



Appointment Survey Summer 2022

Introduction

In July 2022 we invited patients to give their opinion regarding the Practice's appointment system. This included asking for people's preferences with methods of booking, types and times of appointments as well as the opportunity to give comments. We had 247 respondents.

Q1. Last time you needed an appointment were you able to get one at the Surgery?

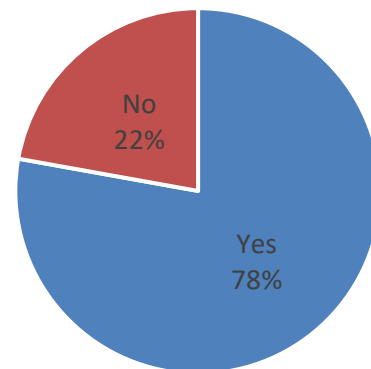
230 people answered this question.

Yes	179 (78%)
No	51 (22%)

Whilst the majority of patients were able to get an appointment when they needed one, over 20% were unable to.

We need to understand what happened with these patients. Did they seek help from alternative services (Eg the walk in centre) or did they leave their problem unresolved.

This would be a useful metric to re-evaluate after making any changes to our system.



Q2. How do you usually book appointments?

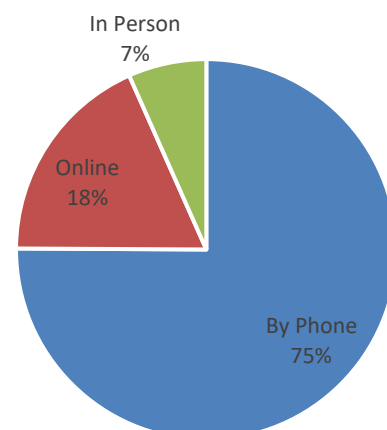
245 people answered this question (some booking via multiple methods)

By Phone	210
Online	39
In Person	19

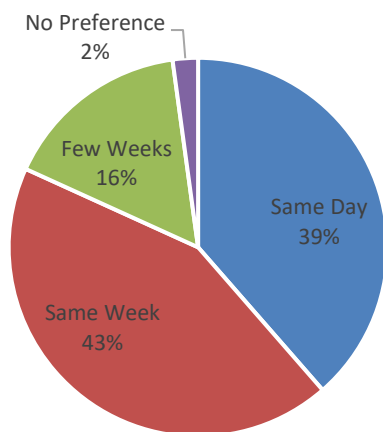
Majority of patients (92%) still book by phone. To be expected as this primary way appointments released at present system.

22% of total patients are able to book online, but the practice could promote this further.

This is a trade-off as unable to signpost people who book online to other resources/healthcare professionals.



Q3. How far ahead would you like to be able to book?



246 people answered this question (some with more than one preference)

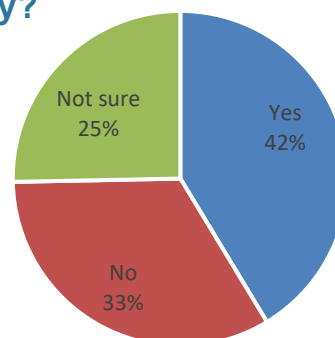
Same Day	125
Same Week	140
Few Weeks	52
No Preference	7

These responses suggest that whilst 39% of people are happy to call on the day a need an appointment, there is a greater proportion (43%) that would appreciate the convenience of calling for an appointment any time that week.

Q4. Would you like to be able to book further in advance at the cost finding it harder to get an appointment on the day?

237 people answered this question.

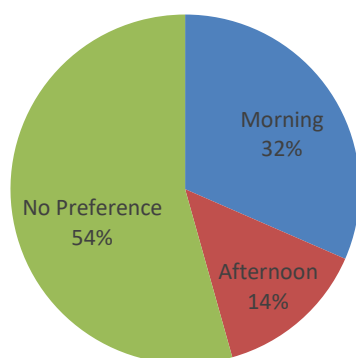
Yes	98 (41%)
No	79 (33%)
Not Sure	25 (25%)



This is a difficult question for patients to answer, and the spread of responses reflects the complexity of the problem of managing demand with limited resources

Q5. What time of day do you prefer your appointments?

241 people answered this question.



Morning	76
Afternoon	34
No Preference	131

The majority of people do not seem to have a preference for the time of their appointment, with a leaning towards morning appointments within those that do.

This meets with our current model and timings for contacting patients.

Q6. Last time you booked an appointment was it...?

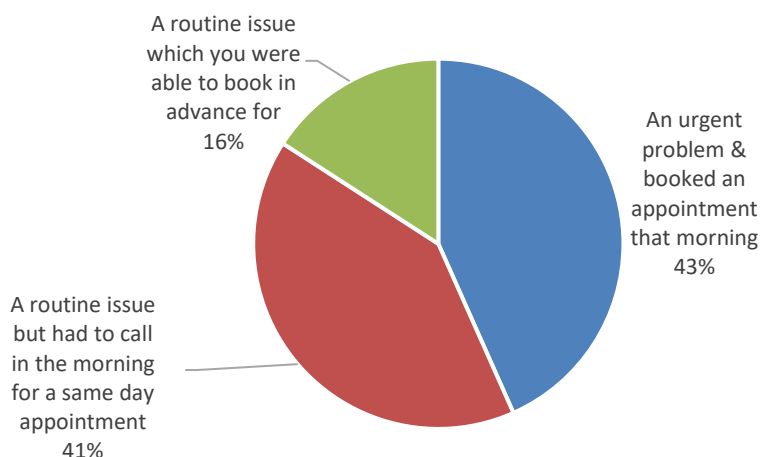
233 people answered this question.

An urgent problem & booked an appointment that morning	101 (43%)
A routine issue but had to call in the morning for a same day appointment	95 (41%)
A routine issue which you were able to book in advance for	37 (16%)

A combined percentage of 57% of people contacted us with an issue they considered routine.

This is at odds with our current system of treating all contacts as urgent on-the-day problems.

This was changed to preserve capacity and safety at the cost of convenience and accessibility for routine problems.



Clearly there is a demand that this ratio be adjusted to meet the needs of patients with important, but non urgent issues. The practice must consider what proportion of appointments to release in advance, what to keep for acute problems and what service we offer when all appointments have gone and we are at capacity.

Q7. Who was your last appointment with?

239 people answered this question

GP	186
ANP	18
Nurse	29
Other	6

The vast majority of patients see a GP. This reflects not only our approximate workforce balance, but also the nature of booking appointments. The practice tends to initiate contact with patients for Nurse appointments, whereas patients book an appointment with our GPs (and ancillary staff to a lesser extent)

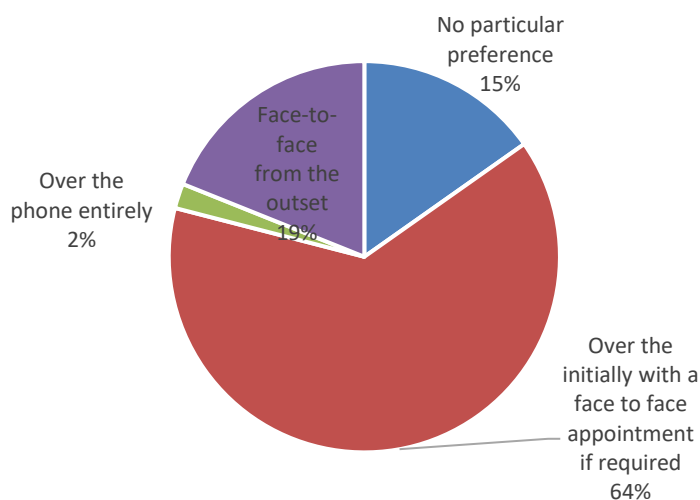
Q8. What is preferred format of consultation?

243 people answered this question.

No particular preference	37 (15%)
Over the initially with a face to face appointment if required	155 (64%)
Over the phone entirely	5 (2%)
Face-to-face from the outset	46 (19%)

64% of people seem to prefer the way we are operating with the majority of our appointments system at the moment (over the phone in the first instance) with a further 17% not being against it.

This does mean elements of this are likely to remain in the long run, but we should make plans to accommodate the 19% of people who prefer to be able to book in without having a phone conversation first.

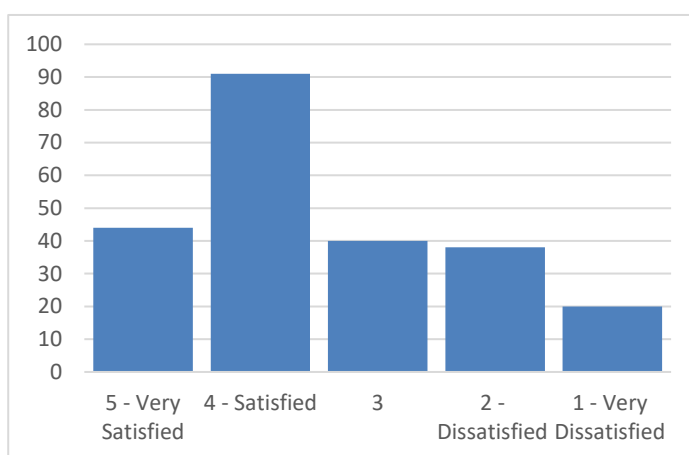


Q9. What is your overall satisfaction of appointments system?

233 people answered this question.

5 - Very Satisfied	44 (19%)
4 - Satisfied	91 (39%)
3	40 (17%)
2 - Dissatisfied	38 (16%)
1 - Very Dissatisfied	20 (9%)

Overall 58% of people are satisfied with the current system, however 25% would like to see some improvements.

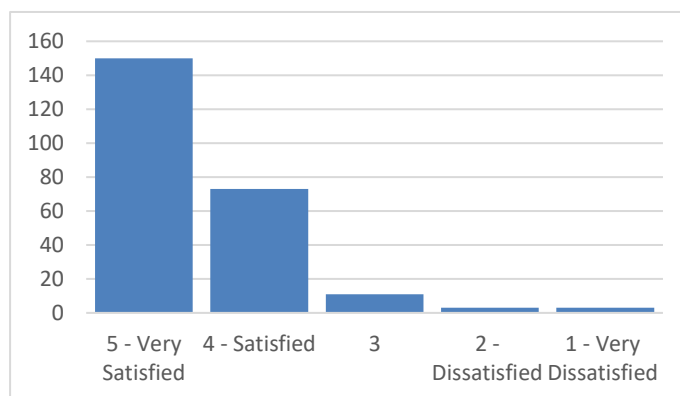


Q10. Setting the booking process aside, were you satisfied with your consultation?

240 people answered this question.

5 - Very Satisfied	150 (63%)
4 - Satisfied	73 (30%)
3	11 (5%)
2 - Dissatisfied	3 (1%)
1 - Very Dissatisfied	3 (1%)

It is very encouraging to see such a high proportion of people satisfied with their consultations.



Whilst we would like 0% of people to be dissatisfied with our service, we can't always meet people's expectations but have robust procedures in place to review every reported instance of dissatisfaction.

Q11. Any other comments or suggestions regarding our appointment system?

We received many useful comments and ideas for the appointment system and they broadly fit into several themes. Example comments are highlighted in **bold** below.

Themes and learning

Thank you, I think the system works really well, and the online option is great too. You do a fab job in challenging times, and I'm very grateful for the friendly efficiency of your staff.

I always get an appointment when I want one. This surgery is the only one of three I've been part of where that has been possible. I can see the benefits of being able to book in advance to fit around shift work or schooling; but this doesn't affect me.

Current system, (whereby it is difficult even to get through on phone to receptionist) pressures the patient to almost self-diagnose before speaking with a GP. Waiting for a GP to return a call can be tricky.

Overall patients are happy with the appointment system, and we received more positive comments than unconstructive criticism. There is certainly some room for improvement which we hope to work towards in the themes below, but generally people are appreciative of the pressures the practice is under and satisfied with the service.

The 8 AM rush

The main and expected frustration patients have is the 8am rush for an appointment.

The stress involved in trying to get through to make an appointment at 8am is ridiculous. I often have to press redial well over 100 times to be told I'm 42nd in the queue.

Your current system does not suit working parents who are usually very busy at 8am which seems to be the only time it is possible to discuss a possible appointment!

Once, at spot on 8.00am there were 52 people ahead of me on the phone, next day 21. I know you're doing your best but I'm getting older and finding it all so stressful.

Patients are often surprised to find themselves in a large queue (although being told their position is an appreciated new feature.) and find this difficult, particularly if they have children or need to travel to work. It is especially frustrating if a patient waits for a long time on hold, only to be told all the appointments have gone, which they invariably do due to high demand.

We have investigated a message which switches on at this point explaining that all available appointments have been booked, but it would not be possible for patients already in the queue to hear this. It would also potentially stop a patient with an emergency problem (which we have an on call doctor to deal with) contacting us and coming to harm, and remove a chance for our receptionists to signpost to other services.

However, we can try to reduce the number of patients calling at 8 am, by serving their needs at other times and for other methods.

Many people the people calling at 8am (~40% of our sample) are actually calling trying to book a routine appointment, but have been directed by our process to call at 8am.

Patients report being very pleased with the improvements to the queuing system so that they have an idea of where they are in the queue.

Urgent vs routine

The Surgery must always strike a balance between advance booking and keeping appointments for release each day for urgent issues. The more we hold back for daily booking, the more flexible we can be at the cost of patient convenience and increased call queuing at 8am.

However, the risk with opening up too many for advance booking is that these all book up and we are faced with the same problem of not enough appointments on a day but with less urgent appointments. This could potentially lead to our emergency on call doctor being overwhelmed and patient safety compromised.

I feel like the system for calling on the morning and getting an appointment would be better for urgent problems. Most of the time my issue can wait a couple of days but there is no way of getting an appointment for later in the week. It's also difficult to book appointments around work and school if you don't know when you are going to be seen or get a call. Being able to book an actual appointment at a set time is much better for those who are working or who have school aged children who need to be seen.

Sometimes I want an appointment at the evening or weekends for non urgent things. Other times I will need a more urgent on the day appointment. If it is non urgent I want to be able to attend when not working. If urgent I will take any time.

I think there should be a provision to book non-urgent appointments in advance. I think the calling/booking online on the day still works well for emergency/urgent appointments.

We therefore must consider what percentage of our finite number of appointments we open up for advance booking. Several questions of our survey related to this, and many comments asked for this ratio to be adjusted.

41% of people had to go through the process of calling back at 8am, when they could have potentially booked their routine appointment at the time or online. 41% of people also said that they would like to be able to book further in advance. When include those who were able to book one of our currently fairly limited advance booking appointments almost 60% of patients contacting us were for issues they considered routine.

Booking methods & reception triage

Another strategy to reduce the 8am phone queue is to encourage people to book their appointments online.

Booking online via an app or website allows patients to see all of the available appointments and select one with a GP of their choice. This is currently the same pool of appointments the receptionists are using each day.

However, avoiding speaking with a receptionist does deprive the patient of opportunity to be 'care navigated'. Care Navigation is the process where a receptionist asks the patient a few details as to the nature of their call and can offer a patient appointments with clinicians other than GPs, for example physiotherapists, pharmacists, paramedics, physician associates etc .

This frees up GP appointments to be booked by other patients. We currently do this to some extent, (reflected in the survey questions “who was your last appointment with) but this is likely to increase as these roles develop and grow.

I would just like to ring up make an appointment. Without all this triage thing. Explaining to all sundry what is wrong. May as well use Google

I know it maybe necessary but I find it difficult informing reception about the reason for an appointment.

Receptionists are for the most part very sympathetic and helpful but the system lets them down, encouraging poor patient behaviour due to exasperation, pain and discomfort or even fear.

Some patients expressed hesitation about what they perceive as untrained receptionists making medical decisions, but this is not what care navigation is and confidence needs to be built for both patients and receptionists.

There may be opportunity for more advanced online triage tools in the future, but it is unclear on their functionality and links to our clinical system. These often seem to be ‘all in’ where everyone has to use this for all types of appointments, which we trialled last year with limited success.

We should continue to promote online access, especially when offering routine appointments. We would like to open up other clinicians to be booked online, but they require special knowledge of what is appropriate to book with them.

Appointment types

The majority of patients are happy to receive a call, with the reassurance for a face to face appointment if required, 20% of patients had a preference for a face to face appointment from the outset, and we had several comments in alignment with this.

Would be better to see someone face to face when required, instead of awaiting a phone call to be contacted anytime, as I have missed calls from them with working at the hospital having to have my phone on vibrate status and needed that appointment on that day.

Would like to be able to book face to face. rather than Dr decide that f2f is necessary

Changes to be implemented in response to this survey

- Release of half of all GP appointments to be bookable in advance
- Pre-bookable appointments are available as either a phone call or face to face consultation at patients’ preference. (Same day to continue to be telephone calls in the first instance for now)
- Try to spread distribution of calls via a message on the phone system asking patients to call at different times (Eg for results in the afternoon)
- Continue to promote online services to reduce number of calls at 8am.
- Build both patient and reception team confidence in care navigating.