

Review of Urgent Care Services in Buckinghamshire: The Patient Experience.

January 2015.

The research for this report was undertaken over six months ago and much of what has been highlighted within has already been actioned with demonstrable improvements such as;

- Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust has taken over Wexham Park Hospital and is addressing concerns raised.
- Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust has implemented a same day assessment unit adjacent to the A&E department at Stoke Mandeville to help reduce pressure on the waiting areas and they continue to focus on improving waiting environments. On average in 2014 the Trust saw and treated 93.5% of urgent care patients within four hours. In December 2014 92.8% of patients would recommend the A&E service at Stoke Mandeville to their friends and family.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.

Introduction

During 2014, Healthwatch Bucks prioritised engagement with users of Urgent Care services. This was prioritised due to the significant number of changes in provision in the county since 2006 and the need to gain a picture of the patient experience of Urgent Care services since then. The following questions were explored;

- What are the main reasons for patients' use of Urgent Care services in Bucks?
- Are patients presenting in the right place?
- What is the quality of service they are receiving?

In order to gain insight into patient experience, which could then inform patients, commissioners and providers, improve signposting, access to and the quality of these services, Healthwatch Bucks conducted a patient experience survey into the use of urgent care services over the past twelve months, from 18th July to 30th September 2014.

A total of 385 surveys were returned with a considerable number recording more than one visit on each survey form. This resulted in a cohort of 648 individual visits and separate Urgent Care consultations.

The urgent care services covered consisted of hospital A&E departments, a Minor Injury and Illness Unit (MIU), NHS 111/NHS Direct, GP services for minor illness and injury and the GP out-of-hours service, and community pharmacies.

Summary of Key Findings

Our research findings complement the Care Quality Commission '*National NHS patient survey programme; Accident and Emergency Survey 2014*' which found most patients had a positive overall experience at A&E, felt treated with respect and dignity and felt cared for. However, it also found A&E services need to do more to ensure they are safe, effective and responsive, with waiting times being too long for patients arriving by ambulance and needing their care handed over to A&E staff and patients waiting too long to receive pain relief. Here is a summary of Healthwatch Bucks' key Urgent Care findings:

- 1. Overwhelmingly positive feedback from patients:** Overall the survey found much to be positive about in terms of patient experiences in Urgent Care provision in Bucks. The majority of patients presenting Urgent Care cases in A+E, MIU, NHS 111, GP Practices/Out of hours and Community Pharmacy had positive experiences and were satisfied with the care provided. In particular, feedback about care staff included patients observing significant commitment and hard work, frequently under great pressure.
- 2. Limited Patient Awareness of the Most Appropriate Local Urgent Care Service for their condition:** Urgent Care patients in Bucks are confused about the most appropriate venue for their Urgent Care condition, and are keen to be empowered to make the correct decision. From the patient surveys that could be clinically analysed we found that 30% of patient visits were inappropriate at both A&E departments and at the MIU. The key reasons given by patients for attending A+E or MIU were "*nearest to me; most appropriate option; ambulance took me and GP/ Out of hours told me.*"

3. **Positive Waiting Times in MIU:** 40% of patients attending MIU in Wycombe were treated within 15 minutes of being assessed. A total of 74% of patients were treated within 60 minutes of being assessed. Despite some considerable delays along the treatment pathway, this patient experience data supports Buckinghamshire Health Trust service outcome data and gives further credence to the commissioner and clinical viewpoint that a minor illness and injury unit can be an efficient and effective solution provider to targeted Urgent Care situations.
4. **Excessive Waiting Times and Inadequate Waiting Room Facilities Reported in A+E:** Approximately 20% of A&E patients (seen at Stoke Mandeville and Wexham Park) reported waiting in excess of 4 hours to receive treatment. These reports suggest that such long delays are not a new phenomenon, but have been occurring at least over the last year. Anecdotes related to these waiting times included patients reporting crowded waiting rooms with a lack of basic facilities such as adequate seating or refreshments. This criticism was focused on Stoke Mandeville with recognition of recent improvements at Wexham Park.
5. **Inappropriate Referrals to an Urgent Care Setting:** It appears that referrals to Urgent Care services from other care providers are not always consistent or appropriate. The clinical assessment of these patient-reported experiences is that some confusion exists, within the Bucks healthcare system, about where patients should be referred in an Urgent Care situation.
6. **Concerns Raised about Quality of Treatment in Wexham Park A&E:** 40% of the survey respondents who had been at Wexham Park Hospital commented that they were not satisfied with the quality of A&E treatment.

Summary of Recommendations

In light of this research, Healthwatch Bucks makes the following recommendations for Urgent Care Services in Buckinghamshire;

1. **Increased Patient Communications to Reduce Inappropriate Attendance:** Although there has been considerable communication activity in Buckinghamshire, aimed at making patients increasingly aware about where best to get help, this research indicates that more remains to be done to build patient awareness. Continued marketing and targeted communication about services would aim to reduce the amount of inappropriate referrals and provide signposting, awareness raising and effective marketing for Urgent Care Services.
2. **Improved Referral Rates to Appropriate Urgent Care Services:** In addition to marketing services, the communication activity would ideally extend to improving internal systems and the staff's ability to make referrals to appropriate clinical settings. Specifically, the statistics in this report highlight that there may be an issue with the quality of referrals from NHS 111, but data samples were small and further investigation is required. It is recommended that providers routinely audit referrals for clinical appropriateness and based on this efforts are made to optimise appropriate referrals.
3. **To clarify, report and monitor local waiting time data publicly:** With a significant percentage of our survey respondents reported waiting longer than the nationally stipulated target of 4 hours, more remains to be done to highlight poor performance and monitor inconsistencies. In addition, however, improved public communication of waiting time data would also provide the opportunity to

celebrate successes (e.g. Wycombe MIU progress and achievements) as part of promoting appropriate services, feeding further into recommendation 1 above.

4. **Enhance Patient Experience in Urgent Care Waiting Rooms:** In order to improve patient experience in waiting areas, practical and logistical changes can be introduced such as increased seating, adequate drinks and snacks facilities and provision of a satisfactory amount of wheelchairs. This is especially needed at Stoke Mandeville A&E.
5. **Improve Inconsistencies in Quality of Care and Patient Experience in Urgent Care Services e.g. by offering staff training on best practice patient communications:** Ongoing efforts to improve 'customer relationship management' and enhance communication between staff and patients/carers should focus on informing patients on the length of waiting time, who they will be seen by and offering reassurance if they are distressed.

Following the publication of this report we will seek to talk to relevant providers to develop specific action plans based on our findings and their feedback. In order to achieve, this we expect feedback/discussions within 30 days. Discussions are expected with; Chiltern Clinical Commissioning Group, Aylesbury Vale Clinical Commissioning Group, Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust and Buckinghamshire Urgent Care.