

Mystery Shopper Report

GP registration for homeless people or people who are temporary residents

Introduction

During 2017, a Healthwatch Hounslow Mystery Shopper contacted GP surgeries across Hounslow to find out how easy it would be for a homeless person or someone who was living in the Borough as a temporary resident to register with their local GP.

We found that staff at over two thirds of the GP practices we contacted stated that the person would need to provide two forms of ID, including photo ID to be able to register with their practice.

This report summarises the findings of the Mystery Shopper exercise and what Healthwatch Hounslow and Hounslow Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) plan to do with what we found out.

Healthwatch Hounslow

Healthwatch Hounslow is an independent organisation led by volunteers from the local community. It is part of a national network of Healthwatch organisations that involve people of all ages and all sections of the community. Healthwatch Hounslow gathers local people's views on the health and social care services that they use. We make sure those views are taken into account when decisions are taken on how services will look in the future, and how they can be improved.

Mystery Shopper Exercises

Some of our volunteers are trained as mystery shoppers. Mystery shoppers engage with health and care providers, posing as patients/users/family/friends/relatives. This enables them to assess how well the providers perform in terms of customer service and information provision.

Mystery shopping only shows us how the provider is performing on that particular day. Mystery shopping is also subjective, as shoppers record their personal view of how they are treated by the provider they visit, but it is a useful tool when we want to explore specific services in more depth. We often use it in combination with other types of research.

We write a report about what the mystery shoppers find out during their visits and/or phone calls, make recommendations for improvement, and also highlight good things about the service. We then work with service providers to make positive changes based on our recommendations. We may also use mystery shopping to measure improvement in services we have already looked at.

Mystery Shopper Report on GP Registrations for homeless people or people who are in temporary accommodation

We wanted to find out how easy it was for people who are homeless or who are living in temporary accommodation to register with a GP.

Our mystery shopper volunteer called GP practices and said they were a person without a permanent address who was residing at a friend's place, using it as temporary accommodation. The volunteer asked if they would be able to register with the GP surgery even though they were unsure about their living arrangements.

What the Mystery Shopper should have been told

NHS England sets the standards for patient care across England. The national patient registration guidance from NHS England is that:

- People do not need a fixed address or identification to register or access treatment at GP practices
- Where necessary, the practice may use the practice's address to register the person if they wish
- The person's immigration status does not affect their right to register with a GP.

What the Mystery Shopper was told

The Mystery Shopper contacted 35 out of the 47 GP practices in Hounslow and spoke to the reception staff.

Of these practices:

- 6 stated that they were willing to take a letter from the home owner as a form of ID
- 21 stated that the person would need to bring two forms of ID to the surgery
- 1 stated that they did not have the capacity to register a temporary resident
- 1 stated that it was closing and signposted to other practices in the same building
- 7 asked the person to come to the surgery to collect information or to fill in a form

Most of the practices that stated that the person would need to have ID, required them to have photo ID, such as a passport or driving licence.

Feedback from Hounslow CCG

We have discussed the findings of the Mystery Shopper Report with Hounslow CCG. They told us that:

- In March 2018 all Hounslow GP Practices received information reminding them of their obligations regarding patient registration.
- In March 2018 Hounslow Practice Managers received a training update from NHSE Officers on patient registration.
- Local organisations working with homeless people have been supplied with information from the Healthy London Project which provides information about GP registration. For more information, please see <https://www.healthy london.org/our-work/homeless-health/healthcare-cards/>
- The CCG is keen to know about any real life examples of homeless people or temporary residents having problems with registering with a GP.

What next

Following on from this piece of work:

Hounslow CCG will:

- From April 2018 commission all Hounslow GP Practices to provide an enhanced homeless service for homeless patients in order to improve access and health outcomes for this cohort of patients.
- Ensure that any planned training for practice staff includes registration of homeless people and temporary resident
- Commission from Healthwatch a further mystery shopper exercise focussing on new registrations. All 47 practices will be included in the exercise

Healthwatch Hounslow will:

- Publish this summary report
- Promote the homeless health cards and other information from the Healthy London Project to organisations working with homeless people in the Borough

Acknowledgements

Thank you to our Mystery Shopper volunteer, Jennifer Bailey, for carrying out the Mystery Shopping Exercise on our behalf.

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