

**Patient Experiences of
General Practice in Richmond
Executive Summary
October 2024**



Introduction

“Phoning for something urgent is always hopeless. There are no appointments available and you are told to 'call tomorrow at 8am.' The next day, you can't get through. When you do get through appointments are full again.”

The story above is painfully familiar. The anxiety of having to call immediately as clock turns 8am. The desperation of needing an urgent GP appointment. The disappointment of being told that none are available. Having to repeat the whole process the next day.

This is just one of the many stories shared by the 2,700 Richmond residents who participated in our survey. We aimed to understand their experiences and preferences for booking GP appointments, remote consultations and the role of allied health professionals. Our goal is to use these insights to improve patient experiences and reduce pressure on GP practices.

We also heard many positive stories: families being supported by their GP over long, difficult periods of time; patients with access needs being carefully considered and helped by reception staff; and all GP staff members going the extra mile to help patients in need. GP practices throughout Richmond should be recognised and praised for all the hard work they do for our community.

The challenges faced by GP practices and their staff in the current climate are complex and multifaceted. We are thankful for all their hard work and the support they provide across our community.

We are also thankful to everyone who has shared their experiences and those who were involved in the design and dissemination of our survey: GP patient participation groups; practice managers; GPs; and the Richmond General Practice Alliance. We thank all of them for their help and hope our research has identified some solutions that could improve access for patients.

Background

In May 2023, NHS England published its Delivery Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care. The report stated that nationally general practice is delivering more than a million appointments every day and half a million more every week than pre-pandemic. However, nationally 1 in 5 people were not able to get through when they last attempted to contact their GP practice.

Within the London borough of Richmond upon Thames there is great variation between GP practices. The 2023 General Practice Patient Survey highlighted this: 94% of patients at Paradise Road Practice said it was easy to contact their practice by phone, compared to just 36% for Hampton Hill Medical Centre.

Healthwatch Richmond wanted to gather qualitative evidence of local residents' experiences of GP practice services. It is undeniably important to listen to our whole community and, in doing so, understand the differing needs and opinions. Hopefully this will inform changes that will benefit all patients.



2700 Richmond residents completed our survey



400+ respondents said they had a disability or access requirement.



We received 2x the number of responses from women as from men.



260+ respondents said they spoke English as an additional language.



We received a higher proportion of responses from people aged 50+ than 18-49.



400+ respondents said they are an unpaid carer.

Making Contact

"It can take a long time hanging on the phone. 45 minutes is the longest I've waited."

"Excellent system where rather than waiting for your call to be answered they will call you back without you losing your place in the queue. Never had a problem with it."

"You can only get an appointment by phoning the surgery at 8.30 am on the day. I phoned a few seconds after 8.30 and was number 43 in the queue."



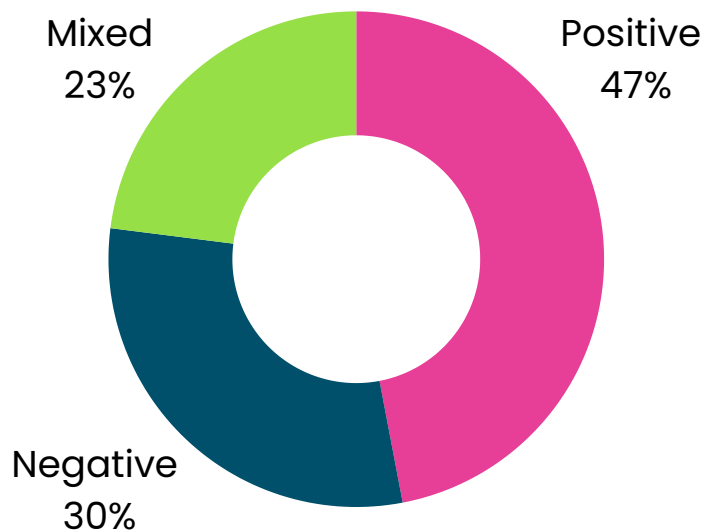
In response to the question: **"I would prefer to contact my GP practice..."**

- **79%** strongly agreed or agreed to over the **phone**
- **67%** strongly agreed or agreed to **in person**
- **40%** strongly agreed or agreed to online, through my practice's **website**

Respondents were largely ambivalent about email and the NHS app but were negative about third-party apps (e.g. Patient Access).

Notably, there is significant variation in the use of digital contact routes by practice. The only two consistent points of access across GP practices are via the phone and in-person.

Please tell us about your experience of contact your GP Practice **on the phone**.



- **25%** of respondents said that there was a **long wait** or queue on the phone.
- 8% of respondents spoke about having to call at **8am** or a particular time of day to book an appointment.
- Respondents spoke positively about **call back** features and knowing where they are in the **phone queue**.

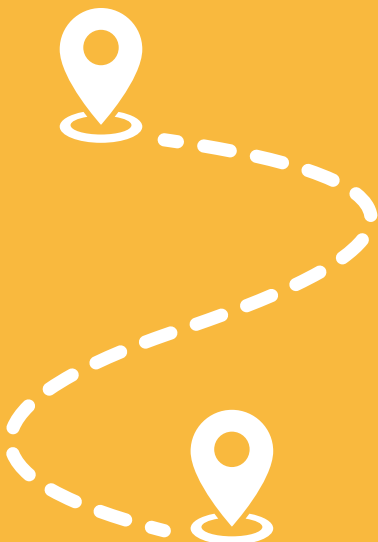
Making Contact

“Always a pleasant welcome and smile from the receptionist staff. Always try to be helpful. A real pleasure to ask any questions and feel that you are listened to.”

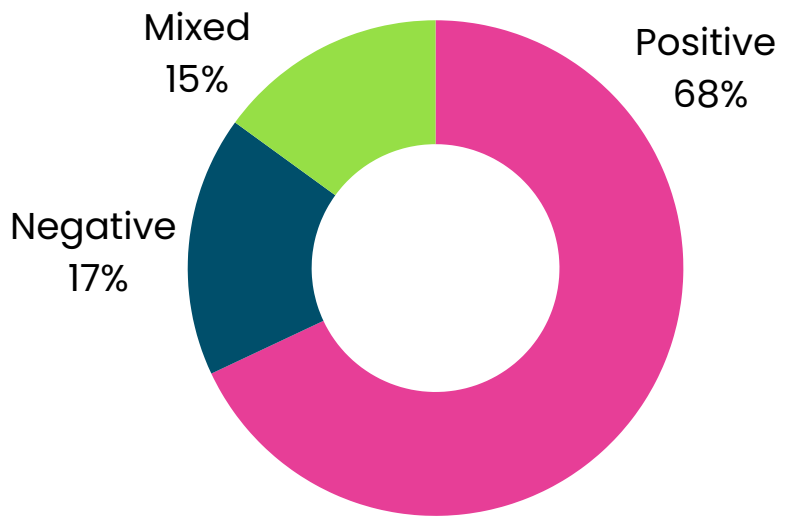
“Receptionist looks bored and acts likes a disinterested robot. Treats patient like dirt and an inconvenience.”

“I find this a fast and efficient way of making contact... I speak to the helpful receptionists when I have to make an appointment.”

“When attempting to make an appointment I am refused at the surgery and told to go home and book it on line.”



Please tell us about your experience of contacting your GP Practice **in person**.



- **12%** of respondents said that going to their practice in-person was **easy**, efficient and/or convenient
- **17%** of respondents spoke of being re-directed from in-person contact to phone or **online contact routes**

Reception

- 25% of respondents praised the reception team at GP practices.
- 8% of respondents reported negative interactions with the reception team at GP practices.

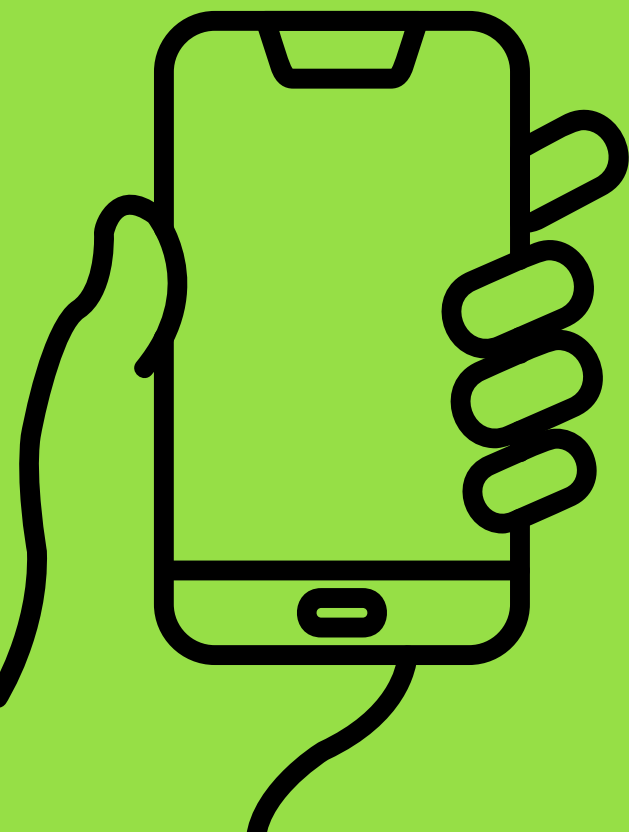
We did not ask any questions about experiences of reception. Respondents voluntarily commented on the wonderful job that receptionists at GP practices do. However, there was a recurring theme of patients being made to feel like a “burden” or “nuisance” by reception.

Digital Services

"I am surprised by the efficiency of contacting the GP practice on the website and the speed of response."

"Difficult to access as keeps requesting personal details over and over. Takes lots of persistence to log in and get through."

"I have used email to order repeat prescriptions. Works smoothly."



Over **20%** of respondents to each question about email, websites and the NHS app said that they were **easy to use**. However, only 7% of respondents said that third-party apps were easy to use.

Respondents pointed out **technical or accessibility issues** with digital platforms:

- 12% on websites
- 10% on third-party apps
- 6% on NHS apps



13 per cent of respondents said they did not receive a **reply** or a timely response to their email.

"They usually reply eventually. But it's not a reliable form of communication"



Respondents reported using all four digital platforms to reorder **prescriptions**. In all cases except for with third-party apps, the majority of responses about prescriptions are positive. Respondents said that ordering prescriptions online was fast, convenient and efficient.

531 respondents said they wanted improvements to online systems.

Appointments

12%

of respondents said they couldn't get a timely appointment over the phone

52%

of respondents said they prefer to see a specific GP at their practice.

"Face to face is best. I do not enjoy talking on the phone and emails can be misinterpreted. I wouldn't feel like I had the same care unless it was face to face."



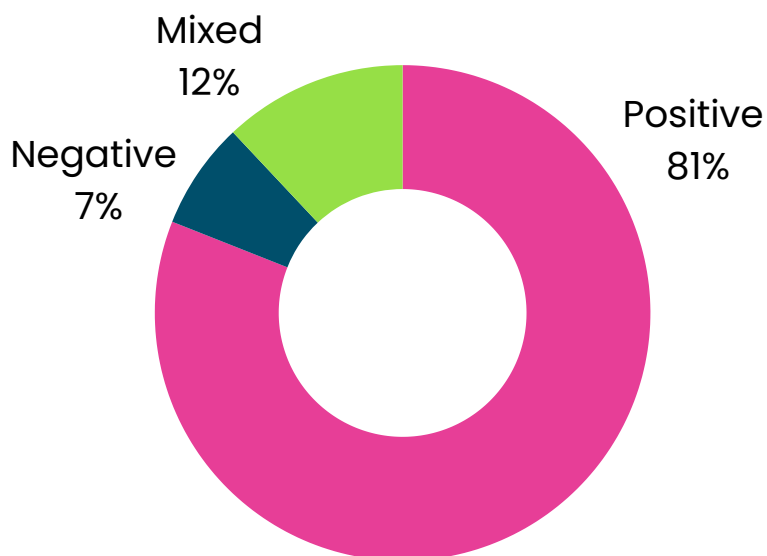
In response to the question: **"I would prefer to have an appointment with my GP..."**

- 93% strongly agreed or agreed to in person
- 41% strongly agreed or agreed to over the phone

Preference for phone appointments varied by age:

- 50% of 25-49 year olds agreed that they they would prefer to have a phone appointment.
- 26% of 65-79 year olds agreed that they would prefer to have a phone appointment

Please tell us about your experience of having an **in-person appointment** with your GP.



- 11% of respondents spoke about the **communication** benefits of face-to-face consultations
- 20% of respondents spoke of having **trust** in their clinician, being treated with care and feeling listened to.

Appointments

"I have always been satisfied with such appointments as they were non urgent and did not need in person attention."

"Mostly, they phone me to review my regular medication. This is sensible and helpful."

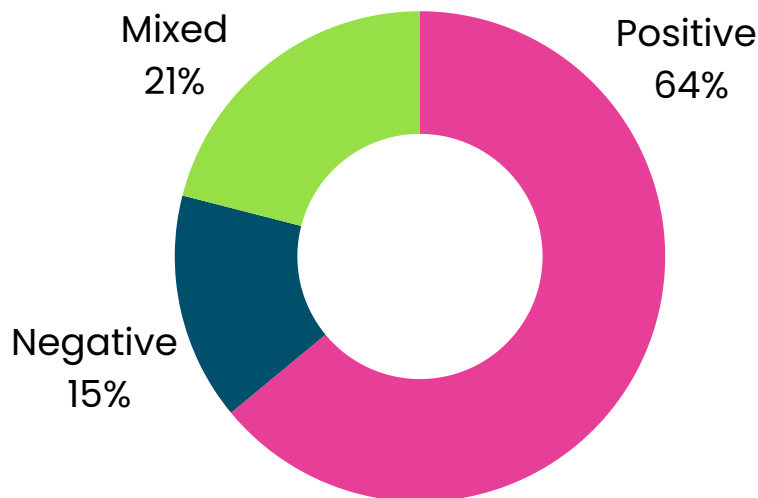
"Very difficult, sometimes impossible to be available for the 4 or 5 hours offered."

"Sent general text format very quickly, easy to use, replied efficiently."

"Annoying if you have questions about what they are telling you. Because it means you have to get back in contact with them to ask these questions; the whole process just takes too long."



Please tell us about your experience of having a **phone appointment** with your GP.



- 13% of respondents said that they felt a phone appointment was **appropriate** for the issue they had.
- 14% of respondents said phone appointments were **efficient**.
- 7% of respondents had issues with the **timing** of their phone appointment.

Please tell us about your experience of having an **appointment with your GP over email or text**.

A relatively small number of respondents gave their thoughts on having consultations via email or text (511).

- 67% respondents reported positive experiences.
- 13% of respondents said that email and text were efficient, easy or useful
- 6% of respondents reported that they had issues replying

Additional Roles

The third section of our survey focussed on patients' experiences of additional roles within general practice. In this executive report we only go into detail on 5 roles: nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, paramedics and physician associates. See our full report for more information.

General Themes

A number of respondents said that they would be happy to see someone in an additional role if it frees up capacity in the system for others:

"Dealt with professionally & procedures fully explained... If it is for tests & checks then I do not need to see doctor which frees appointments for others"

Others reported positive consultations with staff in additional roles but still said: *"I would take the GP as my first offer every time."*

One significant issue was respondents saying that their needs were not met in their consultation with additional role staff. These respondents then had to make another appointment to see a GP:

"Paramedic was nice but ultimately didn't help with my medical issue and said I'd need to see a doctor which is what I'd asked for initially"

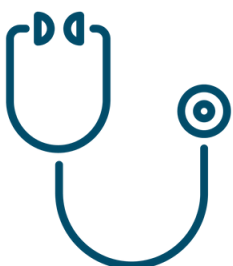
Nurses

1,516 respondents said that they had seen a nurse within the last 6 months.

- 87% of respondents said that their needs were met via a consultation with a nurse.
- 81% of respondents said that they would be happy to see a nurse again.

Positive feedback on appointments with nurses focussed on their professionalism and competence:

"Blood tests and cervical smear test. Helpful and friendly... They're the experts."



Additional Roles

“Pharmacist was fantastic and gave me the most thorough and thoughtful asthma review I’ve ever had.”

“I was hoping to have some manipulation for back pain, but was just given advice and referred to a class.”

“I have seen a paramedic several times and have been impressed by her level of knowledge and ability to provide treatment.”

“I have seen a paramedic twice. Both times it was fine but would rather see a doctor.”



Pharmacists

315 respondents said that they had seen a pharmacist within the last 6 months.

- 76% of respondents said that their needs were met via a consultation with a pharmacist.
- 72% of respondents said that they would be happy to see a pharmacist again.

Respondents showed confidence in pharmacists and it was often felt that a pharmacist was better for medication issues than a GP.

Physiotherapists

144 respondents said that they had seen a physio within the last 6 months.

- 66% of respondents said that their needs were met via a consultation with a physio.
- 69% of respondents said that they would be happy to see a physio again.

Many respondents’ expectations were not met during consultations with physios. Issues were: no hands-on manipulation; not being shown how to do exercises; and not feeling listened to.

Paramedic

104 respondents said that they had seen a paramedic within the last 6 months.

- 65% of respondents said that their needs were met via a consultation with a paramedic.
- 76% of respondents said that they would be happy to see a paramedic again.

Respondents were impressed not only with the paramedics’ efficiency and competence but also with the level of care and support provided.

Additional Roles

"I needed a simple health check so I could continue with my [hormone replacement therapy]. I did not need to see a GP so the physician associate was perfect."

"I didn't know this at the time but I saw an associate for a medical consultant that didn't particularly need a GP."

"She barely looked at me and had her back to me when I entered the room. She did not introduce herself or her role and I could not read her badge."

"No way of going back to her to discuss the effects of the treatment."

"They did not get the full picture and did not give appropriate advice. I had to call triage a few days later to get relevant advice from the GP."



Physician Associates

81 respondents said that they had seen a physician associate within the last 6 months.

- 65% of respondents said that their needs were met via a consultation with a physician associate.
- 68% of respondents said that they would be happy to see a physician associate again.

One issue particular to physician associates was patients' confusion about who they were seeing. Patients should be made clear from the start who they are seeing at their GP practice.

"I saw a professional other than a GP but I don't know who they were"

122 respondents reported seeing a professional at their GP practice but not knowing who they were or what their role was.

This is concerning: receptionists should make clear to patients who they will be seeing and practice staff should introduce themselves and their role at the start of a consultation.

Because they did not know the professional, respondents did not feel that they were appropriately cared for. Respondents either had to see a different professional separately following their consultation or make do with the advice they had been given.

Challenges in Access

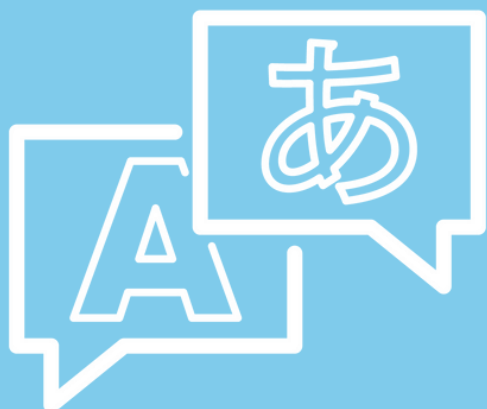
“My needs were fully met and not forgotten especially being 'deaf' when one does not hear their name being called reception staff always there for me and my family.”

“I am partially deaf and don't particularly like using phones, especially when trying to convey symptoms and discuss solutions.”

“I have no issues with my surgery and feel they support me as a carer and are always very helpful”

“For a non native English speaker it is sometimes stressful to make a contact on the phone while you are already stressed about your health.”

“My English language is not that great so I find it so easier to explain myself in person showing physically what is my problems or concerns.”



Disability

Over 400 respondents said that they had a disability or access requirement. Of these, 161 said they had a mobility issue and 39 said they had a hearing impairment.

The majority of comments were on hearing, including: interactions with reception; hearing loops and phone relay systems; and the (in)appropriateness of phone appointments.

Respondents also raised issues around GP practice estates, particularly; parking, seating and stairs.

Unpaid Carers

Over 400 respondents reported that they have a caring responsibility.

Many carers praised their GP practice for the support and care they have provided, often over long time periods. There were, however, also issues raised by carers: not being able to see the same GP easily and not being able to access timely support.

English as an Additional Language

267 respondents said that they spoke English as an additional language.

These respondents enforced the importance of having multiple contact routes open (eg email and phone) and the importance of in-person appointments.

These respondents also reported that some GPs for whom English is also an additional language act as interpreters. While this a great advantage for many, respondents would still like to have access to an independent interpreter.

Conclusions

Overall, this is a very positive report. For the majority of respondents, they are able to access the care they need from their GP practice. This is highly commendable. Once again, all GP practice staff must be thanked for all the hard work they do for our community.

Key Findings

Contact

1. Phone and in-person contact should be prioritised. They are the preferred and most accessible routes for all Richmond residents.
2. There is an appetite for digital contact routes, if they are easy to use.
3. Neither contacting GP practices by calling at 8am or logging on at midnight serves patients well.
4. Changes need to be made to online prescription ordering to reduce mistakes. Patients need to be notified when prescriptions are ready to be picked up.
5. Maintain flexibility around contact routes: enable patients to get in touch with their GP through whichever contact route suits them best.

Appointments

1. Timely appointments need to be available to all patients.
2. Enable patients to see their GP of choice within a reasonable time frame.
3. Improve patient experience of phone appointments by giving a smaller time frame. The perceived lack of care over the phone needs to be resolved, perhaps through further training.

Additional Roles

1. Respondents expressed a high level of satisfaction for appointments with professionals in additional roles. This is a really positive finding.
2. There needs to be easily accessible information on what those in additional roles can do for patients.
3. Ensure that patients know who they will be seeing for their appointment and that practice staff introduce themselves.

healthwatch

Richmond upon Thames



**Committed
to quality**

Healthwatch Richmond is committed to providing a quality service, from how we collect data to the information we provide. Every three years we perform an in-depth audit, in conjunction with Healthwatch England to ensure we meet this high standard.

Please contact us if you would like this report in another language or format.

Healthwatch Richmond
82 Hampton Road
Twickenham
TW2 5QS

0208 099 5335

hello@healthwatchrichmond.co.uk
www.healthwatchrichmond.co.uk