

Seven-day GP service not most important to patients

March 8 2016, by Elizabeth Allen



Access to GP services seven days a week is not the factor considered most important by patients when assessing their doctor's surgery, a new study of more than 170 practices in the UK has found.

In a survey to determine what aspects of NHS GP care [patients](#) most value and how well patients' surgeries are performing, extensive opening hours were rated as one of the least important elements.

Other items ranked among the least important were doctors knowing about the patient's living situation; short waiting times; doctors asking about other possible problems; and the proximity of the practice to the patient's house, researchers from the University of Lincoln, UK, found.

Areas where respondents believed the performance of the GP service could be improved included patients knowing how to access out of hours appointments; ease of getting appointments; patients feeling able to cope with a health problem after a consultation; being involved in treatment decisions made by the doctor and being asked about other possible problems; and reducing time pressures on consultations.

Data was gathered from two surveys featuring the same 15 questions but assessing different aspects of care. One examined what patients thought were the most important aspects of GP services, while the other asked patients to rate the performance of the primary care they received.

The data was compared using Importance Performance Analysis (IPA), a method that simultaneously represents data on importance and performance of a service, enabling identification of its strengths and weaknesses.

Lead researcher Dr Coral Sirdifield, from the University of Lincoln's School of Health and Social Care, said: "These findings offer a real insight into the aspects of GP services which are considered the most important by patients and how those aspects marry up with the actual experiences patients have at GP surgeries. This information can help Clinical Commissioning Groups to determine which aspects of care they need to focus on to provide a service which is both deliverable and suits the needs of the patients.

"Areas relating to GP surgery access such as extensive opening hours, practice proximity and short waiting times were given higher rankings based on what the patients actually experienced, but were not rated as highly when it came to how important they were to patients. This suggests that focusing on these areas is less likely to increase patient satisfaction, and the Government's drive for seven-day general practice is not what patients in this survey valued most."

Five attributes were ranked as very important, while also receiving high performance ratings. These were the doctor having the patient's medical records at hand; knowing important information about the patient's background; listening carefully to their concerns; being polite; and reception staff being polite and helpful.

Almost 1,500 patients from 174 GP practices across the East Midlands, South Yorkshire and East of England provided the data. The findings are published in the journal Family Practice today.

Provided by University of Lincoln

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