



## Health and Wellbeing Board

### **Report title: General Practice access and Safe Surgeries update**

**Date:** 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022

**Key decision:** No

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** All

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### **Outline and recommendations**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Lewisham Health and Wellbeing Board on General Practice access and also the Safe Surgeries programme.

The Health and Wellbeing Board are recommended to:

- Note the contents of the report

### **Timeline of engagement and decision-making**

N/A

## **1. Summary**

- 1.1. As requested by the members of the Health and Wellbeing Board, this paper provides an update on General Practice access and also the Safe Surgeries programme.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. Members of the Health and Wellbeing Board are recommended to note this update report.

## **3. General Practice access**

### **3.1. Background**

- 3.1.1. Access to General Practice remains a high priority and focus for patients, the ICS and local system partners alike.
- 3.1.2. Demand for GP services is at an all-time high and every day, practices in Lewisham are in touch with hundreds of patients to assist with their different needs, requests, and health concerns. The need for care continues to increase, both for one-off episodes of care and for long-term complex conditions.
- 3.1.3. Practices are facing numerous challenges including:
  - Recruitment and retention of staff. Due to the national shortage of doctors and nurses, primary care is changing. To ensure GPs can focus on the most complex patients, practice teams now include other healthcare professionals who can, together, meet the varied needs of patients. New roles include clinically trained physician associates, clinical pharmacists, nurse specialists, physiotherapists, mental health practitioners and social prescribers. However, many of our practices are managing significant vacancies and whilst they are being supported to help fill those vacancies, the turnover of staff is high, including in the new roles within the primary care team.
  - Ageing population with more complex needs. The expansion of the practice team with other allied health professionals enables GPs to focus on those with more complex and long-term needs. Demand and acuity however continues to increase.
  - Wide range of responsibilities in GP practices: In addition to patient appointments, there is a wide and varied range of work undertaken in GP practices to support patient care. Much of this work is unseen and includes prescriptions, medication reviews, chronic disease reviews, staff training, referrals, safeguarding, reviewing results, coroner reports, population health management, actioning hospital discharge management plans and viewing hospital letters etc. General practice and primary care teams also continue to have a critical role in delivering the flu, covid and most recently, polio booster vaccination programmes, with 1000s of vaccinations being delivered across the borough every week.

### **3.2. Summary of initiatives / support**

- 3.2.1. There are several initiatives in place to support our practices to review and seek to continually improve access including:
  - Telephony: Financial support has been provided to practices to upgrade their telephony systems appreciating that this is still by far the most common way that patients interact with their practice. This includes cloud based telephony systems which provide flexibility in how calls are routed and managed and also call management analytics so practices can better understand demand and so try and match their resources to peak times etc.

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- Practice websites: All Lewisham practices are being supported to review and update their websites to level 3 standardisation ensuring that a consistent set of information is available to support patients to get the best out of their practice and other local services.
- Online services: Practices continue to offer a range of ways for patients to digitally interact with them including booking, appointments, requesting repeat prescriptions, reviewing medical records and undertaking Online Consultations. We are fully aware however that digital services may be difficult for some patients to fully utilise and so have developed a primary care digital inclusion plan which builds on the recommendations of the Healthwatch “Digital exclusion and access to health services 2021” report. It is intended that this will form the basis of a much wider digital inclusion plan across all local partners.
- Enhanced Access: All Lewisham practices have signed up to the national enhanced access service contract which offers additional appointments on weekday evenings 6.30pm-8pm and on Saturdays 9am-5pm. This additional access should be particularly helpful for patients who may not be able to access General Practices during the core opening hours of Monday – Friday, 8am-6.30pm.
- Home Visiting service: The Lewisham GP Federation has been commissioned to provide a dedicated Home Visiting service for housebound patients. This allows home visit requests to be addressed in a timely manner which evidence shows reduces the risk of complications and A&E attendance and emergency admissions. It also releases GP capacity within practices.
- Pharmacy: Close working with local community pharmacy continues including through both informal and more formal referral routes from general practice. Community pharmacy are also undertaking an increasing number of services such as immunisations, NHS Health Checks and Blood pressure checks.
- Informing and educating the public on how primary care is working: A SEL wide primary care campaign launched in October 2022 and aims to ensure that everyone in south east London gets the help and professional support they need. The campaign explains how the expanded primary care team is working – see <https://selprimarycare.co.uk/>.

### 3.3. National “appointments in General Practice” report

- 3.3.1. On 24 November 2022, NHS Digital published GP data by practice covering access, complaints, and payments made to primary care. Publication of the data is part of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care’s ‘Our Plan for Patients’ to enable patients to have more information available to choose the right practice for them.
- 3.3.2. It is available at <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/data-tools-and-services/data-services/general-practice-data-hub/appointments-in-general-practice> and includes:
- Number of appointments delivered by each practice per 1,000 patients
  - How long people wait between booking an appointment and receiving one.
  - How the patient was seen (telephone or in person etc)
  - Who the patient was seen by (GP, Nurse, other health care professional)
- 3.3.3. This new GP access data is experimental and as a result has many limitations. For example, it only records details of appointments that are recorded in the GP appointments system, rather than the total number of interactions. It does not include all appointments from online requests as they are often managed using a different IT system or all enhanced access evening and weekend appointments.
- 3.3.4. Therefore, it is not a complete view of general practice activity so is not a measure of

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practice quality or patient care. It cannot be used as an accurate representation of workload and capacity. There is an ongoing programme of work to improve the quality of GP appointment data, and bring information collected by different IT systems together, however there are still issues which mean that any ranking of practices based on appointment numbers will not be a fair or appropriate reflection of either work carried out in general practice or patients' experience of access at specific practices.

- 3.3.5. Local work is underway to get a more accurate assessment of GP access data which can then be used to help inform and target interventions.

## **4. Safe surgeries**

### **4.1. Background**

- 4.1.1. Everyone is eligible to register with a GP and receive primary care services free of charge, regardless of immigration status. In November 2017, NHS England published its Primary Medical Care Policy and Guidance Manual, which states that if a patient says that they live in the practice area but cannot produce proof of address or ID, they should not be refused registration on that basis.
- 4.1.2. Similarly, patients are not obliged to provide information on their immigration status if they do not want to. Everyone living in England, regardless of their immigration status, is entitled to free primary care and to register with a GP.

### **4.2. Safe Surgeries Initiative**

- 4.2.1. Safe surgeries is a Doctors of the World (DOTW) initiative which supports GP practices to tackle the barriers to healthcare faced by people in vulnerable circumstances, especially migrants, people seeking sanctuary and refugees.
- 4.2.2. A Safe Surgery is a GP practice which commits to taking steps to tackle the barriers faced by many migrants in accessing healthcare. At a minimum, this means declaring the GP practice a 'Safe Surgery' for everyone and ensuring that lack of ID or proof of address, immigration status or language are not barriers to patient registration.
- 4.2.3. The safe surgery initiative provides training to increase awareness, improve knowledge of these issues among clinical and non-clinical staff, and looks at how practices can make small changes to reduce barriers. The Safe Surgeries initiative also provides resources, training, and support for GP practices on how to ensure their services (and registration processes) are accessible to everyone in the community, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

### **4.3. Local Support**

- 4.3.1. In December 2017 NHS Lewisham CCG started discussions with DOTW about the numbers of people they were supporting to register in Lewisham. Even with the support of a DOTW advocate some very vulnerable people were unsuccessful in registering at a GP practice. This was often because they were being asked for documents they did not have or asked about their immigration status.
- 4.3.2. The CCG and the local community education provider network worked with DOTW to coproduce training materials and resources for GP practice reception staff to update their knowledge of the practical aspects of supporting vulnerable people to overcome barriers to registration. The training package was made available to all practices.
- 4.3.3. Practices were also encouraged to sign up to the safer surgeries initiative. By signing up practices demonstrated their willingness to support all Lewisham residents in accessing the healthcare they are entitled to.
- 4.3.4. The primary care team have been working closely with practices to ensure that sign up and are able to access the necessary training and support resources made available by DOTW.

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- 4.3.5. To support the initiative, in June 2021 Lewisham Councillors wrote to all Lewisham GP practices around practice policy which supports the safeguarding of vulnerable people and access to primary health care for all our population in Lewisham. The letter encouraged all practices to sign up to the safe surgeries initiative and help make the borough the first where all GP practices are safe surgeries.
- 4.3.6. Currently, 24 of the 27 Lewisham practices have signed up to the initiative. Contact has been made with the outstanding 3 practices to encourage and support them to also sign up to the initiative (capacity to fully engage with the programme is the major reason cited by these practices for not yet signing up).
- 4.3.7. The primary care team has committed to visit all Lewisham GPs practices between October and December 2022 and will use the opportunity to establish what practices are doing as part of the initiative and if any further support might be necessary.

#### **4.4. Access to health services for asylum seekers**

- 4.4.1. There are currently two contingency intermediate accommodation hotels for asylum seekers in the borough, in Lee and Deptford Bridge. Officers have worked with local GP practices and other local providers to ensure all asylum seekers are registered with a practice and receive enhanced support, have access to other mainstream NHS services required during their stay and their medical and social care needs are managed efficiently i.e. vaccinations.

### **5. Next Steps**

- 5.1. A more detailed update on GP access will be taken to a future Health and Wellbeing Board meeting.

### **6. Financial implications**

- 6.1. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

### **7. Legal implications**

- 7.1. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### **8. Equalities implications**

- 8.1. The referenced primary care digital inclusion plan will seek to identify and mitigate any inequalities associated with digital exclusion.
- 8.2. The Safer Surgeries initiative looks to directly address inequalities that might be experienced by migrants, people seeking sanctuary and refugees when seeking healthcare.

### **9. Climate change and environmental implications**

- 9.1. There are no climate change and environmental implications arising from this report.

### **10. Crime and disorder implications**

- 10.1. There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

### **11. Health and wellbeing implications**

- 11.1. The health and wellbeing implications for this report are outlined in the main body of text

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## **12. Background papers**

12.1. None

## **13. Report author and contact**

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