
What we're hearing about primary care Surrey Heartlands

September 2023



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About Healthwatch Surrey

Healthwatch Surrey is an independent service, empowering the residents of Surrey to have their voices heard. We seek out people's experiences of health and care services and share these with service providers and decision-makers, to support services to improve and tackle health inequalities. We believe that health and social care providers can best improve services by listening to people's experiences.

We also provide information and signposting to help the people of Surrey find the care that best suits their needs. Any urgent or concerning experiences within this report have been escalated to the appropriate teams. All appropriate information, advice and signposting to complaints processes has already been given.

This report is designed to highlight the themes of from experiences related to primary care services and includes examples to provide context on the themes. This report is not designed to be a representative portrayal of individual services. We have provided details of the practices involved to provide context, however we should highlight that multiple references to a certain practice may be as a result of our community engagement taking place within a certain geographic area, rather than being indicative of a particular concern with a specific practice.

If you would like more information or examples of what people have shared, please get in touch.

Themes across Surrey Heartlands

The following themes represent what we have been hearing about primary care services across Surrey Heartlands.

Accessibility

We have been contacted by people with accessibility needs who have found that changes to booking appointments have made it difficult to access support:

"I would like to make a complaint about my GP practice, The Old Cottage Hospital Epsom. I am disabled and registered blind, up until last week I was able to leave a message with the reception for my GP or to book an appointment. This was really useful as my carers could dial the number and help me make the appointment. The practice last week told me that they can no longer do this, If I need to contact my GP or book an appointment, I need to call between 8am and 9am to get an appointment.

The issue with this is that my carers do not come until 9:30 every day to help me get ready, so by the time they arrive I will have missed the cut off."

190651, May 2023, Old Cottage Hospital.

Similarly, we hear from residents who routinely require help from family or friends to book appointments:

"I rarely get seen in person, usually a telephone consultation. My husband tends to make appointments for me online as I cannot get on with it."

192018, May 2023, Greystone House Surgery.

Digital access and triage

We hear from residents who dislike being triaged virtually and feel this is a barrier to accessing help:

"Everything is online which I don't like. They always assume I have the flu or want me to take photos! Triageing on the phone is no good.

I have a teenager with mental health issues that needed to be seen quickly. I got an appointment but had to do a lot of pushing."

189103 March 2023, Greystone House Surgery.

Residents continue to share experiences of remote appointments and the response is mixed:

“Have to wait 2–3 weeks for an appointment at Studholme. With the phone appointments, you don't know what time of the day they will call you, need to wait all day. However, the GPs are very nice. GP rings and decides if they need to see you, sometimes they ask you to send a photo.”

195596 July 2023, Studholme Medical Centre.

A patient shared their concerns with us about the cost of calling up their GP practice and being on hold for a long time:

“My GP [practice] is tricky. It costs a lot of money to hold on the phone to get an appointment, I find this very frustrating. Might be 30 mins on hold.”

195597, July 2023, North West Surrey resident.

Using the NHS app

We are beginning to hear more experiences relating to use of the NHS app. For some people, this has been positive:

“I saw the GP in March and was able to have a good chat, I had enough time to discuss multiple issues and we also discussed blood tests I had in February, I received a text about blood tests and was able to make the appointment via the NHS app which was excellent. As a result of speaking with the GP I was seen by the physio who has now requested I have a DEXA scan for bone density.”

190401 April 2023, Medwyn Surgery.

We speak about the NHS app with residents during our engagements, however we hear that some people prefer the option of talking face-to-face:

“Speaking to the GP can be hard sometimes, the receptionists ask can you do it online? But I can't do it, I have a smartphone, but I don't find it easy to use. I asked about how I would set about setting up online for the GP and for my husband so we could keep track on one phone, they said I

need to go into the practice and do a form or something and I need to get an app but I can't understand what I'd need the app for. I'd rather go in to [the pharmacy to manage my prescription], it's easier face to face. That works well at the moment, the GP prescribes and then I pick it up."

196678, August 2023, Grove Medical Centre.

And other people feel excluded by the messaging about accessing care through apps and other digital means:

"I don't have a computer or a phone so how can I use this. I would want to look at my blood test results but I am excluded from this because I am not digital. I feel like a totally forgotten demographic."

195218, July 2023.

We have also heard that some residents accessing care virtually through apps find the information misleading and potentially upsetting without a health professional to guide them:

"I went to the GP with a strange growth on my fingernail in Spring 2022. I have had it for years, it was probably a sports injury, but a GP friend said I should get it checked out in case of cancer. I was referred to the dermatologist in Send. Before attending I was asked in June 22 to download MySkinDoctor app and take photos. I was then told by the app that I had been diagnosed with periungual fibroma (tuberous sclerosis) which is a genetic disorder that has a whole host of associated problems. Being in my fifties, I took it with a pinch of salt that I might have a genetic disorder showing itself now. However, for another patient this could have been a very worrying time. I went to the Send clinic and they said it wasn't a dermatology issue, nor was it periungual fibroma, so they referred me to a plastic surgeon at the Royal Surrey."

193548 June 2023, The Mill Medical Practice.

Accessing prescriptions through community pharmacies

We continue to be contacted by Surrey residents who are experiencing barriers to accessing their prescription, particularly in cases where a complete prescription can't be fulfilled leaving residents having to find alternate medication:

"I have been trying to sort out some medication which hasn't been able to be fulfilled by the pharmacy, it's been a bit of a palaver. The medication is Letrozole, and the pharmacy are usually really good, but they can't get hold of it. I asked if I could get my other drugs from the same prescription but they were explaining to me that if they dispense from the prescription the other drugs then I need to get a voucher for the other medication and will have to wait for them to source it.

I'm at the Grove and [the pharmacy] suggested I went back and asked for alternative medication to be prescribed. The alternative medication the pharmacy suggested that I ask for, I was told by the pharmacist at the GP it is too much [£100] and so they won't prescribe any new meds. The Grove have revised the prescription so I now have two prescriptions, one with the medication on that [is available] and [the other one] on a separate prescription which I can try and source separately. They suggested I went over to Stanwell as apparently they might have some."

196678, August 2023, Grove Medical Centre.

A Surrey resident submitted the following experience through the Healthwatch England feedback form, sharing the difficulties caused by having to attend multiple pharmacies for people with limited mobility:

"Boots in Redhill – terrible. Long queues all the time. You queue with your prescription, get to the front to find they don't stock it. Even if they do, then you have to come back later while they get it ready, and queue again. Not great for

older people who can't stand for long periods. There is only one pharmacist and no service while they are at lunch. The rest of the store is almost as bad, very few staff and stock lacking – even worse in Reigate.”

194608, July 2023, East Surrey resident.

Carers

Healthwatch Surrey works alongside [Giving Carers a Voice](#) who engage with carers across Surrey to hear their experiences and understand the challenges they face.

Recently we heard about challenges for people and carers in information and support accessing extra help such as personal health budgets:

“My husband has Parkinson's and has heart problems, we have a nighttime carer who comes and supports overnight and carers during the day.

We have been having problems with The Yellow Practice. I have been trying to get in contact with the practice manager, but they have not returned any of our calls. I wanted to enquire about our carers grant (Personal Health Budget), which was suggested to me by action for carers.

I applied back in May/June time and we did not hear back. I raised it with our GP, who told me it was an admin problem so I should contact the practice manager. When I call reception to ask to speak to the practice manager, the receptionists tell me that they are unavailable.

I have noticed that there is very little attention to details, especially when it comes to admin. The reception staff have been very dismissive.”

199935, August 2023, The Yellow Practice.

In March, Giving Carers a Voice [published a report](#) highlighting the important role played by primary care services in helping carers be identified and access support.

We hear from residents providing support to their relatives who don't see themselves as carers, but could benefit from the support that identifying as a carer would bring:

"My mum has been very happy [with her care]. Mum has MS [Multiple sclerosis], I look out for her, my sister and I. We are not her carers as she does most things for herself, like shopping and managing appointments/medication, we are more caring daughters. She relies on us quite heavily in order to get her out and about. She could do something without us..... I think it's more about her confidence, she's wobbly but she can do it but she feels reassured with one of us there. I think she is lonely and would like to do something but feels too shy about doing it without us."

190414, April 2023, Medwyn Surgery.

Carers also have shared concerns about the closure of pharmacies, particularly the branches in supermarkets as this has limited their access to medication:

"Pharmacies are closing down in supermarkets and I had to change to a local pharmacist. I received a call to say my prescription was ready for collection, this was 6.30pm on a Friday, they close at 6pm and don't open again until Monday. If this had been an urgent medication need it could have caused a medical emergency.

If the pharmacies were encouraged to stay open in the supermarkets it would be easier to access medications/prescriptions outside working hours."

192104, April 2023, North West Surrey.

Neurodiversity

Healthwatch Surrey continue to work with partners across health and care to discuss our report on the [value of diagnosis for neurodiversity for children and young people](#). A Surrey resident shared their experience of support for people with neurodiversity through Healthwatch England, highlighting the need for more awareness among primary care staff:

"I've known I [have ADHD] for many years before I decided it was time to get a formal diagnosis in order to protect myself as a student nurse and reassure my son that autism was perfectly normal. I asked my GP to refer me and was told "don't be so stupid, there's no such thing as adult autism" and "what was the point anyway?". I immediately made a formal complaint, supplied the practice with the NICE guidelines for adult referrals. I received an insincere apology and was referred. The GP made excuses for their behaviour, claimed I had misinterpreted their response and my recollection was incorrect.

The practice did respond quickly after receiving my discrimination complaint. Although autism awareness has increased, understanding has not and that needs to change. The change needs to be implemented using evidence from actual neurodivergent professionals/academics.

This relates to my local GP service but the problem is systemic in health and social care. Even those practitioners who think they're getting it right, for the most part, get it wrong. The patronisation and lack of self-awareness (unconscious discrimination is still discrimination) demonstrated by professionals is as excruciating to bear as it is shocking."

191993 May 2023, Madeira Medical Practice

Surrey Downs

Praise and positive experiences

People often tell us when they've been pleased with the support they've received:

"I'm happy with my care overall, I have used multiple services. I think my GP practice, Medwyn Surgery, is really good. You can email in and they respond quickly - you can get an appointment the same day/ next day. I have now

been given a designated GP, they do this for the patients over 70 after the check up when you get to 70 at Medwyn. It has worked really well and I think that emailing has been a good way for me to communicate.”

190401 April 2023, Medwyn Surgery

A Surrey Downs residents shared their positive experience of being signposted to emergency care by their GP practice:

“I contacted my practice over the phone and had a text message back [offering me an appointment the following morning]. I saw my doctor and she said go straight to A&E. Very, very happy for the response that I received at the [GP practice]. Went to A&E and arrived about 1.30pm got seen within 10 minutes by the triage nurse. Had X-rays done, given 3 more lots of pain relief and discharged at about 8.15pm. Got told if no improvement, [then I should] return.”

188677, March 2023, Ashlea Medical Practice.

Communicating with patients

Residents have shared mixed messages they received about how to contact their practice:

“I am with Glenlyn, who have been notoriously bad for their phone system. I got a text recently from them saying there will now be a 7 min limit wait on the phone.

It was unclear if they have recruited more staff or how this will work.”

189881, April 2023, Glenlyn Surgery

Referrals and waiting for treatment

Residents share frustrations about a lack of information following referrals to other services. Some people are choosing private options rather than waiting and would perhaps benefit from clearer information about referral processes:

"I needed knee surgery in 2019 but it was cancelled and never rearranged due to covid. Letters from East Surrey were confusing – I had an appointment in March and it was cancelled, I was sent two letters with different times on them for the same day. Both were cancelled and still waiting for a new date. Happy with the medical staff but the admin and processes are appalling. Can't get an appointment at my GP practice without triage and it's very annoying. I feel that old people struggle with these processes and having to do things online."

192073, May 2023, Brockwood Surgery.

"I went last to the GP in Feb/March time. I was referred to ophthalmology at East Surrey Hospital. However, since my referral I haven't heard anything yet, but if I don't I will call and follow up, I have a phone number for ophthalmology from before and it was quite easy to follow up. I've had several eye operations cataracts and I needed treatment for a macular hole and needed at vitrectomy at St Helier. There were delays to my treatment and so I ended up going privately but with the same surgeon."

190401, April 2023, Medwyn Surgery

Support for children

We heard positive experiences of care for young children with parents suggesting that there is less support in the wider community for new parents:

"I live in Epsom and use Derby Medical Centre. I make my appointments over the phone, and I get in quickly. I have had same day appointments before for my 2-year-old."

191471, May 2023, Derby Medical Centre.

"I go to Tadworth Medical Centre. I find them excellent for both myself and my children.

My daughter got very ill at 6 weeks old. This was on the weekend. Dr examined her first thing on the Monday and

called the paediatric team at Epsom Hospital straight away. We got straight in at Epsom and she was diagnosed with RSV, COVID and a chest infection. She was in hospital for a week. The hospital were great with her, but I think the GP at Tadworth saved her life by seeing her and referring her so quickly.

I think there are less baby/toddler groups in the area this time around. When I had my first child 9 years ago I received a pamphlet about the children's centre but I had nothing this time. I find the council website difficult to navigate. Its ok because I know what I am doing but it would be hard if I was a first time mum."

191469, May 2023, Tadworth Medical Centre.

Long term conditions

We spoke to a resident who told us that there are financial barriers which impact their care:

"Don't see my GP enough. I'm diabetic and have a diabetic nurse at Medwyn Surgery they won't give me an appointment face to face. I can only call them and I can only call them if I have credit on my mobile phone. I asked my colleague who is a former pharmacist for advice they have a diabetic husband. It's difficult to get transport to hospital I have no money to pay for a taxi. I'm due to have a call with the diabetic nurse today but I haven't had one since last year I will ask the nurse today about support groups. Update after appointment I spoke to the nurse but she called on time today and I asked about a face to face appointment and once been made for me next week I'm really happy with that outcome."

192086, May 2023, Medwyn Surgery.

Mental health

A resident received support for substance use, who highlighted that accessing the right support is a challenge as they have moved addresses multiple times:

“My GP is Leith Hill practice, I was there about two weeks ago to discuss medication for my mental health. I actually got videoed during my consultation – with my consent! The outcome is I got bumped up an extra dose of my meds and offered more talking therapies, so we will see if that helps. I have used talking therapies before, I had 10 sessions, it was all over the phone and to be honest I would have preferred face to face, that would have improved it for me, I struggle a bit on the phone. I’m not sure I’ll do it again; I’ll see how I get on with the meds. It did help at the start but then I kept relapsing and now I find Cocaine Anonymous is the best thing for me. I go to the meeting every week, me and a couple of my friends have been supporting each other to go along. I live in shared accommodation, and we are working to support each other. There are staff there 24/7 and they are helping us to get our lives back on track. I haven’t heard about recovery colleges and don’t really know anything about mental health services in the area open to me.”

192103, May 2023, Leith Hill Practice.

Live Well Service

A resident did not answer calls from Live Well as they were from a withheld number leading to them not accessing support:

“I was referred by GP to Live Well for weight management and didn’t find it helpful. The programme was via phone waited a few weeks and had my first, and only, phone call. I then missed two calls as they were caller withheld number, then found out I’d been discharged. I’m on blood pressure tablets [which I’ve taken for the] last 3 years. I’m checked 2-3 times a year – last time it was very high, but nothing happened. The GP practice have been good with other things though, I’ve been on anti-depressants for a long time, but I’m all good.”

192071, May 2023, Derby Medical Centre.

Boundaries and patient choice

Our Helpdesk was contacted by a resident who has recently moved a short distance from their previous residence into a Surrey borough and is concerned that this will impact their continuity of care:

"I was previously living in [borough of Kingston], but have recently to [Epsom and Ewell]. I'm only 2 miles from my previous practice, but now Orchard Practice wants to deregister me using their boundary guidelines

I have a long medical record at Kingston Hospital where I have been receiving all my care for 40 years. I am insulin dependent diabetic and I am attached to Diabetes Day Unit there [where I receive] regular care.

I have enquired at Bourne Hall Surgery and they have confirmed that their patients' blood tests are sent to Epsom Hospital, which will compromise with my care which I hope to remain at Kingston Hospital.

I have appealed but they are sticking to their boundary guidelines which probably did not exist when I registered some 40 years ago. I am well stressed."

195559, July 2023.

Wound Dressing

Residents have queried the limited availability for minor injury support leading some to attend A&E as they were more convenient:

"Last evening, I suffered a nasty scrape on the back of my hand due to a car door closing on it. I have a low platelet count of 32 which means that bleeding from a wound doesn't cease as quickly as normal, but after dressing my hand a third time using a new hydrocolloid dressing from Tesco, the bleeding stopped and I had a good night's sleep.

This morning I went to my GP practice at Fairfield Health Centre to ask for an appointment to check the wound and

put on a new dressing and was told they had none available [for two weeks]. Also, I understand Leatherhead Hospital no longer operates a drop-in minor injuries service, and I gather the only way I can get urgent help is to attend the A&E Dept. at Epsom.

This not a serious injury which should take up A&E time. I had hoped there might be a Minor Injuries Unit nearby, but as it is 21 miles from my home to Caterham, it would be better for me to bite the bullet and attend A&E at Epsom, about 6 miles and a bus ride away. Fortunately, the wound on my hand would seems to be progressing quite well under self-medication, so it doesn't seem a hospital visit will be needed. But is there no way I can get nurse attention locally without having to wait 10 days?"

188801, March 2023, Fairfield Health Centre.

North West Surrey

Praise and positive experiences

Residents have shared experiences of positive, responsive care leading them to access the care they needed quickly:

"I needed to visit the GP twice in the last month. On both occasions I sent the online form at 8 am, received a phone call from the GP and had a face-to-face appointment the same morning. Caring and efficient consultation. Excellent service."

195749, July 2023, Hillview Medical Centre.

"Left an online request for a GP appointment, was triaged 2 hours later and appropriate questions asked.

Recommended that I was seen by a GP. Text received from GP later in the afternoon to say an appointment had been made in the Acute Illness GP Hub at Woking Community Hospital for the next morning. Given antibiotics and told to return in a week if not cleared, which I did and again left

online message and got call back from GP shortly after.

Process felt improved and responsive.”

193874, June 2023, Heathcot Medical Practice.

Diagnosis and ongoing support

We heard from a resident who was experiencing regular pain. They felt that they had been left without any support having a severe impact on their mental health:

“It’s been about 7-8 months now that I have not been treated for my pain under chest and back. First I was told by my GP practice that it’s bacterial infection and was kept on antibiotics which made no difference to my health. I then went to my country and the ultrasound there said they were very small gallstones. I again contacted my practice but all GP had to say was that they won’t operate it because I am too young. My glucose level drops so much and now it’s been a week that I have become unconscious at my work, at my hallways doorstep and on street. The pain has become unbearable now that I have stopped eating proper meals which now is affecting my brain as well. If I won’t be operated for this then I would suicide because I am unable to look after myself and bear this pain. I am a single mother and my daughter sees me suffer every day and if I do anything I will already leave written confession that my practice and GPs are responsible for not looking at my case. They have left me to bear this pain without considering me human I guess. That’s my last option because obviously I don’t want a life where I cannot even eat, work or survive.”

[We followed up with the person involved to ensure that they are safe and accessing the support they need].

191405, May 2023, Hillview Medical Centre.

Communicating with residents

We regularly hear that people are happy with the care they receive, however they also would like practices to be more sensitive to their needs:

“An improvement would be more people to pick up the phone at the GP and at the pharmacy. The care I’ve received has been good, but staff to be more understanding when talking to you.

I’ve had cancer 4 times, hysterectomy, mastectomy and more recently two bouts of skin cancer. I’m okay now and I’m now caring for my husband who is in remission for prostate cancer. It’s been a really hard time recently, I try and keep my chin up.”

196678, August 2023, Grove Medical Centre.

Contacting practices

Communication has been a consistent theme in experiences relating to primary care services. We continue to hear from people who have tried different methods to book appointments but have been unable to do so:

“I was told I needed to follow up with my GP after I was discharged from A&E. On Monday at 3.50pm, I went on Hillview Medical Centre's website offered two options: Request an appointment using an online form or request an appointment using the NHS app/website. I tried to do it using an online form, so clicked on that option and got redirected to a page that did not have a form for normal appointments, only a message about urgent appointments. There was no link below to request a routine appointment. So, I decided to try the [via the NHS website] however going through this process showed no appointments available online. I then decided to try calling to see if I can make an appointment by phone. I was waiting to be connected for 9 and a half minutes.....eventually the call disconnected at their end. On another occasion when I tried coming into the practice in person....the reception I was told they didn't have a booking system there and that I would have to call or make an appointment online. I called the number while still at the practice. There were several staff members at the reception that day and only one more patient who came for an

appointment, and yet it took almost 10 minutes to pick up the phone.

[Appointment booking has been] designed in such a way that there is no way to get an appointment by coming into the surgery, both options via the website do not work, and no one is picking up the phone at their end, making it impossible to book an appointment.”

195822, July 2023, Hillview Medical Centre.

And we have also heard from residents who are finding it difficult to obtain test results:

“Impossible to get hold of the GP practice. The online forms close at 11:00 and telephone is not answered for over 30 minutes on every occasion I call. Results of a test for a child that supposed to take 3-4 days not given in 3 weeks plus. Results of a test for an adult not provided at all. Impossible to get hold of the practice. Absolute shambles. Every time I raise this with them they just shrug and say they are busy.”

194105, June 2023, Hillview Medical Centre.

Feedback and complaints handling

Our Helpdesk was contacted by a resident who has had informal meetings with their GP practice to resolve issues in their care but did not feel that their situation had improved:

“I have been having a lot of issues accessing support from my GP with regards to my complex chronic illnesses. I am registered with the Grove Medical Centre and have raised a complaint with them and had an informal face to face meeting to discuss the issues I have been having. I have tried to deal with it informally, but I think I now need to make a formal complaint against the practice.

They have also taken the phone off the hook for a week, so people could not call through. I have a condition that effects my immune system, and I recently had a tooth infection, and

could not get support anywhere to get it sorted before it became worse. My GP said that they cannot support me with anything moving forward.

I would also like some advice on how to access a new GP, as I no longer trust the GP I am with. I don't want to go to Englefield green because I know some of the reception team. I think the nearest GPs after that are in Staines."

192402, May 2023, Grove Medical Centre

East Surrey

Praise and positive experiences

Residents of East Surrey have also shared their positive experiences:

"Very pleased with my GP practice. Nice doctors there but they do change the staff a lot."

192018, May 2023, Greystone House Surgery.

Registration

We have heard from multiple residents trying to register with a GP practice have been told that their nearest practice is not accepting new patients, with no information on what they should do to register elsewhere:

"I am a recent arrival to the UK and I have been trying to register at a GP without success as they are telling me they are not accepting new patients. It appears that only one GP practice has [my home address] within its catchment area and it is closed to new patients."

187689, March 2023.

"I am having trouble registering to a local GP as the clinic which holds my postcode area is full at the moment. If you could please find me a GP as I need to see one due to back problems I am experiencing related to work."

189765, April 2023.

We also heard that some residents are contacting other neighbouring practices only to be told that they are not in their catchment area:

"I am having trouble registering with a GP practice. The only practice I am in the catchment for has not been accepting new patients for many months. Please can I be provided some assistance in gaining access to a GP practice. I have tried other practices and they tell me I'm not in their area."

194505, July 2023.

Communication about test results

A resident was concerned when their GP practice asked them to book an appointment following a test result:

"I went to the GP about 6 months ago with hip pain and the GP sent me for an X-ray. The practice texted to say I needed to make an appointment to discuss the results and I was very worried it was cancer. They set up a telephone appointment for me to discuss the results. The X-ray showed osteoporosis, so now I have blood tests and vitamin D. I'm new to the blood tests thing, so I'm working on the premise that no news is good news. The doctor said the worst case scenario is a hip replacement, but so far the vitamin D seems to be helping."

192116, May 2023, Birchwood Medical Practice.

Repeat prescription

We were contacted by the parent of a Surrey resident, who was concerned about her daughter who was struggling to access a repeat prescription:

"I am calling this morning about Smallfield GP practice. My daughter is struggling to get a repeat prescription for morphine and has been without for 10 days. She is now numb from the pain [Daughter has a history of chronic pain from Fibromyalgia]. My daughter is currently at home trying to look after two small children, she has no husband as he left her and I live in East Anglia so cannot get to her easily.

My daughter has tried calling the GP several times and was told that they would say they would book her in with the duty doctor, but she has not received a call from them. I have also called twice and they assured me on Friday that a duty doctor would call her, but they never did. I don't want to complaint, I just want to make sure that she has the medication she needs as she is in pain and has mental health issues."

189803, April 2023, Smallfield Surgery.

Support for older residents

A resident who was previously caring for her husband told us that she felt supported as a carer, however she now finds it challenging accessing the right help on her own:

"I have difficulty in going to the GP. My GP wants me to go to the practice for jabs. I still drive at 95 but there is nowhere for me to park. They should be coming to me at my age. In the end, I had to drive down to the local chemist for my blood pressure to be taken and they wouldn't visit me.

I've been so independent but I wish more people would help me. I have to pay for taxis to the hospital as I had two bad knees. I am now going to the pain clinic as the hospital can't help me. When I had my husband, I looked after him and got a lot of help. Now he is gone, I feel abandoned."

191930, May 2023, The Wall House Surgery

Guildford and Waverley

Praise and positive experiences

"I have been registered with Shere Surgery for approximately 25 years. Over this time, I have suffered significantly from mental health and asthma/breathing issues. More recently I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder in respect of my liver (diagnosed by a locum GP who 'kept going' until my issue was resolved). I want to report to you that I find

everyone in the surgery, from the outstanding GPs, both permanent and locum (which reflects well on the selection process of the management), administrative/reception staff, nurses and, definitely not least, the dispensary team. The whole team are especially diligent, helpful, kind (very, very kind), hardworking and supportive. They more than 'go the extra mile' and no number or quality of praise is too high for this exceptional service. Dr Knight and her entire team are the best."

192011, May 2023, Shere Surgery.

We have heard of good examples of patients receiving prompt and effective care:

"I called the GP at 8am on a Friday morning as I had a bad UTI [urinary tract infection]. I got through after a 5-minute wait (during which I was kept informed about my position in the queue), and was offered a face-to-face appointment at 9.30 the same day. I was back home within an hour with antibiotics, after seeing a friendly GP who put my prescription straight through to the pharmacy on site. I felt this was an excellent service all round."

190482, April 2023, St Luke's Surgery.

We also heard about positive support for a transgender resident, who was appreciative of the help from their GP practice and was receiving support for multiple conditions:

"I live in a shared flat...[where we used to live] there seemed to be some half-way houses and there were a lot of issues so have moved. I've kept the same GP; Dapdune as really like them and their on-site pharmacy is very good for my meds [anti-depressants]. Receptionists are very nice. In an ideal world, Dapdune would get my hormones on NHS and I'd be exempt paying. I first accessed the Tavistock 6 years ago. But I have had to go privately to Gender GP. I was paying £100 per month for gel. Now I pay £25 per month for the shots. I've done the training so I can administer it myself as

it's very personal and I prefer it that way.

I have chronic fatigue and was referred by Guys and St Thomas ages ago to a pain specialist in Bath. Heard nothing. Have asked my GP 3 times. I was also assessed there for a sleep disorder."

196208, August 2023, Dapdune House Surgery.

Limited appointment booking options

Residents continue to contact us about limitations in booking a appointment at their local GP practice:

"I am not satisfied that appointments must be booked before 8 am daily. Often you cannot get through and need to keep calling back daily to get an appointment, then the appointment isn't for that day. I would like to see an improvement in being able to book appointments and for more flexibility, for example, online or at any other time of the day. Patients should have the choice to decide how to book appointments, not everyone can call at 8am.

The GP practice website is out of date too."

194585, July 2023, Merrow Park Surgery.

And we have also heard that residents are being provided with mixed messages about what appointments are available to them and how they can book these:

"I have just called my GP to book a routine appointment. When I phoned and spoke to the receptionist, I explained that I would like to book a routine appointment. She told me that the government has changed the policy on appointments, so [Merrow Park] can no longer book appointments in the future and only book in appointments on that day. Unfortunately, all the appointments that day had already gone by the time I called.

I have emailed the practice to request a copy of their policy,

which outlines the way appointments can be booked. I have also called NHS England to enquire with them if this is true, however they have said that there is no policy in place.”

189836, April 2023, Merrow Park Surgery.

Communicating with patients

We also hear that messaging about patients’ treatments isn’t always sensitive to patients’ needs:

“I use the GP at Fairlands. The service is ok.

I have to get my blood checked every 2-3 weeks as I am taking warfarin. I couldn’t for a while due to a pulled muscle. The GP practice got quite cross with me and said I should be with a different practice instead. But I’ve always been at Fairlands. I felt like they were trying to get rid of me. The district nurse eventually came out to my house. I would like to complain as I was made to feel that I shouldn’t be registered with them.”

189325, April 2023, Fairlands Medical Practice.

Communications between services

We also heard from a Surrey resident who had shared their frustration through Healthwatch England about a lack of follow up from primary care following a blood test at Royal Surrey:

“I received a text message from my GP practice, I presumed about a hospital letter following a blood test. I phoned the practice, they did not know what I was talking about [when I mentioned the text]. Medication? No. I had to mention the hospital letter. [They] came back and have an appointment 3 weeks later. Still waiting to see someone. Very disappointed.”

196356, August 2023, Unknown practice

Families with young children

We have heard from families who would like clearer information about the options for support available to them:

“When we have needed an appointment, even for an under 5 and despite living opposite the surgery in Witley, we have had to go to Milford which is a car journey away. But we have gone just to be seen.”

192001, May 2023, Witley Surgery.

“My daughter has what looks like bacterial conjunctivitis. My husband called the GP to find out what the best thing to do was and was advised he'd need to arrange an appointment at an optician. He was told about MECS and she would be seen that evening. The first number (Eye Spy) couldn't fit anyone else in and the 2nd number (Boots) no longer offer that service.

As my other daughter has had the same in the past, I was able to tell him to go to a pharmacy where you can buy over the counter eye drops with antibiotics in them, meaning she didn't miss out on an important day at school amidst various bank Holidays and strikes.

It's a shame the GP surgery didn't offer alternative advice.”

190468, April 2023, Witley Surgery.

Pharmacy

Supply challenges

Our Helpdesk was contacted by a resident who experienced prolonged symptoms of a near infection due to difficulties accessing appropriate medication and did not receive clear advice or information from the services they interacted with:

“I developed a serious ear infection in both ears around January 2023 with nearly total hearing loss. A swab showed

that it was a fungal infection and that I required Clotrimazole solution ear drops for 4-6 weeks, without a break, which I struggled to get dispensed as the pharmacies around Guildford had nothing in stock. However, I managed to find a one in Boots, Shalford which lasted me for a couple of weeks.

Meanwhile, my GP referred me to ENT at Royal Surrey. The ENT doctor reviewed by the hospital and told that the infection was clearing, however, I learnt that the hospital pharmacy also had no medication for ear infections, due to lack of anything available from their stockists.

Then last Friday I visited my local Boots pharmacy to collect a different prescription and learnt there were two outstanding prescriptions which had not been dispensed for my ear infection. I was told, it was a supply issue. I left Boots close to tears, feeling very distressed. I returned a couple of hours later and asked for my prescriptions so that I could try to get them dispensed by a different pharmacy. I was surprised to observe that my prescriptions were retrieved from their confidential waste.

Over the course of my ear infection, I attended around four GP appointments and three hospital appointments due to my difficulty in getting medication. At my second ENT appointment I was seen by an ENT consultant, due to the junior doctors' strike. The consultant told me that there has been an ongoing problem with ear medications for many years.

Meanwhile I reported my concerns to my MP, who wrote to the Minister of Health who responded that there isn't a supply issue in my area! Meanwhile I have been told by others that ENT medication supplies are part of a wider problem with medication. Unfortunately, I wasn't given any further details."

192350, May 2023, Guildford and Waverley.

"I was told by pharmacy my regular diabetic medication would be ready on [7 July]. I went to Boots at Merrow on the morning of 10 July. Was told prescription was in but not ready. I agreed to come back [tomorrow]. Went to pharmacy on 11 July, I was told that the prescription was ready but needed labelling, so I waited. Over 30 minutes later, I was told one of the medications was coming tomorrow and the other they have no idea when it is coming in as Boots have run out. These medications are essential [so] I then came home and phoned my GP practice. Message said no prescription orders by phone and must be online or in writing. I went to the practice in person and was told to ring tomorrow when, hopefully, I may get a written prescription or number that I can take to any pharmacy. Fortunately, I can travel to an alternative pharmacy."

194504, July 2023, Guildford and Waverley.

We have heard from residents experiencing difficulties accessing HRT medications, querying why they were given a prescription for an unavailable medication. They would like the information provided by pharmacists to be clearer in cases of incomplete prescriptions:

"I tried to collect my HRT medication last week, having requested a repeat prescription from the GP. The pharmacist handed me half the medication with a "voucher" for Utrogestan as they were out of stock. They did not explain any implications of this process. I then started phoning round other pharmacies locally to find some but was told that even if they had stock of Utrogestan, they would not be able to give it to me as once your original pharmacy have given you the 'voucher', you cannot then get that medication elsewhere. I phoned the GP receptionist and was then told I had to go back to the GP to get a prescription for an alternative. Luckily, I was able to fill out a request form rather than taking up a valuable appointment slot. When I went back to the same pharmacy to get the alternative medication, another woman was having exactly the same conversation with the pharmacist and was very surprised to

find out that if she wanted to go elsewhere for part of her prescription, the only way to do this was to refuse the whole lot from Boots and start again somewhere else. This makes me question: 1) why are pharmacists not explaining this clearly to every customer who has a partially fulfilled prescription? It should be a standard wording for everyone. 2) Why is the GP prescribing a medication that is totally out of stock at the neighbouring pharmacy (and nationally) – thereby generating more admin and follow up in order to obtain a prescription for an alternative?”

193505, June 2023, St Luke’s Surgery.

A resident who had taken up the pre-pay option to access HRT medication, contacted our Helpdesk to share that there were limitations to this that could be better communicated to patients:

“I wanted to pass on my experience with an HRT pre-pay certificate. If there are other medicines on the prescription alongside HRT, then the pre-pay certificate doesn't work as it doesn't apply to the whole prescription.

I have taken this up with Shadbolt Park House Surgery and asked that HRT be prescribed separately, but it probably applies to other GPs and ladies on HRT. Maybe something for a health professionals bulletin? A social media post advising women to order their HRT separately from our medicines?”

195808, July 2023, Shadbolt Park House Surgery.

Changes in availability of services

We have heard about how the withdrawal of Lloyd’s from Sainsbury’s has put additional pressure on nearby community pharmacies:

“A family member told me that the Merrow Park Boots (Epsom Road) and Kingfisher Drive Boots have taken on all of the prescriptions from the Lloyds pharmacy that used to be in the Burpham Sainsbury’s. This has led to the store itself being so full of stock, that the staff and patients cannot move safely around the store. It has also led to wait times of

1 hour plus for medication, and even more shortages of medications and the pharmacy is having to shut for a couple of hours a day, so the staff can keep up with the demand that they are now trying to fill.”

192700, June 2023, Guildford and Waverley.

A Surrey resident contacted us to raise their concerns about the impact of their local Boots pharmacy closing and the impact this might have on the local community:

“The Boots in Farncombe provides medication to 3 care homes, which are in walking distance. The Farncombe community is of a certain age, and the team there is invaluable to supporting the community. As the daughter of a resident of Farncombe, I would not feel comfortable leaving my mum there without access to a pharmacy.

There are other pharmacies around, but they are not within walking distance, meaning that people would need to drive or get public transport for their medications. Luckily for us my sister lives around the corner, so she could collect mum’s meds, but there are lots of other residents, who won’t have the support. If my sister was unable to support, my mum would just go without the medications, she has COPD and Rheumatoid Arthritis, so she needs her medications.”

196321, August 2023, Guildford and Waverley.

We also heard how changing of services at community pharmacies could potentially increase calls to GP practices:

“I was informed by Boots staff that they are no longer offering the repeat prescription service that I have used for many years. This is going to place an additional burden on GP practices and patients who cannot get to the practice or do online ordering.”

194504, July 2023, Guildford and Waverley.

Learning through feedback

A resident contacted our Helpdesk to share their frustrations about he felt his local pharmacy weren't responsive to his feedback:

"I am very frustrated by the fact that over a year ago he complained that no-one picks up the phone at the Day Lewis Pharmacy. When I went to the Pharmacy and complained, I was told, there was a problem with the phone. I still have the same issue and I feel this should have been corrected by now. On occasions when the phone is answered, the response is 'we are busy, call back later'. I am currently unable to leave my home due to multiple health issues."

188379, March 2023, East Surrey resident.

Dentistry

Compassionate support for young people

In August, our community engagement team visited groups and organisations supporting children and young people. We heard a positive experience of dentists providing support sensitive to a young person's needs:

"Dentist is very nice, they always look after me and my sister. We go every 6 months, and my Mum makes the appointments in person as we leave. I have all my check-ups there and have just had my braces taken off at the orthodontist. They have been great through the last 2 years with me. I hated having braces, but they helped me have light colour bands and metal."

196249, August 2023, North West Surrey resident.

Services becoming fully private

Residents have shared that their local dentist is no longer offering NHS services, leaving them without ready access to dental services:

“Our local dentist has gone private and I need to register myself my wife and my mother. I have Parkinson's, my wife is on warfarin and has a pacemaker, and my mother is 87 and has all her own teeth. We cannot get registered anywhere and feel like the medical profession has given up on us.”

197049, August 2023.

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