out of 28) of the GP practices initially said that some form of ID is required to register with the GP practice. 4 out of those surgeries specifically asked for a photo ID. When prompted 2 of the surgeries said they would accept other forms of ID should they not have any photo identification. 7 out of these practices elaborated further to say they would accept patients without ID too.
- 25% out of practices (7 out of 28) said the patients would have to complete the practice registration form.
- In general GP surgeries asked to see for a proof of address, passport, birth certificate, driving license, bus pass, prescription form etc.
- Almost all practices specified that the patient is required to live within the surgery's catchment area

3. Did they suggest any particular practices? If so what was the reason given for this particular practice?

- Most GP Practices (93%) said they currently accepted new patients, one practice advised to go on the NHS Choices to see whether there are other GP Practices closer to the area.
- One GP practice advised to contact a different surgery in Bury, no clear reason was given for this although it was further away from the patient's address. However when asked a direct question whether the surgery currently accepted new patients the receptionist said they do.

4. What did they say would happen if someone who was in an eligible group for the COVID vaccine asked how they could get vaccinated?

- 3 mystery shoppers were advised to ring 119 for further advice regarding vaccinations.
- 6 mystery shoppers did not ask about vaccinations and/or the surgery didn't respond.
- 68% of the surgeries (19 out of 28) said the vaccine would be arranged by their GP once the patient had been registered or they would be allocated to a vaccination centre.
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18% of the surgeries also specified about registering homeless people:

- The surgery would book the appointment for the vaccine if the person was homeless & had no means of booking it themselves.
- They would give them the NHS England number if they were homeless & wanted vaccine.
- Would tell them the process - invite sent out. Not sure if homeless person could have vaccine before they were registered but once they were registered they would go into the system & get an invite like any other person.
- When asked what would happen if the person was homeless he said they'd try to get a number for them. Or, if they came to the front door of the surgery they could tell them how to book a vaccine. Homeless people can give a hostel or project address.
- I said she was 63 and had been homeless so probably vulnerable so the receptionist said would arrange once registered.

Please note this might have been because they are homeless friendly and/or volunteers asked the question about homeless patients.

5. Who did you speak to? (Receptionist, practice manager etc.) Was this the staff member helpful?

- The majority of mystery shoppers spoke to the GP receptionist, 2 mystery shoppers were transferred to the practice manager.
- The majority of receptionists were helpful and friendly, few volunteers felt like they were a bit rushed.

6. Any other observations?

Comparison of information provided with information on website

- 18 Bury GP Surgeries are registered as homeless friendly practices www.homelessfriendly.co.uk However Healthwatch volunteers couldn't find this information from the GP surgeries websites.
- The majority of the GP surgeries have got a registration form on their website that new patients are able to download and print out. However there was one practice that on their website advised to contact the reception to register as a new patient.
- Although the website did state that you would need proof of identity at the time of registering with the practice I was told that I wouldn't need to provide proof of identity. The 'home address' section on the online form is however a mandatory field.
- Once I said the patient is not a permanent resident in Bury and from the EU country the GP receptionist didn't think the EU residents can register with the GP practice due to Brexit unless they have an indefinite leave to remain in the UK and they would have to access private healthcare.
- The receptionist asked a senior staff and confirmed they would not be able to register the patient without photo ID and they would have to ring 111 meanwhile.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to our mystery shoppers: Diane Gaunt, Florence Sokol, Alan Norton and Andrea Wilson.

References

NHS England. How to register with the GP Practice. (online) Available at:

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-surgery/>

Contact us

If you require this information in an alternative format, please contact our office via the details below.



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