

Harrow Road Surgery

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Healthwatch Waltham Forest
GP Outreach Research 2014: Individual Practice Report

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

This report is a summary of the comments made by patients we met over a period of six weeks at Harrow Road Surgery. This was part of a wider project which involved Healthwatch representative visiting four surgeries in Walthamstow and Leytonstone to find out what patients think works well at their GP surgery and what could be improved.

We spoke with 90 patients over the six weeks. They made 99 comments about what works well at the surgery and 108 comments about aspects that could be improved.

Harrow Road Surgery has recently moved into new premises and amongst patients we spoke to there is a very positive feeling about the move and a hope that it is the start of a new chapter for the surgery. Patients told us that communication can be poor with the GPs and the service variable. Several patients told us they avoid seeing particular doctors. The surgery appears to be designed around the systems used rather than the patients. For example, there is inflexibility in appointment booking.

Recommendations, based on what the patients told us, have been made for ways to improve the service and environment at the surgery so that it better meets the patients' needs.

The main recommendations

1. Trial of a drop-in appointment system could increase choice and flexibility for patients. (Such a system has been regarded positively by patients at another practice in borough).
2. Patient Participation Group (PPG), together with staff, to review the appointment system to make it more patient-focused rather than systems-driven.
3. Reception staff should be trained and supported to offer a consistent polite, helpful and friendly customer service experience to all patients.
4. The development of a patient-centred practice development plan to identify and promote shared values and greater consistency in how patients are treated should be undertaken.
5. A review process should be initiated when patients say they prefer not to see a particular doctor.
6. Promotion of the Patient Participation Group (PPG) amongst all patients.
7. Review referral and other systems to ensure a protocol is in place that guarantees patients are referred on appropriately and in good time.
8. Provision of an information sheet about the Langthorne Phlebotomy Clinic, including location, opening times, contact details and system for seeing patients.
9. Removal of the 0844 number from all patient literature and notices, including on websites. All patients should be advised of the new telephone number.
10. A website should be provided so that patients can find information about the practice in one place.

Introduction

In 2013 Healthwatch Waltham Forest conducted research on local GP access issues by inviting people across the borough to complete a short survey¹. Through this piece of work we spoke to approximately 400 people, but also met many who had not been to the GP recently and so did not feel qualified to complete the survey. This year we decided to visit GP surgeries and talk directly with their patients.

We approached all the surgeries in Walthamstow, Leytonstone and Leyton, forty-five in total, four of which agreed to let us visit their surgery. We made arrangements to visit all four surgeries once a week over a period six weeks to speak to the patients attending the surgery on that day. The aim was to find out what patients think works well at their surgery and what can be improved. At the request of two surgeries, on their request, we tested the Friends and Family Test (FFT) question, by including it in a short survey which also asked what works well and what could be improved. At the other two surgeries we used comment cards to gather feedback, and invited patients in person to comment on what was good and what could be improved at the surgery. At one surgery we also asked what additional clinics patients would like at the new surgery building. In all four surgeries we displayed posters advertising our visit and offering prompts about aspects of the service patients might like to comment on. These prompts were based on what people had told us as part of the GP Access research Healthwatch Waltham Forest conducted in 2013.

Each practice has been issued with an individual report containing the feedback at their surgery, with recommendations for change based on what patients told us. There is also an overall report summarising all the feedback from all the surgeries.

We would like to thank Jacqueline Parkes, Healthwatch Board member, and Evalina Strum, Healthwatch volunteer, for working on this project with us, attending the surgery and speaking to the patients. We greatly appreciate their help, without which this project could not have been completed. We would also like to thank Dr Samuel and his team, who made us welcome, and the patients who answered our questions.

What is Healthwatch?

Healthwatch Waltham Forest is a local Healthwatch organisation, established by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to act as the local independent consumer champion for health and social care.

¹ http://www.healthwatchwalthamforest.co.uk/sites/default/files/healthwatch_waltham_forest_-_gp_report_0_0.pdf

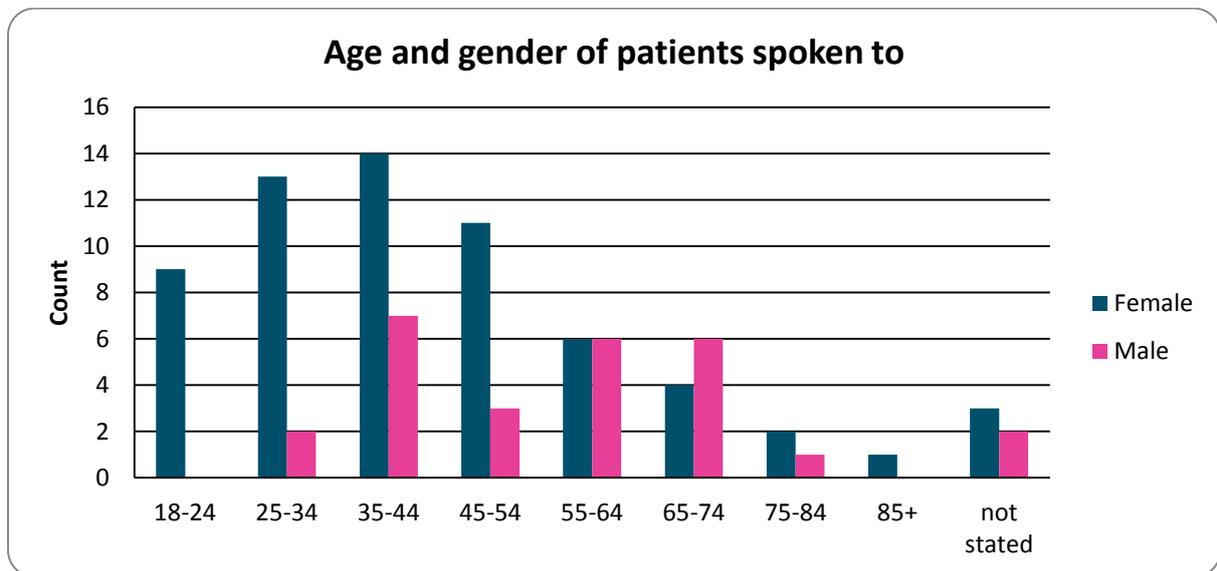
Local Healthwatch organisations have statutory duties to:

- Gather the views and experiences of patients and public
- Make those views known to providers and commissioners
- Promote and support the involvement of people in the commissioning and provision of local care services and how they are scrutinised
- Recommend investigation or special review of services via Healthwatch England or directly to the Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- Provide information and signposting about access to services and support for making informed choices including independent advocacy support to make an NHS complaint
- Make the views and experiences of people known to Healthwatch England, providing a steer to help it carry out its role as national champion

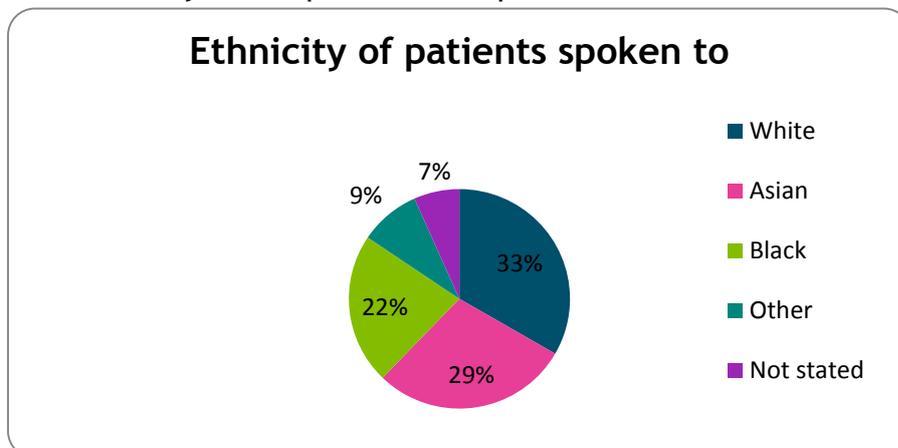
Information about Harrow Road Surgery

Harrow Road Surgery is in Leytonstone and is a multi-doctor GP surgery with a patient list of approximately 7000. We visited every Tuesday, mid-morning to early afternoon, between 30th September and 4th November. We used comment cards to gather feedback on what works well at the surgery and what could be improved. We were also asked to gather information from patients about the type of clinics they would like see in the building, which consists of a purpose-built new surgery with additional space. We spoke to 90 patients over the six visits. This compares favourably with the 101 patients that responded to the latest national GP Patient Satisfaction survey, not all of whom completed the full survey².

The profile of the patients we spoke to can be seen below and includes a wide range of age groups. We spoke to more women (63) than men (27).



The ethnicity of the patients we spoke to is as follows:



² <https://gp-patient.co.uk/practices/F86666>

What people told us about the Harrow Road Surgery

Clinics

At the request of Dr Samuel, we asked the patients what clinics or services they would like to see at the new surgery building and 30 people made suggestions, with some suggesting two or more services.

Clinic/service	Count
Blood	21
Diabetes	11
Family Planning	4
Maternity	3
Walk-in centre	2
Asthma	2
Children's service	3
Physical Therapy	1
Alternative therapy	1
Elderly service	1
Podiatry	1
Dermatology	1
Prescribing chemist	1
Hypertension/stress /depression	1
Total	53

A blood clinic at the surgery was the most popular suggestion, with twenty-one people suggesting it. Patients told us that they had previously been able to have blood tests with the GP or nurse, but now have to go to Langthorne Phlebotomy Clinic. They would prefer to have the blood tests at their surgery: “it would be nicer and more convenient than going to Langthorne”. For one patient the preference was due to mobility issues: “as a wheelchair user I would like it if all the clinics I need could be in one place”. Another has a child with learning disabilities who prefers someone he knows to take the blood: “my (LD) son doesn't like to go to Langthorne - he prefers having the Dr take it”. A third worried about the paperwork causing delays and requiring the clinic to check with the GP: “I would like the information on paperwork to be more specific because blood tests are not done here.” At least one person said going to Langthorne was not an issue for them: “Langthorne, I use the blood clinic, good service and very accessible, so no difference to me if there was a blood clinic here”, but another had had problems there: “I would like to have it done here, they usually mess it up at Langthorne”

A diabetes clinic was suggested by eleven people, but only one went into detail about the benefit it would bring to her: “I go to Whipps Cross for the diabetes nurse but have to go to Loughton to see the specialist. It is a cramped building and not very nice, I go for a twice yearly appointment there. I feel pushed out of Whipps for diabetes treatment.”

Four people would like to see a family planning clinic at the surgery and three asked for a maternity clinic, despite there currently being one at the surgery. Two asked for an asthma clinic, although a third told us: “This practice has an asthma nurse which is something specific to my needs. I'm pleased to be a patient, using this service.”

Patients also suggested other clinics and services they would like to see, and one patient would like services more targeted to ethnic groups. One patient feels very strongly that there are no services set up to specifically support the Afro-Caribbean community. She feels that other cultures are much better represented and she feels her culture's needs are severely overlooked. Another woman would like to see to more information and support for the elderly, a resource centre where they can find out what services, health and social care, and help is available locally.

There is a chemist shop on site, but it is not currently set up to prescribe. One patient mentioned that having this service would be useful asking: “when will the chemist start a prescription service, it is very important.”

Comments

All the patients we spoke to were invited to say what they like about the surgery, what works well and also what could be improved. There were Healthwatch posters on the wall with suggestions of aspects of the service they might like to comment on, including appointment booking, reception staff, waiting times, the GP, treatment and referrals. These were all issues raised during our 2013 GP outreach project. The comments in this report reflect what the patients we met on our six visits told us; they are not necessarily reflective of all patient experience at the surgery. A copy of all the comments is included in Appendix 1.

What is good about this GP surgery - what works well?

There were 99 positive comments made about Harrow Road Surgery, with some people commenting on several aspects of the service that they think work well. The comments are categorised by subject below:

Subject	Positive
Premises	25
Staff	20
Appointments	19

Generally positive	14
Communication	6
Location	5
Good care	4
Phone issues	3
Continuity of care	2
Opening times	1
Total	99

Premises

The surgery opened in the new premises a few weeks before our first visit. It had been a long time in the planning and many patients we spoke to were seeing it for the first time, so it is unsurprising that a quarter of all positive comments were about the premises.

Most patients compared the new building favourably with the old surgery: “better looking than the old place”, “it is an improvement on the previous building” and “It was a crumpled old surgery, so this looks a good improvement but I will reserve judgement.” “[The surgery] feels very fresh and clean, you won't catch anything in here.” “New place is clean, tidy and spacious, and reception area has a well mannered and well spoken staff.” One patient hoped that the move would also improve the service: “happy with the new surgery building and hope it will also improve the doctors”.

Staff

Twenty patients commented positively on staff, including the reception team, the nurses and the doctors. Some comments were general: “staff can be quite helpful”, “reception staff are very good and lovely”, “very helpful nurses and midwives” and “the staff is working hard just to keep us happy”. Others were more specific: “reception was very helpful in resolving the [appointment] issue and rearranged so I could be seen today”, “staff are very accommodating and supportive of special needs patients” and “the receptionist (Veronica) was very helpful and made sure she helped me as much as possible. Generally, the new receptionists are a lot friendlier”.

Appointments

Nineteen patients mentioned appointments as something that worked well at Harrow Road. Patients can call or come in at 8am and 2pm to make an appointment for that day or for a future date. This system works for many patients: “appointment system is good, usually same day”, appointments are easy to get, usually the next day” and “I was seen within 3 hours of calling for an appointment”. A newly-registered patient commended the appointment system

and the service: “this is my first appointment, but reception staff seem very nice, they called to confirm my appointment”. One patient said: “I’m able to get appointments when needed.” Another said: “I always get the appointments on time” and a third said: “I’m very happy with the current appointment system and can’t think of any improvements.”

Generally positive comments

Fourteen patients were generally positive about the service, without being specific about what was good about it. They were “happy with the Practice”, feel “the service is generally good here” and “had positive experiences here”. One newly-registered patient said it was their “first visit but pleased with everything, feel well looked after and treated”. Another person registering at the surgery had been recommended it by a friend.

Communication

The positive comments about communication at Harrow Road were generally expressed as a feeling of good communication, support and openness between the doctors and patients. One patient told us she feels very comfortable there and feels she knows who to speak to for whatever conditions she has. She feels the surgery has vastly improved over time, and feels even more comfortable since moving to the new building. Another said they were “very happy with the service, feel I can talk to all of them and they give me enough time”. One singled out in particular Dr Margaret as a good communicator. She feels confident with her and prefers to see her.

Location

This was mentioned by five people as a positive aspect of the surgery. One described it as “easily accessible and close to home”. Three newly-registered patients had chosen the surgery primarily for its location: “it is a convenient location”.

Good care

Four patients mentioned the good care they receive at Harrow Road. One does not like the appointment system, but “the care is good when you get an appointment”. Another said: “the service is good, I’m grateful for that”. One likes Dr Begum, describing her as “the best in the surgery, she investigates more and I hope the others will now do the same”.

Phone issues

Three people spoke positively about the phone system at the surgery. Patients were very pleased to see the end of the 0844 number that had been used in the old surgery: “it’s good they changed from the 0844 number”. One patient thought the new menu system worked well: “the phone system is a vast improvement on

the previous one”. Another said: “the phone was answered very quickly - it’s good”.

Continuity of care

Two patients mentioned they appreciate the continuity of care they receive. Both patients were talking about Dr Margaret: “I have been coming here for more than 10 years and I see the same 2 doctors but mainly see Dr Margaret. I am very happy with them both and enjoy a very positive relationship with Dr Margaret particularly.” The second said they also like Dr Margaret, feel confident with her and prefer to see her, but that all the doctors are excellent.

Opening times

One patient was positive about the opening hours at Harrow Road: “hours have improved, no grumbles”.

How could this GP surgery be improved - what would make it better?

There were 108 comments about how the Harrow Road surgery might be improved. Patients are particularly concerned about communication, the appointment system, services offered and the standard of care they receive.

Subject	No. of suggestions for Improvement
Communication	25
Appointments	22
Services	18
Good care	10
Phone issues	8
Staff	8
Waiting times	7
Premises	5
Continuity of care	2

Generally positive	2
Online appointments	1
Total	108

Communication

Those who said communication could be improved mentioned systems that had failed them, not feeling listened to and how the doctors treat them. Several patients said they had poor communication with the doctor. One “would like more personal interest to be shown by GP”. Another said: “I see Dr XX, he’s a bit grumpy.” Another patient insisted on a scan, and when it came back clear: “I was told by Dr XX that I had wasted government money by getting the scan.” Two carers “feel that it takes a lot of effort at the surgery to get the appropriate services for our sister”. Another patient has not been asked what her needs are and doesn’t feel confident enough to ask. She says they know her and she feels they take care of her, however, she lives in a bedsit on her own, and is in need of a care package, but has no idea how to access one.

Some comments patients made indicate a lack of systems in place to ensure that patients are seen when necessary, referred on and remain informed throughout their treatment. Two pregnant patients mentioned communication failures with their appointments. One was not sent for her 28-week scan: “they forgot to send me for my scan. I had no contact with the hospital, I was not happy about missing my scan”, and another “saw Dr XX who said she referred [me] to the antenatal clinic at Homerton, but Homerton say they don’t have her details”. She doesn’t know who the error lies with and was attending to speak to Dr XX about moving forward.

A third pregnant patient expressed a wish for better communication, having missed her appointment. She was referred to Harrow Road Maternity Clinic by the Allum Medical Centre. She has found the experience somewhat unhelpful. She had a 28-week appointment scheduled but couldn’t attend. But she was given no clear details on whom to contact in such an event. She missed her appointment, but no-one contacted her for a while. When they did leave a message on her phone, they left no contact details. She had a difficult time finding out how to re-book and was referred from the GP to Whipps Cross, then back to the surgery.

One patient had to chase up after her appointment because it was not done automatically: “requested coil but they did not contact me; I had to come to chase it up”. Another had been having vaccinations with the nurse: “I needed three vaccinations and was given two last week and was advised by the nurse to return next week for the 3rd. When I went in she denied telling me that but after reading her notes she realised that I was correct.”

One patient lost her child in a miscarriage due to poor communication at the surgery. “Very unhappy with appointment service. It takes weeks to get an appointment.” Earlier she had been six months pregnant with a girl. She developed pains and a smelly discharge. The GP sent her to the midwife, but the midwife referred her back to GP, so she couldn't get an appointment with anyone. She called the GP for five days. She was never seen and then miscarried her baby.

Several patients also said they did not feel listened to at the surgery. One said they are “not always asked if you would prefer male or female, it would be helpful to have that choice”. Another wanted to discuss weight control with the doctor, “but doctor said he doesn't have time to discuss that”. Another said they were “not happy with doctor because he rushes and I feel I'm in the way! I'm very disappointed with him”.

One parent, there for his own appointment, spoke about his experience when taking his son to the doctor: “Brought 6 year old son to see Dr XX because of a chronic problem with dry eyes which itch and tear excessively. While telling the doctor about my son's problems, Dr XX said to me, “this is not a car MOT, just tell me one problem”. I was very shocked and found her very rude. I and my wife took my son and left. Ever since then I refused to see this doctor even if she is the only doctor available.” Several patients mentioned that they no longer see particular doctors due to a breakdown in trust or communication.

Appointments

While some patients spoke positively about the appointment system, for others it is an area for improvement. The issues include having to ring or visit the surgery at set times to make an appointment, having to wait for an appointment date and being unable to get a same-day appointment when needed.

Several patients said they have trouble getting an appointment. One patient has had difficulty getting through to the surgery: “had several instances of having a difficult time getting an appointment, busy line, being disconnected, waiting”. Another “would like a same-day appointment but appointment times are difficult to obtain on the same date of asking”. Others would like to see an improvement in the wait for an appointment date: “Very unhappy with appointment service. It takes weeks to get an appointment” and “could be a bit more prompt with appointment timings”.

Several patients mentioned the inflexibility of the system which requires patients who don't get an appointment on calling in the morning to try again in the afternoon: “Having severe difficulty getting an appointment, particularly after introduction of a new appointment system, ring in at 8am and the lines are often busy, by the time you get through the appointments are all gone. This is especially

hard as I am 70 years old. I have been told to return at 2pm for an appointment today but I need a blood pressure reading and can't see the GP to get it. I was able to get a flu jab appointment today with the nurse, which is positive but the GP appointments are much harder to get.” One child patient was told to go to A&E because no appointments were being issued when the parent called before 2pm, and none were available when they managed to get through to reception at 2.15pm: “My grandson was sent home from school at 11:30am with ear-ache, was told to phone back after 2pm - finally got through at 2:15pm to be told no appointments - go to casualty.”

Some appointments are easier to get than others. One patient can get a nurse appointment but would also like a GP appointment: “Very unhappy with the appointment system. I had to wait two weeks just to get an appointment with the nurse today. Still haven't been able to see the doctor.” Another patient said that appointments are sometimes cancelled: “sometimes appointments get cancelled even when the hospital makes an appointment”. One patient had also had an issue where: “Two weeks ago I came to the surgery with a pre-booked appointment for 2:30pm. I was 15 minutes early. I was told to sit down but waited 45 minutes after not being seen. The [receptionist] woman who told me to sit down had left and someone else told me I had to be re-booked because I'd missed my appointment. She apologised when she realised the mistake. Not a big deal.”

Good care

The comments about the lack of good care include patients feeling that the doctor failed to diagnose, or mis-diagnosed, their problems, exacerbating the situation - sometimes tragically. One patient told us his back pain went untreated for years: “I had severe pains in back and neck for several years which Dr wouldn't treat. I went to hospital with pain and they told me I had arthritis and had had for about 8 years.” Another was told their condition was not treatable: “had a problem with catarrh for two years, was told it was a viral infection and nothing could be done about it”.

One patient, who has been with the surgery for more than twelve years, no longer has confidence in the doctors to treat her family in emergency situations: “Have been with surgery for over 12 years and had a difficult history with them, misdiagnosis and late diagnosis, resulting in long-term health problems and the death of one of my children...I choose to attend A&E if my or my children's symptoms are serious for fear of further misdiagnosis. I would like to see clinicians listening more and give practical support”. She also reported being given drugs for a bowel issue “which I was allergic to and ended up in hospital with a blood clot on the lungs.”

Several patients spoke about issues with their children at the surgery: “My husband brought our son in to the surgery but he was told that he was fine. That night we had to take him to A&E with a 40 degrees temperature.” A patient’s son developed a skin condition. Dr XX prescribed a topical cream which the mother felt was not working, although Dr XX insisted it was. The mother took her son home for four weeks to the Czech Republic. While there, she saw a doctor who was surprised that the cream was prescribed “as it is for adults not kids”. She was given another treatment and the condition improved. She feels that: “some doctors here are very good but others very bad”. We spoke to several patients who now refuse to see certain doctors at the surgery, having experienced poor care from them: “don’t want to see him” and “since then I refused to see this doctor even if she is the only doctor available”.

Phone issues

Those who wanted improvements to the phone system do not like the menu system: “I don’t like the phone menu system, I would prefer phone was answered by a person straight away”; the wait for it to be answered: “waiting times on the phone are too long”; the inability to get through to the surgery: “difficult to get through on the phone, it is constantly engaged so I have to come to the surgery in person” and at least one person was unaware that they have switched from the 0844 number, but is glad they have: “I am not happy about the 0844 no and was not aware that it has recently changed.”

Staff

Some patients said there could be improvements around staff. One “came to see the doctor and can’t get past receptionists”. Another would like “kind and helpful doctors and staff”. One patient finds that “Dr XX is often on his holiday”. Two patients mentioned that staff manner could be improved. One concerned a nurse: “Do not like her manner, which I feel is uncaring”, and the other a doctor: “I saw Dr XX, I did not like the way he spoke to me, I would describe it as uncaring.”

Waiting times

Seven patients raised waiting times as an issue at Harrow Road. These included long waits for an appointment, and when attending for an appointment: “waiting times, to get an appointment, and even once you arrive for your appointment can be very long”. One patient questioned why they routinely have to endure a wait at their appointment when they arrive early or on time, but will sometimes not be seen if they arrive even five minutes late.

Premises

There were a few suggestions for improvement of the premises, including some additions: “should have a comments box in surgery”, “water in reception area would be good too” and “there is no clock in reception”. One patient does not like

the fact that the receptionists wear a uniform: “I don't like the receptionists wearing uniforms; it feels like a business and make them appear less caring.” The layout of the building was also an issue for at least one patient: “love new building and layout, receptionists very polite and professional, however issue of privacy, can hear and see what's going on around reception area.”

Continuity of care

Two patients spoke to us about issues with continuity of care. One was told it was not possible to specify who they would like to see when making an appointment, but preferred to see Dr XX. Another, who said they were offered a choice, found it was not always practical to wait for that doctor: “there is difficulty getting an appointment with Dr XX and I would prefer to see him for the continuity but you can wait for a week or more for an appointment with him”.

Online appointments

One patient expressed a preference for online appointment booking: “would like that option, to avoid telephone issues”, which is not currently offered at Harrow Road.

Maternity clinic issues

Several patients we spoke to were not registered at Harrow Road, but had come for a maternity clinic appointment. They expressed concern about a lack of information prior to the appointment and on arrival: “here for midwife visit, would be good to have some kind of arrival system so you are not so nervous of being forgotten about” and “here to see midwife for first time, would have liked more info about appointment and surgery before attending but pleased with services, timed appointment”.

What we observed at the Harrow Road Medical Practice

Three people from Healthwatch conducted the outreach at Harrow Road Surgery and observed the following.

The surgery is in a purpose-built building that had been open for a few weeks when we started our visits. The surgery move, from down the road, had been planned for a long time and was clearly welcomed by the patients and staff we spoke to. Most commented very positively on the new premises and the surgery had a very positive atmosphere when we visited. We hope this positivism remains as the surgery settles into the building long term.

The building has a chemist shop in one corner, with its own separate entrance from the street and a wide internal entryway from the surgery. The chemist is not currently set up as a dispensing pharmacy, but that is the long-term intention. The shop currently sells non-prescription items.

The reception desk is on the left of the entry into the main surgery area. It has space for up to three reception staff and a long, chest-height counter which is open, rather than glassed-in. There is a lower counter area at one end where staff can talk to patients who can't reach the higher counter and also exit into the waiting area. All receptionists wear a uniform, including a blouse and scarf, which clearly identifying them as reception staff to patients and visitors. We feel this makes them look very professional and easily identifiable to all, although at least one patient said they didn't like the uniform. There is a queuing area in front of the reception area where patients wait to be seen on arrival. Behind the reception is a glassed-in office where the Practice Manager and other administrative staff work.

All the consultation rooms are behind the reception area and not visible from there or the waiting area. The consultation rooms are accessible from the waiting area through one door, to which access is controlled by the reception staff. One day we saw several patients struggle to open the door between 1pm and 2pm. Reception staff told us that the automatic lock needs to be manually overridden during these times, but we had to ask them several times to open the door to allow patients through.

The waiting room is large, airy and a pleasant environment, in that it is fresh and newly-decorated. However, there was little visual stimulation in the waiting area. Chairs are arranged in several long rows, all facing a wall. On our first visits the wall was empty, but a noticeboard was subsequently added and used to display posters. There is no clock in the waiting area or reading material. There is an electronic display board on the wall facing the chairs which is used to call patients to their appointments and displays messages of relevance about the surgery. We

did not observe any patients being called by name to their appointment by staff. This might be an issue for those with visual impairments, but we did not observe any such issues during our visits.

On our last visit, a flat screen television was being installed in front of the waiting room chairs. Dr Samuel told us that it would be used to share important information with patients. The position, in front of all the waiting room chairs, will make it hard to ignore or get away from in the waiting area.

There are toilets off the waiting area, which were clean and well maintained during all our visits. We did not see any checking of the toilets by staff during our sessions. There was no water fountain or drinking water otherwise available to patients in the waiting area.

When patients arrive for an appointment, they queue at the desk to let staff know they have arrived for their appointment and then wait in the waiting area until they are called. People booking appointments or picking up prescriptions, letters etc. also queue at the desk. At times, particularly just before 2pm, the queue was fairly long and snaked around in front of the desk, partially blocking entry to the waiting area. During one visit, when the phones were not working due to an installation fault, the queue was longer as more people than usual came to the surgery in person to book appointments. We observed that, during the 2pm appointment booking slot, one receptionist answers phone calls while the others deal with patients in the surgery queue.

On one visit the telephones were busy at 2pm and ringing constantly. There were four patients in the surgery queue and the first one to be seen was offered an appointment for 9.40am the next day. It was noticeable that all conversations at the desk can be overheard by those in the queue and, in quieter times, by those in the reception area. With the current open counter configuration this is unavoidable, but does mean patients are potentially revealing personal details and medical histories publically. The majority of conversations and interactions we observed at the reception desk were polite and helpful, although on occasion the tone was clipped and clinical.

We observed patients coming in to the surgery to make an appointment and being told to return or call at 2pm because it was not possible to make an appointment until then. One man had tried earlier in the day and returned at 1.40pm to try again. He sat talking to us in the waiting area as there was no one else in the queue. We advised him to go and join the newly formed queue at 1.50pm to ensure he was on time to make an appointment when the system opened. He said he could not understand why the system had to be so inflexible.

On October 28th we observed two patients who had come to see the nurse sitting in the waiting area for more than 45 minutes. On investigation they had both checked in at the reception on arrival, but had not been called for their appointment. The nurse was on a home visit and had not returned as yet, but the patients were not informed of the reason for the delay.

On an early visit we overheard a patient being directed to the Langthorne Phlebotomy Clinic by reception staff. His first language was not English and he was not familiar with the local area. He was told to walk down the High Road and turn left at the yellow laundrette. He clearly did not understand the directions given to him, but left to go and find the clinic. He had also not been told that it was a drop-in session where he might have to wait to see the phlebotomist.

During our preliminary visit prior to the start of the project we spoke to a patient who told us he was diabetic and, although he has moved from the area, he remains with the surgery because he likes the doctors. He told us that on a previous visit to the new surgery he had had to call an ambulance because he was unable to get an appointment to see the doctor, despite feeling that it was an emergency because he was experiencing low blood sugar levels. He said he was advised to call an ambulance by reception staff. He waited several hours for the ambulance, but it did not arrive, so he called a taxi and went home.

Summary and recommendations

Harrow Road Surgery has got off to a good start in the new premises and patients we spoke to welcomed the change and improvement in the physical surroundings. We hope this boost to morale can be maintained and bring improvement in the service too. The following recommendations are based on what patients told us and what we observed could be improved at the surgery.

<p>Patients would like a more flexible appointment system.</p>	<p>1. Trial of a drop-in appointment system could increase choice and flexibility for patients. (Such a system has been regarded positively by patients at another practice in Waltham Forest).</p>
<p>The systems in place do not seem patient-focused and are sometimes strictly enforced or not used at all.</p>	<p>2. Patient Participation Group (PPG), with staff, to review the appointment system to make it more patient-focused rather than systems-driven.</p>
<p>A patient said the receptionists are a barrier to accessing the doctors; interaction needs to be improved.</p>	<p>3. Reception staff should be trained and supported to offer a consistent polite, helpful and friendly customer service experience to all patients.</p>
<p>There is a perceived lack of a shared ethos amongst staff.</p>	<p>4. The development of a patient-centred practice development plan to identify and promote shared values and greater consistency in how patients are treated should be undertaken.</p>
<p>Some patients don't want to see particular doctors and the doctor they insist on seeing varies from patient to patient.</p>	<p>5. A review process should be initiated when patients say they prefer not to see a particular doctor.</p>
<p>Few patients we met had heard of the Patient Participation Group (PPG), but many had ideas for improving the surgery and services offered.</p>	<p>6. Promotion of the Patient Participation Group (PPG) amongst all patients would improve services for all.</p>
<p>Patients have missed antenatal scans or not had follow-up appointments as necessary, or requested.</p>	<p>7. Review referral and other systems to ensure a protocol is in place that guarantees patients are referred on appropriately and in good time.</p>
<p>It seems that patients are being directed to the Langthorne Phlebotomy Clinic verbally, despite being unfamiliar with the area and language.</p>	<p>8. Provision of an information sheet about the Langthorne Phlebotomy Clinic, including location, opening times, contact details and system for seeing patients.</p>

<p>At the time of our visit the 0844 number is still in use and some patients were unaware it had been replaced with an 0203 number.</p>	<p>9. Removal of the 0844 number from all patient literature and notices, including on websites. All patients should be advised of the new telephone number.</p>
<p>There is no surgery website for patients to access information about services.</p>	<p>10. A website should be provided so that patients can find information about the practice in one place.</p>

Conclusion

The move to a new building, a clean and fresh environment, is an opportunity for Harrow Road Surgery to refresh its approach to patient care and improve the services it offers to patients. Staff and patients seem keen to maintain momentum and an emphasis on improved communication with patients will ensure this. Having spoken to patients, we suggest the service offered needs to be more uniform, so that patients will be happy to see any of the doctors and know they will be getting a high standard of care whoever they see. The systems used need reviewing so that they are flexible and work for patients. We would like to see staff and patients working on this together.

Appendix 1: Comments from patients of Harrow Road Surgery

Comment	Gender	Ethnicity	Age group
I called up the surgery asking for advice regarding pregnancy, the receptionist (Veronica) was very helpful and made sure she helped me as much as possible. Generally, the new receptionists are a lot friendlier. The only problem I have with the maternity service is that it is difficult to contact the midwife and ask for advice through mobile/telephone.	Female	Asian	18-24
here to see midwife for first time, would have liked more info about apt and surgery before attending but pleased with services, timed appointment so not waiting time.	Female	Asian	18-24
She has attended this surgery since birth - for 18 years. She feels very comfortable here and feels she knows who to speak to for whatever conditions she has. She feels the surgery has vastly improved over time, and feels even more comfortable since moving to the new building.	Female	Asian	18-24
This young lady was referred here by Allum Medical Centre. She has found the experience somewhat unhelpful. She had a 28 week appointment scheduled but couldn't attend. But she was given no clear details on who to contact in such an event. She missed her appointment but no-one contacted her for awhile. When they did leave a message on her phone, they left no details to contact them. She had a difficult time finding out how to re-book and was referred from the GP to Whipps X, then back to the surgery.	Female	Asian	18-24
Came here to see midwife, great attention from staff. I would like the info on paperwork to be more specific because blood tests are not done here. Sometimes there is a long wait for urine samples . I am having baby at Whipps X and so far very happy with them.	Female	Black	18-24
It's a good service much better than old surgery building, I've been with them for a year.	Female	White	18-24
Newly registered, Recently moved to the area, was going to register at Forest Gate but a friend recommended this surgery to me	Female	White	18-24
waiting times to get an appointment and even once you arrive for your appointment can be very long	Female	White	18-24

Comment	Gender	Ethnicity	Age group
Pregnant - 18 weeks; saw Dr XX who said she referred her to antenatal clinic at Homerton but Homerton say they don't have her details. She doesn't know who the error lies with. She's here today to speak to Dr XX about moving forward.	Female	White	18-24
happy here sometimes wait 3 or 4 days for appointment but Drs are good, came today for immediate appointment	Female	Asian	25-34
very helpful nurses and midwives, would like a phone line to get in contact with someone right away if needed (phone menu?), could be a bit more prompt with appointment timings	Female	Asian	25-34
They provide a good service, the new building is a big improvement and I like the appointment system	Female	Black	25-34
appointments are easy to get, usually the next day, it is an improvement on the previous building., the DR s are wonderful here.	Female	Black	25-34
good to see surgery is now new and updated facility, there is a good service and I'm able to get appointments when needed. This practice has an asthma nurse which is something specific to my needs. I'm pleased to be a patient, using this service	Female	White	25-34
Came to the surgery when I found out I was pregnant and they forgot to send me for my scan. I had no contact with the hospital, I was not happy about missing my scan. I have my baby at the Homerton, it was a very good experience, I was in labour for more than 13 hours.	Female	White	25-34
Newly registered, just moved from Scotland. Chose surgery by location, googled those closest to home and came here, wait 5 days to see nurse for initial check up, been attacked and being treated by Whipps. Noted old address when searching online	Male	White	25-34
here for midwife visit, would be good to have some kind of arrival system so you are not so nervous of being forgotten about. Water in reception area would be good too.	Female	White	25-34
great improvement on old surgery building, but when will chemist start prescription service, it is very important, when will it happen	Female	White	25-34
everything is ok, the staff is working hard just to keep us happy. The waiting time is a little bit long	Male	White	25-34
love new building and layout, receptionists very polite and professional, however issue of privacy, can hear and see what's going on around reception area	Female	White	25-34
spacious clean and tidy surgery, only waited 2 days for appointment with nurse, much improved on old practice	Female	White	25-34

Comment	Gender	Ethnicity	Age group
place is nice but not happy with DR because he rushes and I feel I'm in the way! I'm very disappointed with him	Female	White	25-34
spacious and clean compared to old building. appointments difficult to get through on the phone, it is constantly engaged so I have to come to the surgery in person	Female	White	25-34
Requested coil but they did not contact me; I had to come to chase it up. My husband bought our son in to the surgery but he was told that he was fine. That night we had to take him to A&E with a 40 degrees temperature	Female	Not stated	25-34
Better looking than the old place. Good System, made an appointment and was seen immediately today	Male	Asian	35-44
I have been coming here for more than 10 years and I see the same 2 DRs but mainly see Dr Margaret, I am very happy with them both and enjoy a very positive relationship with Dr Margaret particularly. I feel the surgery is very clean and reception staff are very friendly	Female	Asian	35-44
I am registered with the Green Man surgery but have been sent here for the maternity clinic. I'm happy with the service I have received and with other health services in Leytonstone	Female	Asian	35-44
Had several instances of having a difficult time getting an appointment, busy line, being disconnected, waiting. But thinks they may be because they don't have enough doctors Been with surgery for 10 years.	Female	Asian	35-44
I like the new premises, much better than the previous surgery. I would like to see a Specialist Dr here, for example my daughter has skin problems. It would also be nice to spend more than 10 minutes with the Dr	Female	Asian	35-44
does not get full previous prescription - the don't want to give it because it is too strong and they need a letter from her previous GP. would like one longer appointment because lots of 10 minutes ones wastes time, she has 5 children to care for and has trouble getting to surgery as has problems walking. wants to lose weight but DR said he doesn't have time to discuss that	Female	Asian	35-44
didn't wait long for my appointment and happy with practice	Male	Asian	35-44
Been attending for 10 years. Very happy with surgery. Making an appointment was very difficult before but it has improved.	Female	Asian	35-44

Comment	Gender	Ethnicity	Age group
Saw nurse in room 3 today and also saw her last week. Do not like her manner, which I feel is uncaring. I needed 3 vaccinations and was given 2 last week and advised by the nurse to return next week for the 3rd. When I went in she denied telling me that but after reading her notes she realised that I was correct. I usually see Dr Alex and like seeing him because we speak the same language (Ghanaian) but he was on leave so I saw Dr XX, I did not like the way he spoke to me, I would describe it as uncaring. I would like to see a comment/suggestion box in the surgery	Male	Black	35-44
I am hypertensive and get regular check-ups, whereby blood has to be taken for tests. Having blood taken from some other places is rather troublesome and I would prefer blood samples be taken at the clinic itself	Male	Black	35-44
here with 3 kids for flu jab, definite improvement from previous practice, children have asthma so regular at surgery. would like blood testing facility here, and a lot of people I know would like the same	Female	Black	35-44
likes look of new place, feels the DR s are not always available when phones for appointment, may have to wait 2 weeks sometimes. not happy with the service, sometimes appointments get cancelled even when the hospital makes an appt.	Female	Black	35-44
new facility is a relief, service is usually quite quick, can usually get appointment same day and it is easily accessible and close to home. Would like to see more female Drs here, majority are male and not always asked if you would prefer male or female, it would be helpful to have that choice	Female	Black	35-44
Generally very happy with the surgery, but 2 weeks ago I came to the surgery with a pre-booked appointment for 2:30pm. I was 15 minutes early. I was told to sit down but waited 45 minutes after not being seen. The woman who told me to sit down had left and someone else told me I had to be re-booked because I'd missed my appointment. She apologised when she realised the mistake. Not a big deal. Bought 6 year old son to see Dr XX because of a chronic problem with dry eyes which itch and tear excessively. While telling the doc tor about my son's problems, Dr XX said to me, "this is not a car Mot. Just tell me one problem" I was very shocked and found her very rude. I and my wife took my son and left. Ever since then I refused to see this doctor even if she is the only doctor available.	Male	Other	35-44

Comment	Gender	Ethnicity	Age group
The phone system is a vast improvement on the previous one, usually only wait a few days. Hours have improved, no grumbles	Female	Other	35-44
first time at practice and like the look of it, here for a midwifery appointment	Female	Other	35-44
happy with the new surgery building and hope it will also improve the doctors Prefers Dr XX the best in the surgery, she investigates more and I hope the others will now do the same	Male	Other	35-44
Have been with surgery for over 12 years and had a difficult history with them, misdiagnosis and late diagnosis, resulting in long term health problems and the death of one of my children. Had a growth in bowel that was over looked, despite passing blood per rectum and severe weight loss. 17mth old daughter complained of a headache and was sent home and later died of a haemorrhage. I feel the surgery has improved in the last 1-2 years but I choose to attend A&E if my or my children's symptoms are serious for fear of further misdiagnosis. I would like to see clinicians listening more and gave practical support - e.g. she had no idea of practicalities when her daughter died and could have used support. It was only 8 months after daughters death that I was referred for counselling. I was given drugs for her bowel issues which I was allergic to and ended up in hospital with a blood clot on the lungs. I still have problems today	Female	White	35-44
the staff is very helpful and attentive. I always get the appointments on time and I'm very happy with the service	Female	White	35-44
always very helpful here, likes Dr Margaret, feels confident with her and prefers to see her but all doctors excellent	Male	White	35-44
Very unhappy with appointment service. It takes weeks to get an appointment. A few weeks ago she was 6 months pregnant with a girl. She developed pains and smelly discharge. GP sent her to midwife but midwife referred her back to GP so she couldn't get an appointment with anyone. She called the GP for 5 days; was never seen and then miscarried her baby. Some time ago her son developed a skin condition. Dr XX prescribed a topical cream which the mother felt was not working although Dr XX insisted. Mum took her son home for 4 weeks to Czech Republic. While there she saw a doctor who was surprised that the cream was prescribed as it is for adults not kids. Was given another treatment and condition improved. Mothers prescription for high blood pressure was delayed. Patient feels some doctors here are very good but others very bad.	Female	White	35-44

Comment	Gender	Ethnicity	Age group
Blood test clinic would be good, my (LD) son doesn't like to go to Langthorne -prefers having the Dr take it. I've been with GP for 30 years. Prescription service is variable - sometimes good/bad. Need to collect after 2 weeks	Female	Asian	45-54
New premises are a big improvement. There is difficulty getting an appointment with Dr XX and I would prefer to see him for the continuity but you can wait for a week or more for an appointment with him. Telephone no, is much better now not 0844. getting to Langthorne Clinic in a wheelchair is a mission	Male	Asian	45-54
not happy with writing out own detail for prescription because has to have so many different pills etc. Feels this is a burden - has to wait here a long time. phones for appointments and doesn't have to wait too long	Female	Asian	45-54
Drs should take more care of the patients and take their problems seriously. should have a comments box in surgery	Female	Asian	45-54
very happy with the service, feel I can talk to all of them and they give me enough time, the DRs attitude here is good, which is the most important thing.	Female	Asian	45-54
This woman feels very strongly that there are no services set up to specifically support the afro-Caribbean community. She feels that other cultures are much better represented and she feels her culture's needs are severely overlooked.	Female	Black	45-54
She has been attending this surgery for over 20 + years. She finds the appointment system terrible; it takes ages for them to pick up the phone and when they do the available appointments are a week or two away. She also dislikes the system of ringing at 8am or 2pm to try to set an appointment that day. She suggested an online booking system and also thought that telephone consultations would be a useful way to help patients access the surgery. Also said appointments are always running late, but if she's late sometimes she is told that she can't be seen.	Female	Black	45-54
First visit to new surgery. Only had to wait 2 days for appt. Would like kind and helpful DR and staff.	Male	Other	45-54
First time at the new surgery, it's a nuisance to wait for an appointment, I couldn't get one in the morning and so have to get here at 2pm to try again. Dr Margaret seems nice ; don't mind who I see. I would like a blood clinic here, it would be nicer and more convenient than going to Langthorne	Female	White	45-54

Comment	Gender	Ethnicity	Age group
attended with sisters, have COPD, diabetes and MH issues, sisters feel that it takes a lot of effort at the surgery to get the appropriate services for their sister.	Female	White	45-54
Been here twice previously at old surgery, this is much better. appointment system is good, usually same day. I have Crohn's disease so would like to see all necessary services offered here. I see Dr XX, he's a bit grumpy	Female	White	45-54
newish patient to surgery, old place very damp and unkempt and had to wait to be seen in tiny reception area. New place is clean tidy and spacious, and reception area has a well mannered and well spoken staff. I was seen within 3 hrs of calling for appointment and the service appears to be very much improved. I was able to make further appointment within a week and I am pleased so far	Female	White	45-54
It is a very nice building, the service is good, I'm grateful for that	Female	Not stated	45-54
Spoke primarily to Paul's carer. Paul is autistic. The carer has been attending this surgery for about 5 years. She finds that it is a brilliant GP surgery with staff who are very accommodating and supportive of special needs patients	Male	Not stated	45-54
I have been with the surgery a few months and had positive experiences here. I am not happy about the 0844 no and was not aware that it has recently changed.	Male	Asian	55-64
came with carer for 11.30am appointment but mix up between surgery and employer, it was actually at 11am. Reception was very helpful in resolving the issue and rearranged so I could be seen today.	Male	Asian	55-64
I don't like the receptionists wearing uniforms, it feels like a business and make them appear less caring. If this is a business it seems they want people to remain sick. Receptionist on phone also.	Male	Asian	55-64
I feel very happy at the new surgery, the reception staff are friendly and work hard to get me an appt. as a wheelchair user I would like it if all the clinics I need could be in one place	Female	Black	55-64
The surgery was quite helpful when I came to see the GP, presently I find the service quite helpful	Female	Black	55-64
have chronic illness and here for same day appt. Happy here but it took ages on waiting list for op on knee, would like a home visit service to be developed	Male	Black	55-64
could get blood test in old surgery but have to go to Langthorne now, I would like to have it done here, they usually mess it up at Langthorne	Male	Black	55-64

Comment	Gender	Ethnicity	Age group
Been here for 12 years there's only 1 male Dr and I would often I'd prefer to see a male. Dr XX is often on his holiday. I am frustrated and would like more patient choice. having major problems 1.5 years ago and asked for a scan, it came back clear. I was told by Dr XX that I had wasted govt money by getting the scan. I had severe pains in back and neck for several years which Dr wouldn't treat. I went to hospital with pain and they told me I had arthritis and had had for about 8 years.	Male	Other	55-64
Blood test previously done in surgery but now have to go to Langthorne. It was a crumpled old surgery, so this looks a good improvement but I will reserve judgement. It's my first visit to the new surgery, the phone was answered very quickly - it's good they changed from the 0844 number. It was possible to make appointment for bloods with nurse at old surgery, which I liked.	Female	White	55-64
signed up a week ago, choose it as close to home and it was very easy to sign up	Female	White	55-64
This is my first appointment, but reception staff seem very nice, they called to confirm appt. I chose to register here because it is a convenient location. I don't use the GP unless it is really necessary.	Female	Not stated	55-64
Been attending for 6 weeks. Very unhappy with the appointment system. Had to wait two weeks just to get an appointment with the nurse today. Still haven't been able to see the doctor. On leaving the surgery today, she tried to get an appointment only to be told again to ring tomorrow at 8 am or 2 pm.	Female	Not stated	55-64
Came to see Dr on Thurs and forgot name of prescription. Came back Friday to pick up prescription and part got lost, when he went to chemist it wasn't there, had a row at the reception. Here for an appointment and running 25mins late wants to see rheumatologist and Dr is writing a letter of referral. Feels the service is generally good here though there is one Dr he is not happy with and doesn't want to see. Came in for a flu jab today	Male	Asian	65-74
My grandson(9 years) was sent home from school at 11:30am with ear-ache, was told to phone back after 2pm- finally got through at 2:15pm to be told no appointments - go to casualty. They were home at midnight, it was tonsillitis. Now on antibiotics. (They should be obliged to look after children, not turn them away)	Female	Black	65-74
I'm happy with the surgery overall and have no negative feedback	Female	Black	65-74

Comment	Gender	Ethnicity	Age group
very good Drs, reception staff very nice. I'm very happy with the current appointment system and can't think of any improvements. Langthorne, I use the blood clinic, good service and very accessible, so no difference to me is there was a blood clinic here	Male	Black	65-74
Been attending the surgery with his wife and children for 9 years. They are very happy with the surgery and with setting appointments. He seemed quite fond of Dr Samuel.	Male	Black	65-74
came to see Dr and can't get passed receptionists, appointment system is very inflexible but the care is good when you get an appt. I would prefer a drop in system and no triage from receptionists	Male	White	65-74
Pleasant, nice and clean and staff are good. I get on well with the DRs and will happily see who ever is available. It's "tip top"	Male	White	65-74
Drs are alright and I will see whoever is available though I would prefer a female GP. Reception staff are very good and lovely. It feels very fresh and clean, you won't catch anything in here! I don't like the phone menu system, I would prefer phone was answered by person straight away. I go to Whipps X for the diabetes nurse but have to go to Loughton to see the specialist. It is a cramped building and not very nice, I go for a twice yearly appointment there. I feel pushed out of Whipps for diabetes treatment.	Female	White	65-74
doesn't like appointment system, phoning at 8am or 2pm, would like more times when its possible to make appointment, but it is clean and nice here in new building	Male	White	65-74
having severe difficulty getting an appointment, particularly after introduction of a new appointment system, ring in at 8am and the lines are often busy, by the time you get through the appointments are all gone. This is especially hard as I am 70 years old, I have been told to return at 2pm for an appointment today but I need a BP reading and can't see the GP to get it. I was able to get a flu jab appointment today with the nurse, which is positive but the GP appointments are much harder to get.	Female	Not stated	65-74
Been with the surgery for 13 years. They know her and she feels they take care of her. However, she lives in a bedsit on her own in need of a care package but has no idea how to access one. She is vulnerable and afraid and wishes to be near her daughter in Hackney.	Female	Asian	75-84

Comment	Gender	Ethnicity	Age group
Getting an appointment is difficult, I don't like being told to come back at 2pm and having to wait excessively for an appointment, there are problems with the phone . [30/9 phone system down due to repair - people having to come to surgery to book] Had a problem with catarrh for 2 years, was told it was a viral infection and nothing could be done about it	Male	White	75-84
happy here, likes Drs, except one, doesn't like that can't ask for choice of Dr but is happy with Dr Alex. here due to incorrect prescription, so had to come back to surgery. There have been problems with getting everything on prescription altogether	Female	White	75-84
used to go to old practice and is such a nice improvement here, come for flu injection	Female	Other	85+
There is no clock in reception, but the environment is much improved on the old surgery. There is an easy appointment system. I used to get my bloods taken by the GP, I assume they will do that here as well.	Female	Asian	not stated
I would like to see water available for patients so they have something while they wait	Male	Asian	not stated
registering with surgery, after a recommendation from friend	Male	Black	not stated
appointment times are difficult to obtain on the same date of asking, waiting time on the phone are too long, don't like not being able to discuss more than 1 problem at a time with the GP and would like more personal interest to be shown by GP. Staff can be quite helpful	Female	Black	not stated
newly arrived in area, recommended by relative, first visit but pleased with everything, feel well looked after and treated.	Female	Other	not stated

Appendix 2: Comments from Harrow Road Surgery

Glossary

A&E - Accident and Emergency centre at the hospital

CQC - Care Quality Commission

FFT - Friends and Family Test, a feedback tool used in the NHS to gather opinion from patients on their experiences of services

GP Patient satisfaction survey - The GP Patient Survey is an independent survey run by Ipsos MORI on behalf of NHS England. The survey is sent out to over a million people across the UK. The results show how people feel about their GP practice

PPG - Patient Participation Group