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IMPROVING GP
BOOKINGS IN
LONDON



ANDREW BOFF
GLA CONSERVATIVES
GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The demand for general practice care has been continually increasing for a number of years – with general practitioners (GPs) now seeing 340 million patients annually across the UK. In London alone, patient consultations have doubled over the last decade¹.

Working Londoners have fewer choices of and access to GP appointments than London residents who are not employed and who are able to opt for appointment times throughout the working day.

On the NHS Choices website in 2014 a patient at an East London surgery commented:

“If you don’t work you’ll have no problems with this surgery, however if you’re an actual contributing member of society, you either have to give them a month’s notice to be ill, get an emergency appointment for everything or forego all routine medical care e.g. cervical smear etc. Horrendous place, not improving, in fact it has got progressively worse in the last 3 years.”²

This report seeks to resolve the issue of the inequality experienced by working Londoners who currently have fewer choices open to them when they seek to consult a GP. It recommends:

1. That the GP appointments system be broadened to permit Londoners to make an on-line appointment booking at any London GP Surgery extending patient choice and avoiding over-long waits.
2. Alternatively, that the possibility of patients being able to register at two GP surgeries, one near home and one near to their workplace, be considered in order to give working Londoners more flexibility in booking appointments without losing work time whilst ensuring continuity of care.
3. That all London GP surgeries consider offering on-line appointment booking.
4. That London GP surgeries consider holding walk-in surgeries limited to patients registered at that surgery, replacing some appointment slots, early and late in the day, so that working Londoners who do wish to see a GP where they are registered are able to do so without sacrificing a day’s work. This would also reduce missed appointments.

1. Access to GP care, London Assembly, March 2015 - https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_migrate_files_destination/FINAL%20Access%20to%20GP%20care%20report_1.pdf

2. [http://www.nhs.uk/Services/GP/ReviewsAndRatings/DefaultView.aspx?id=40793&pageno=2&sorttype=5&subject=All subjects](http://www.nhs.uk/Services/GP/ReviewsAndRatings/DefaultView.aspx?id=40793&pageno=2&sorttype=5&subject=All%20subjects)

INTRODUCTION

The most recent Census showed that London was the fastest growing region across England and Wales, with the population increasing by 12 per cent between 2001 and 2011. The Census also showed that 19 of the most densely populated local authorities were located in London – with Islington, for example, having 13,873 people per square kilometre³.

In February 2015, the Mayor of London confirmed that London is now home to more than 8.6 million people, with the latest projections estimating that the city will be home to 11 million people by 2050⁴.

The demand for general practice care has been continually increasing for a number of years – with general practitioners (GPs) now seeing 340 million patients annually across the UK. In London alone, patient consultations have doubled over the last decade⁵.

However, while 70 per cent of people consider their GP to be offering appointments at a convenient time – 50 per cent of people found no appointments were available for the day they wanted, and 19 per cent found that there were no appointments for the time of day they required⁶.

A patient at a North London surgery in September 2015 said:

“Avoid at all cost! Absolutely horrible service. These people are really irresponsible and clearly do not care about your health. Not only it is impossible to get an appointment but when you do get one it is likely that they’ll keep you waiting and eventually say that they can’t see you. They keep losing my files and every time I go I have to explain my whole story because they don’t know who I am.”

Posted on 28 September 2015

Such difficulty in arranging appointments which suit the patient will often result in individuals having to take time off work. It can often be hard to reconcile the demands of many jobs, particularly those which are hourly paid, with the ability to secure a GP appointment.

A comment in September 2014 about an East London surgery on NHS Choices:

“If you don’t work you’ll have no problems with this surgery, however if you’re an actual contributing member of society, you either have to give them a month’s notice to be ill, get an emergency appointment

3. Census result shows increase in population of London as it tops 8 million, Office for National Statistics, July 2012 - <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mro/news-release/census-result-shows-increase-in-population-of-london-as-it-tops-8-million/censuslondonnr0712.html>

4. London population confirmed at record high, Mayor of London, February 2015 - <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/london-population-confirmed-at-record-high>

5. Access to GP care, London Assembly, March 2015 - https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_migrate_files_destination/FINAL%20Access%20to%20GP%20care%20report_1.pdf

6. GP patient survey, NHS England, July 2015 - <https://gp-patient.co.uk/surveys-and-reports#july-2015> – (Accessed on November 2015)

for everything or forego all routine medical care e.g. cervical smear etc. Horrendous place, not improving, in fact it has got progressively worse in the last 3 years.”

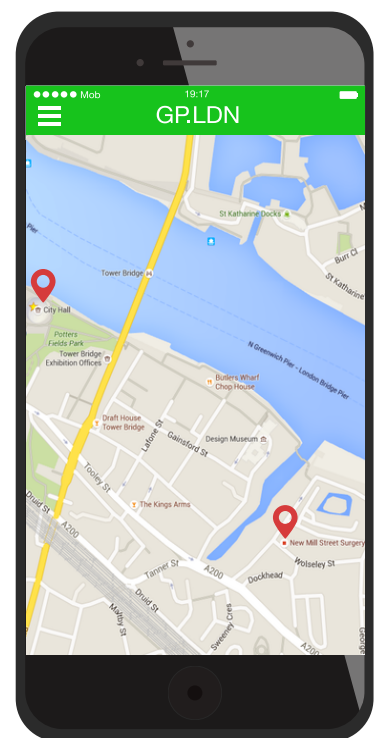
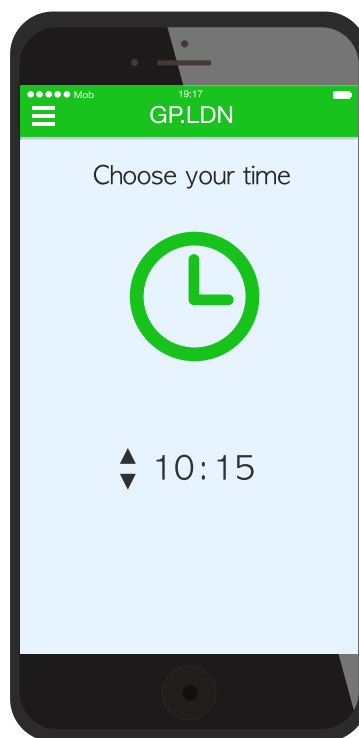
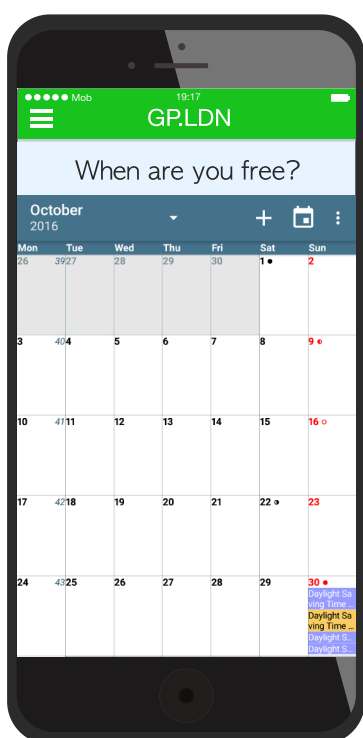
It is evident that those finding it difficult to get an appointment which fits with their working life find that the system is unequally slanted against the working population of London.

Inequality can take many forms and is not always immediately recognisable. Working Londoners have much narrower choices of and access to GP appointments than London residents who are not employed and who are able to opt for appointment times throughout the working day. This report seeks to resolve the issue of the inequality experienced by working Londoners who currently have fewer choices open to them when they seek to consult a GP.

GP APPOINTMENTS

The system of GP surgeries has been around for a long time and now is the time to radically rethink how appointments are managed. With the advance of the internet and automated booking and record systems, why not consider the possibility of making an appointment via the internet with a doctor anywhere in London converting the capital into one large, flexible group surgery at the service of Londoners?

This would mean that working Londoners could attend for an appointment near their work during lunch hours or before or after work bringing flexibility and choice to the system. If companies such as Expedia and Booking.com allow the consumer to access hotel room booking systems throughout the world surely it cannot be impossible to set up a system permitting patients to book GP appointments in London with a simple website with drop-down menu choices?



A significant number of GP branches in London, already provide the option to book and cancel appointments online.⁷ Surely it is time for the remaining branches to follow suit and modernise their service for the benefit of Londoners?

The NHS is already moving in this direction with its Wave One Pilots. In 2013 NHS England invited GP practices to apply to be one of the first Wave One Pilots. Over the country twenty schemes were selected including some in Barking and Dagenham, Southwark and North West London.

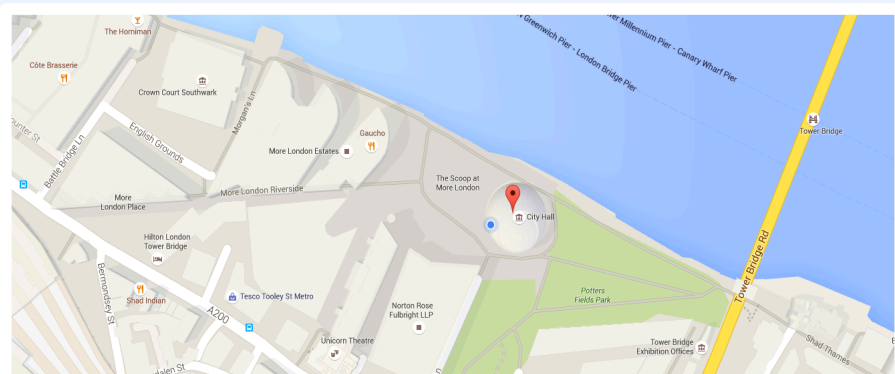
In North West London, GP practices are coming together to deliver services as provider networks. This is improving access to primary care for patients across eight CCGs. Over 1.4m patients are already benefiting from extended access provided by almost 300 GP practices working together in provider networks. Network working has scaled up the number of patients able to benefit, through such initiatives as extended access hubs. By the end of March 2015, our expectation is that 2.1m residents will be able to benefit from improved access.

GPs in Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge have now launched three new access 'hubs' providing more than 700,000 patients with the opportunity to see a GP in the evenings between 6.30pm and 10pm without having to wait until the next day.⁸

GP.LDN

Find your closest GP

Postcode



HOME

FIND YOUR CLOSEST GP

FAQ

HELP

SITE MAP

7. <http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/GP/London/Results/4/-0.085/51.511/4/13136?distance=25&metricGroupId=317&ResultsOnPageValue=10&isNational=0>

8. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/futurenhs/pm-ext-access/wave-one/pm-about/>

In Southwark, 44 GP practices with 305,000 patients are offering additional access from 8 am till 8 pm seven days a week via new Extended Primary Care Service hubs “neighbourhood groups of practices”⁹.

*The Fund is supporting 44 practices covering 305,000 patients to provide better access to primary care services to the population of Southwark; offering additional levels of access from 8am-8pm, 7 days a week via new ‘Extended Primary Care Service hubs’ delivered by neighbourhood groups of practices. Practices engaged and co-designed the service model with patient input – the pilot heard what patients told them was important and incorporated this into their service models and patient experience surveys.*¹⁰

*The pilot has implemented record and appointment sharing across the patch. This system has enabled the sharing of clinical information between general practice clinicians and the access clinic sites with patient’s consent. The outcome for patients is greater continuity of care and ongoing management of their condition.*¹¹

If the above schemes are already successful in selected areas of London across neighbouring Care Commissioning Groups, there appears to be no reason why it could not be set up for the whole of London, benefiting Londoners living in one area and working in another a considerable distance away enabling them to book an appointment with a doctor at a convenient place and time. It would be possible to book appointments near a workplace or near to a convenient interchange station on their way to or from work.

The screenshot shows the GP.LDN website interface. At the top left is the logo 'GP.LDN'. Below it is the heading 'Your nearest GPs'. A list of four GP practices is displayed, each with a rating, address, phone number, and opening hours. Each practice entry includes icons for 'Website', 'Directions', and 'Book'. A vertical navigation menu on the right side contains the following links: HOME, FIND YOUR CLOSEST GP, FAQ, HELP, and SITE MAP.

Practice Name	Rating	Address	Phone Number	Opening Hours
New Mill Street Surgery	3.4 ★★★★★ (6) - Doctor	0.4 mi - 1 Wolsey St	020 7252 1817	Open until 20:00
Blossoms Healthcare - London Bridge Private Do...	No reviews - Doctor	0.1 mi - 139 Tooley St	020 7489 1136	Open until 18:00
The Bermondsey & Lansdowne Medical Mission	3.5 ★★★★★ (11) - Clinic	0.5 mi - 6 Decima St	020 7403 3618	Open until 18:30
St Katharine Docks Practice	1 review - Medical Centre	0.5 mi - 50 Thomas More St	020 7488 3653	

9. www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/futurehhs/pm-ext-access/wave-one/pm-about/

10. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/futurehhs/pm-ext-access/wave-one/pm-about/>

11. Ibid

A majority of people in the UK (76 per cent) used the Internet every day in 2014 and 68 per cent used a mobile phone, portable computer and/or handheld device to access the internet “on the go”.¹² A large proportion of people now own smart phones and in 2012, 91 per cent of those aged 18-24 and 30 per cent of those aged 55 and above owned them.¹³ Internet access using a mobile phone rose between 2010 and 2014, from 24 per cent to 58 per cent.¹⁴

If online booking were available at all surgeries some of the pressure on telephone booking systems would be removed. This would enable easier access to the system both for those using the internet and for those without internet access who would continue to use the telephone system.

While, some patients would not wish to see a doctor outside their own practice, particularly the elderly and those with long-term conditions, there are occasions when a patient needs to see a doctor, any doctor, as soon as possible whilst not finding themselves in a situation where a visit to Accident and Emergency is appropriate. Someone finding a lump in a breast or suffering from urinary tract infection is unlikely to be too fussy about which doctor they consult, they merely need to find speedy medical advice and help.

Another possibility would be to allow Londoners to register at two GP surgeries in London – one at a practice near their home, as is the current position, and another at a surgery near to their workplace. This would give working patients more flexibility in arranging appointments without having to lose time at work and also give continuity of care where required.

WALK-IN SURGERIES

More walk-in GP surgeries replacing appointment slots early and late in the day could also increase the ability of working Londoners to see a doctor as an alternative to booking an appointment in advance anywhere in London. If the walk-in surgeries were not available to patients from other areas people would be able to see a doctor from their home practice whilst not suffering from appointment booking problems. It is not suggested that walk-in GP surgeries be open to patients registered at other practices as this could cause over-demand at some surgeries, particularly those near to commuter stations and other transport links.

MISSED APPOINTMENTS

An increase in GP walk-in surgeries could help to lower the number of missed appointments which some reports state currently cost the NHS millions.¹⁵ There have been suggestions of penalties for patients who miss appointments because of the numbers and lost money

12. http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_373584.pdf

13. Our Mobile Planet, Google, 2015 <http://think.withgoogle.com/mobileplanet/en/>

14. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit2/internet-access---households-and-individuals/2014/stb-ia-2014.html>

15. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3128894/61-000-patients-day-miss-GP-appointment-Lost-time-costs-NHS-300million-equivalent-year-s-work-1-300-doctors.html>

involved but, if patients cannot get through to a practice to cancel appointments, it is understandable that they eventually give up trying. It is all too easy to blame the patient rather than examine the shortcomings of the system and seek ways to improve it.

PATIENT SATISFACTION

Ratings for 1192 London GPs' surgeries with making an appointment show 250 (20.9%) received ratings where 40% of patients were dissatisfied with the appointments system. Ninety one surgeries scored levels between just 21.4% and 49.8%. There is wide variation in satisfaction levels with t booking between surgeries that are nearby. In London SE1, satisfaction levels with appointment booking ranged from 81% in one surgery to just 44.2% in another. In E1 satisfaction levels with appointments ranged from 79.8% at the high end to a low of 32.7%.

Regarding telephone contact, in the same surgeries 318 (26.7%) over 40% of patients were dissatisfied with the service and 168 surgeries scored satisfaction levels between 12.25% and 49.9%. Again there is a wide variation in levels between surgeries close to each other. In SE1 the highest satisfaction level regarding telephone contact was 73.8% and the lowest 23.36%.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION #1 - That the Mayor consider working with NHS England and London Clinical Commissioning Groups with the aim of ensuring that the GP appointments system be broadened to permit Londoners to make an on-line appointment booking at any London GP Surgery extending patient choice and avoiding over-long waits.

RECOMMENDATION #2 - Alternatively, that the possibility of patients being able to register at two GP surgeries, one near home and one near to their workplace, be considered in order to give working Londoners more flexibility in booking appointments without losing work time whilst ensuring continuity of care.

RECOMMENDATION #3 - That all London GP surgeries consider offering on-line appointment booking.

RECOMMENDATION #4 - That London GP surgeries consider holding walk-in surgeries limited to patients registered at that surgery, replacing some appointment slots, early and late in the day, so that working Londoners who do wish to see a GP where they are registered are able to do so without sacrificing a day's work. This would also reduce missed appointments.



FEEDBACK

Connect with us online and tell us what you thought about this paper.

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