



Greater North Kent – Summary of our reviews of the NHS GP Patient Survey results in 2021 and 2022

Introduction

Greater North Kent (GNK) was formed in 2021 and chose five priorities as the focus for its work – health, skills, infrastructure, culture, and climate action. On health, our attention has initially been on residents' experience of primary care in North Kent, and particularly their access to GP services. This features heavily among the issues that residents raise with their local councillors, and we decided that it was important to look at the evidence.

As we started on this work in autumn 2021, rather than carry out our own resident survey, we reviewed and analysed the results of the annual NHS GP Patient Survey. This provides a comprehensive and authoritative account of what patients reported about their experience of GP practices during the preceding 12 months.

The surveys are carried out between January and April and the results are published the following July. We therefore looked at the 2021 results and that formed the basis for our first report, which was completed in early 2022. We shared that report in draft with the leaders of the incoming Integrated Care Board (ICB) as the start of a conversation about how primary care services could be improved.

Mindful of the structural changes underway in the NHS, we agreed to pause publication. But we stayed with this issue and followed up with a similar analysis of the 2022 results once these were published last summer. In the same way as before, we shared the draft report with the ICB to inform our ongoing conversation with them about progress on their action plan.

GNK Leaders decided that it would now be appropriate to publish both the 2021 and 2022 reports to provide a benchmark against which we will track progress.

Approach to the analysis

The NHS survey asks patients about their GP practice, their experience of making appointments and of their dealings with healthcare professionals where they have had appointments, what actions they take when their GP practice is closed, and questions about themselves – their general health and circumstances. In 2022, 10,362 North Kent patients completed the survey (32.8% response rate).

All the data we have used are drawn from the survey results, produced for the NHS by Ipsos Mori, other NHS digital sources, and Office for National Statistics sources such as the Indices for Multiple Deprivation and population estimates.

The picture we wanted to assemble was about the experience of patients at GP Practices within the local authority areas making up North Kent – Dartford, Gravesham, Maidstone, Medway and Swale. We therefore put together the results at individual GP practice level to show the total position for each authority and for North Kent as a whole, as well as comparison with the results for Kent & Medway¹ and England.

The results

The 2021 results showed that on most measures North Kent residents were less satisfied with the service they received than the results for England or for Kent and Medway as a whole. Nationally, the 2022 results showed that on virtually every indicator patient satisfaction with their GP service was lower than in previous years and with a marked decline since 2021. Most concerning for Greater North Kent Leaders was the fact that the results for North Kent were noticeably lower than the results for

¹ Reported as the Kent & Medway Clinical Commissioning Group in 2021 and as Kent & Medway Integrated Care System in 2022.



England as a whole, and our analysis showed that on most measures the decline in North Kent was even steeper than both the England and Kent & Medway ICS results.

Compared with the England average –

Overall Experience

- Only 62% of North Kent patients described their overall experience of their GP practice as good, 10% below the national result.
- Around one in five North Kent patients (21%) described their experience of their GP practice as poor compared with one in seven nationally (14%).

Dealing with GP practices

- A much smaller proportion of North Kent patients found it easy to contact their GP practice by phone (35%, England 53%), considered practice receptionists to be helpful (76%, England 82%), or reported a good experience of making an appointment (43%, England 56%).
- A higher percentage made no use of their practice's online services (49%, England 45%) and did not find their GP practice's websites easy to use (45%, England 33%).

Making Appointments

- A smaller percentage were satisfied with the appointment times available to them (43%, England 55%), and when they had a preference to see a particular GP they were less likely to be able to do so (32%, England 38%).
- North Kent patients explored fewer alternative actions when they could not get the appointment they wanted, and had to wait a little longer for appointments to happen.
- Worry about catching Covid-19 figured less amongst North Kent patients' reasons for not making appointments (10%, England 12%), but the difficulty of the appointments process (37%, England 27%) seemed to be a more significant hurdle.

Experience of last appointment

- A smaller proportion of North Kent patients were given a set time for an appointment; and where a set time was given it more frequently actually happened later than the time given (29%, England 25%).
- A lower percentage of North Kent patients thought the healthcare professional they saw was good at giving them time, listening to them or treating them with care and concern (78%, England 84%).
- Confidence in the healthcare professionals seen has slightly declined since 2021, with lower satisfaction that needs were being met than in 2021 (both -3%),
- The gap between well and less well performing practices seems to be widening. In 2021 the gap between the top and bottom five averages was 20%, but in 2022 this had widened to 29%.

Long-term health conditions

- Marginally fewer North Kent patients than in England felt their condition impaired their ability to carry out day to day activities. But fewer patients (59%, England 64%) felt they'd had enough support from local services in managing their conditions.
- North Kent lags behind England for the percentage of patients with plans in place to manage their long-term conditions (51%, England 61%).

When GP Practices were closed

- When GP Practices were closed, a smaller proportion of North Kent patients reported a good experience of other NHS services in these circumstances (42%, England 50%) and the decline since



2021 was steeper in North Kent (-18%) than England (-15%). This indicates some of the wider pressure on NHS services rather than patients' experience of their own practice.

Our conclusions and recommendations

We are keen to work in partnership with the ICB to help shape improvements to healthcare provision in North Kent and to tackle health inequalities and wider determinants of health. Primary care remains an essential part of that picture, and our latest report highlights some areas where we would like the ICB to focus some attention.

- We want to see concentrated efforts and initiatives to fill existing GP vacancies and to strengthen provision where GP to patient ratios are particularly low. We are keen to collaborate with NHS partners to explore ways to attract and incentivize GP recruitment and retention in priority areas.
- Wider initiatives would be beneficial to raise residents' digital skills and tackle digital exclusion. The results suggest a need to help some GP practices improve their online systems. An audit of GP practices' websites to ensure high standards of accessibility and functionality would help in sharing good practice, along with ensuring that practices (or Primary Care Networks) have access to the necessary expertise and capacity to keep websites up to date.
- Patients' mental health needs appear to be getting less attention than they should. It would be useful for the ICB to track how these results map onto practices and PCNs where support from mental health professionals is available to inform decisions about where additional support might be prioritized.
- The results in the Survey echo anecdotal evidence reported by GNK partners about the difficulty of appointment systems, especially where online triage arrangements are restricted, for instance, by limited GP capacity to review requests submitted online. Peer-reviewing arrangements and sharing good practice could help to remove some of the barriers patients have encountered.
- We would like to see better publicity and signposting of information about the most appropriate course of action where patients cannot get through to their GP practice, or when practices are closed, taking account of the need for inclusiveness of people with less access to or skills with digital media.
- We would like to see a clearer narrative around the relative deprivation of GP practices, the communities they serve and how they are being supported. This is chiefly about communication and visible alignment with wider public strategies for tackling inequalities.
- GP Practice data are changing all the time but the apparent transparency of data available is slightly undermined by inconsistencies between different sources. It would be helpful to have "one source of truth" which brings together and streamlines the multiple channels that exist currently and enables data to be explored in different ways, including by different geographies.
- Where the apparent inconsistencies in different data are simply indicators of change over time, they appear to highlight significant upward pressure in terms of patient numbers in North Kent. Some of this is likely to need new primary care provision rather than expansion of existing practices.
- There are some significant anomalies between the size of patient lists and resident population based on the most recent Census data, particularly in Gravesham. Whilst recognizing that patients registered with a GP practice may not be local residents, we suggest these anomalies should be investigated by the ICB as part of establishing the "one source of truth" suggested above.

Greater North Kent

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