

Sunday GP appointments unlikely to meet patient needs

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Sunday GP appointments are unlikely to meet the needs of patients - according to a new report from the University of East Anglia.

New research on weekend GP opening published today in the *British Journal of General Practice* reveals the views of more than 800,000 patients.

The study found that four out of five people are happy with traditional GP opening times and that weekend appointments are wanted most by

younger, working people.

It also finds that while Saturday appointments are preferable for those who find week-day appointments inconvenient, just 2 per cent would only be able to attend an appointment on a Sunday. This suggests that Saturday opening, but not Sunday, would meet most people's needs.

Lead researcher Dr John Ford, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, said: "Weekend working in primary care is a flagship policy of the UK government. Their plan is that by 2020, people will have access to GPs seven days a week.

"Some argue that it will reduce pressure on hospitals, while others say that it is unaffordable and mismatched with what patients need.

"We wanted to identify who would benefit from the policy and the difference between Saturday and Sunday opening."

The research team from UEA and the University of Oxford used data from the national 2014 General Practice Patient Survey (GPPS). Surveys were sent to sample patients from all 8,011 practices in England, and more than 800,000 people responded.

Key findings:

- The majority of people (81 per cent) did not find traditional GP opening times inconvenient.
- 15 per cent said that weekend opening would make it easier for them to see a doctor. Of these, 74 per cent preferred Saturday opening, 35 per cent Sunday and 33 per cent Saturday or Sunday.
- Only 2 per cent would only be able to attend an appointment on a Sunday at the weekend.
- Younger people, those in full time work or those with certain

long term conditions are more likely to use a weekend service.

- People with dementia, learning difficulties, problems with walking or dressing, or poor quality of life are less likely to want weekend opening.

Dr Ford said: "We found that most people do not think they need weekend opening - but it may benefit certain patient groups such as younger people in fulltime work, and with certain long-term conditions. We found that people with angina, diabetes, hypertension, long-term neurological problems, arthritis, back problems, asthma, kidney or liver disease and cancer are most likely to use a weekend service.

"Some weekend opening pilots have already begun to show that there is a lack of demand on Sundays, and our findings suggest that Sunday opening, in addition to Saturday, would be unlikely to improve access.

"Another key problem is that many practices do not currently have capacity to provide weekend opening in addition to weekday services. This means that a reduction in weekday services would be necessary - which could actually reduce access for patients who find it easier to see their GP during the traditional working week."

'Weekend Opening in Primary Care: Analysis of the General Practice Patient Survey' is published in the *British Journal of General Practice* on November 6, 2015.

More information: *British Journal of General Practice*,
bjgp.org/content/early/2015/11/05/bjgp15X687673

Provided by University of East Anglia

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