

Customer service: GP reception staff

Introduction

Healthwatch Islington (HWI) works closely with Islington Clinical Commissioning Group (ICCG) and local voluntary sector partners to ensure that the CCG's work is informed by feedback from the community.

In 2013, HWI and ICCG held a joint workshop on the Equality Delivery System. This is an annual exercise in which the CCG is graded on the equity of service access it facilitates. The meeting involved a range of local voluntary sector partners, particularly those working with communities who may be considered more vulnerable or less frequently heard. It was agreed that a way to increase equity of access within primary care services would be to offer support to front-line, reception staff to improve customer service.

In 2014 the CCG arranged training sessions for reception staff within GP practices to attend. Healthwatch Islington agreed to visit practices to measure the impact of the training. Not all staff would have attended and we were not able to conclude whether the staff who greeted our mystery shoppers had undertaken training, even though we knew whether the practice had.

Mystery shoppers used a checklist of questions and acted as if they were registering with the practice. Visits took place between August and December 2014. The mystery shopping team included trained young people and a Healthwatch staff member.

Findings

Our mystery shoppers visited 20 of the borough's 36 practices. Of these 20 practices 12 had undertaken the training offered by the CCG (19 of 36 practices undertook the training overall).

- ▶ In 13 of the 20 practices our mystery shoppers were not able to talk to the reception staff without being overheard. This is due to the layout of practices, and makes it even more important for reception staff to be sensitive to patient's needs and potential wishes not to disclose personal information.

- ▶ 18 of the 20 practices made patients feel comfortable about asking their questions. Of these two that did not make our shoppers feel comfortable, one had undertaken the training and one had not.

- ▶ In two practices our shoppers did 'feel a bit rushed', in 18 practices staff members gave our shoppers enough time to explain what they needed in their own words. Again, of the two that did not give our shoppers time, one practice had been involved in the training and one had not.

(These positive findings were supported by the findings of a separate mystery shopping exercise looking at interpreting within GP practices, where shoppers felt that they were treated with respect by reception staff at 31 of the 36 practices.)

- ▶ In all practices our shoppers found that staff used clear language and were able to answer all of mystery shopper's questions satisfactorily.

- ▶ Of the 20 practices visited five had information on registration clearly displayed in the practice. Our mystery shoppers were unable to find information about registering in the other practices.

(This finding was similar to those of the Mystery Shopping GP complaints reports, which found that only 11 of 36 practices had information displayed on complaints.)

Healthwatch Islington will continue to monitor how people feel treated by GP reception staff through its out-reach work and by incorporating this question in to other mystery shopping activity where there is capacity.