

What Acorn Patients Think

A Report on the Survey of Patients' Perceptions
of the Services at the Acorn Group Practice, Twickenham,
Acorn Patients Group, March 2013

Introduction

This report summarizes the key findings and outcomes of the Acorn Group Practice Survey of February 2013. The Survey was undertaken by patient members of the Practice Patients Group, following an invitation to help investigate and address patients' priorities for service improvement.

In consultation with the Acorn Senior Partner and the Practice Manager, we designed a two-sided questionnaire focusing on patients' perceptions of the quality of Acorn Services. Tick box questions were used to determine patients' priorities for improvement. Open-ended questions were used to determine the issues for patients, which they would like the Practice to address. A copy of the questionnaire is given at the end of this report.

The questionnaire was uploaded onto the Acorn website, but no responses were received through this route.

279 of the patients attending Surgery during a fortnight in February 2013 completed a questionnaire. The results are given below and in the accompanying Tables. The Patients Group presented these findings to the Practice for discussion at a meeting on 19 March 2013. The response from the Practice has been integrated into the text of this Report. This is followed by an Action Plan from the Practice, agreed with the Patients Group, to address findings.

Please note: items 1-12, listed below, refer to the 12 Statements in Question 1. of the Survey. Items 13 onwards refer to responses on side 2 of the Survey.

1. Appointments

58% are satisfied with the ease of making appointments (scores of 4 or 5); 17% are dissatisfied (scores of 1 or 2); 24% are non-committal (score 3). A full breakdown is given in numbers in Table 1 and in % in Table 2.

Appointments were by far the most contentious issue raised by patients. Although Waiting Times scored lower, adverse comments in response to open-ended Questions 2 and 6 were greatest for Appointments (114 in total).

Issues for patients are: telephone lines for on-the-day appointments open at 8.30 am which is inconvenient for working people and those on the school run; telephone lines are permanently engaged first thing in the morning and often all appointments are taken by the time patients get through; in order to beat the system, patients have to turn up in person at 8.30 and then return later in the day for the appointment, which is not good when you are unwell; the supply of appointments is inadequate for the demand; make it easier for booking repeat/follow-up appointments; make it easier to make an urgent appointment; open lists for longer than two weeks ahead.

Survey findings indicate that 56% are in favour of online booking / cancellation. 22% are not in favour; 17% are unsure; 5% did not answer. (Question 4 on side 2 of the questionnaire) Younger people are significantly more in favour than older people: up to 39: 69%; 60 and over: 44%. The Practice is investigating online booking and cancellation of appointments, which will hopefully relieve early morning pressure on telephone lines. It is also considering the use of Twitter to alert patients to developments at the Practice.

Currently all non-consulting staff man the six telephone lines in the morning and the Practice does not have the resources to increase capacity. Urgent drop-in ambulatory cases are accommodated.

It would help the Practice if patients did not request on-the-day appointments for routine matters. Triaging cases proved unpopular and was discontinued.

The Practice is reluctant to offer advanced booking beyond two weeks since the doctors have other NHS related duties for which they often have only two weeks' notice. They prefer not to risk having to cancel patients' appointments.

The Practice is considering the option of taking on another doctor to help meet the demand for appointments.

2. Surgery Opening Hours

Surgery opening hours are inconvenient for those working full time, commuters, and patients with fixed office hours. They would like the Practice to consider later opening in the evening, and on more than one day a week, lunch-hour appointments and Saturday opening. True dissatisfaction for opening hours (Statement 2) in the accompanying Tables, is, if anything, higher than the figures indicate, because of the likely low take-up of fulltime workers in the Survey: only three and a half hours of evening appointments in the two weeks of investigation.

The Practice will reconsider its opening hours in the light of the Survey findings. In the past, when it extended its opening hours, the incidence of patients not attending for appointment, known as "DNA's", rose from 10% to 30% and so the longer opening was discontinued. The new system of reminding patients of their appointment, by a text message to mobile phones, might be extended to email. The opportunity to cancel an appointment online in future may also reduce the incidence of DNA's. The Patients Group pointed out that it is unfair to penalize the 70% who do attend because of the 30% who do not.

3. The Reception Staff

The overall rating for Reception staff helpfulness and friendliness was 90% (Table 3 Column 1.): the highest overall rating of all, in the entire survey.

Only a tiny minority of patients raised issues.

4. Waiting Times Before Being Seen/ 5. The Doctors and Nurses Give Me Enough Time

Although ratings for Waiting Times were the lowest in the Survey, on closer examination, this is less of an issue than getting an appointment. There were 62 adverse comments for Waiting Times, compared with 114 for Appointments.

The most impatient of delays are the young and those with young children. Those up to 39 years old scored 63.7% satisfaction, whilst those aged 60 and over gave 77.2%. Frequent attenders (four plus appointments in the last six months) are 10% less satisfied with waiting times than occasional attenders (0-1 appointments in the last six months): 66.8%: 76.1%.

Doctors allocate 10 minutes per patient, but there is always some variation depending on the individual patient, which sometimes results in unavoidable cumulative delays. Patients appreciate being given more time if necessary.

Satisfaction ratings for being given enough time by doctors and nurses are very high, as indicated on all three Tables for Statement 5.

Doctors will continue to monitor scheduling and their individual throughput rates, with the aim of reducing waiting times to a maximum of 20 minutes beyond the scheduled appointment time. At the same time they will balance this aim with ensuring that patients receive the amount of time they need.

Reception staff may be able to advise patients on current delays.

6. 7. 8. 9. 10. The Consultation Process

The most gratifying result of the Survey is the very high approval ratings for the competence and professionalism of Acorn staff across the board: for doctors, nurses and Reception staff alike. Indicative ratings for the quality of consultations are given alongside Statements 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 in Tables 1, 2 and 3, at the end of this summary. Table 3 Column 1 shows ratings from 82.2% to 89% for the five measures we used to test satisfaction with the quality of consultations. There were, additionally, 44 comments of general praise and 21 compliments for Acorn staff in response to the invitation at the end of the questionnaire for “any other comments”.

11. The Staff Welcome And Act On Feedback From Me

Satisfaction with this aspect appeared to be lower than for most other areas in Question 1. But this needs unpicking. Most patients do not volunteer feedback on the Service. Forty-three patients did not answer this question as it was not relevant to them. Sixty-five gave a non-committal “3”, i.e. neither agree nor disagree. One person noted that the questionnaire was the first time she had been asked for feedback. There is now a new facility on the Acorn Practice website for leaving feedback online.

12. Recommending the Acorn Practice to Others

The strong ratings for staff competence and professionalism, quoted above, underpin the very good scores for recommending the Practice to others. It is clear from these figures that any dissatisfaction with procedural aspects of the Services are, by comparison, a minor consideration for Acorn patients. Figures against Statement 12. on Table 3. show an impressive overall % rating for recommending the Practice to others of 88.8%, with sub-group ratings rising from 85.7% to 96.8%.

13. Patient Support Groups

The value of support groups to help patients manage their condition is recognized. 19 patients are very interested in support groups, 69 are interested. Perhaps surprisingly, men are more interested than women: 38%: 31%. Keenest are those who have had four or more appointments in the last six months (39%), and 40-59 year olds (39%). Least interested are those aged 39 and under (25%).

Numerically, four patients showed an interest in mental health/ depression support groups, four in pregnancy and ante/post natal support, three in diabetes, three in heart disease, two in epilepsy and another two in chest problems. 24 other conditions were proposed but each with only one advocate.

The Practice agrees to list approved patient support groups on their website with contact details, and to make available publicity leaflets in waiting rooms. GPs may also alert patients to relevant support groups where appropriate. Additionally, they will consider providing more help-yourself literature on common medical conditions and general health in waiting-room pamphlet racks.

14. Repeat Prescriptions

The overwhelming majority of patients are either very satisfied or satisfied with arrangements for repeat prescriptions, whatever the method used. Only 11 (4%) of the 251 who answered this question said they were “not very satisfied”. 46% prefer to order prescriptions online, 29% at the pharmacist, 20% in person and 5% by post. No issues were raised.

15. Additional Issues and Ideas Raised by Patients

Additional issues volunteered by patients are: seeing the same doctor (10 patients); more GPs/ more time with GPs (6 patients); parking, especially for the disabled (5 comments); put the customer first (5 comments); facilities/ furnishings / environment (4 comments); better children’s facilities (3 comments); widening the Service (3 comments); more online communication (2 comments).

The Practice agrees the proposal for a display board of all Acorn staff with names, job titles and photos and to adding photos to the website staff listing. There are strict hygiene regulations, which prevent the Practice from implementing some of the proposals made for environmental improvements, though they might consider inviting patients to donate up-to-date reading material for recycling in waiting rooms. A water fountain is a possibility.

The Practice has applied in vain for concessionary parking for blue badge holders in two adjacent parking lots.

In conclusion

The headline figure of overall patient satisfaction at the Acorn Practice is 83.9%. (Average of averages, Column 1, Table 3)

Acorn staff have every reason to be proud of their Service. Patients are very positive about their professional competence. The overwhelming majority of patients would recommend the Acorn Practice to others.

The three priority areas for improvement - appointments, opening hours and waiting times - are all managerial aspects of the Service. Incremental improvements in these areas are possible.

This Survey was the first initiative of the reconstituted Acorn Patients Group. Members see themselves as critical friends of the Practice. We hope that this Report reflects our experience of the mutual benefits of dialogue between Acorn patients and staff. Patient members report that they now have a better insight into the running of the Acorn Practice.

The Patients Group would like to thank the Practice for the opportunity to do a Patient Survey. We are grateful to all Acorn patients who participated in the Survey. The Practice will be reporting in due course on actions taken in response to the findings and subsequent achievements.

Table 1

		Agree			Disagree		N.A.	total
Q.1. Results by number, all respondents		5	4	3	2	1		
1	I find it easy to make an appointment.	89	73	67	26	22	2	279
2	The Surgery's opening hours are convenient for me.	129	72	47	15	9	7	279
3	The Reception staff are helpful and friendly.	183	67	18	6	4	1	279
4	I do not have to wait too long before I am seen.	56	86	83	31	17	6	279
5	The doctors and nurses give me enough time.	161	79	26	6	2	5	279
6	The doctors and nurses give me enough information.	160	86	20	6	3	4	279
7	The doctors and nurses understand my condition.	163	76	26	6	4	4	279
8	The doctors show interest in my general health.	156	72	33	8	4	6	279
9	The doctors involve me in decisions about my care.	164	69	27	4	3	12	279
10	The follow-up to my consultation is good.	109	81	47	13	3	26	279
11	The staff welcome and act on feedback from me.	86	72	65	7	6	43	279
12	I would recommend the Acorn Practice to others.	173	60	22	12	3	9	279

Table 2

		Agree			Disagree		N.A.	total
Q.1. Results by %, all respondents		5	4	3	2	1		
1	I find it easy to make an appointment.	32	26	24	9	8	1	100
2	The Surgery's opening hours are convenient for me.	46	26	17	5	3	3	100
3	The Reception staff are helpful and friendly.	66	24	6	2	1	0	100
4	I do not have to wait too long before I am seen.	20	31	30	11	6	2	100
5	The doctors and nurses give me enough time.	58	28	9	2	1	2	100
6	The doctors and nurses give me enough information.	57	31	7	2	1	1	100
7	The doctors and nurses understand my condition.	58	27	9	2	1	1	100
8	The doctors show interest in my general health.	56	26	12	3	1	2	100
9	The doctors involve me in decisions about my care.	59	25	10	1	1	4	100
10	The follow-up to my consultation is good.	39	29	17	5	1	9	100
11	The staff welcome and act on feedback from me.	31	26	23	3	2	15	100
12	I would recommend the Acorn Practice to others.	62	22	8	4	1	3	100

Table 3

Q.1. Analysis of sub-groups, by gender, age & frequency of appointments, % of satisfaction (average scores)

	All resp.	Gender		Age			Appointments			
		men	wom	≤39	40-59	≥60	0-1	2-3	4+	
1	Easy to make an appointment.	73.0	76.4	71.5	75.2	69.2	75.1	78.4	73.0	71.8
2	Surgery opening hours convenient.	81.8	83.4	81.0	80.5	76.9	88.4	81.1	80.0	84.2
3	Reception staff helpful and friendly.	90.2	91.4	89.1	91.4	87.0	91.2	89.2	90.1	90.0
4	I do not have to wait too long.	69.8	71.7	68.1	63.7	67.3	77.2	76.1	69.5	66.8
5	Doctors & nurses give enough time.	88.6	90.0	87.7	89.0	89.0	87.2	91.4	87.4	89.0
6	Doctors & nurses give me enough info.	88.6	90.8	87.6	88.5	87.5	89.7	91.4	88.0	88.6
7	Doctors & nurses understand my condition.	88.2	88.4	87.9	88.8	86.8	88.9	93.0	87.7	87.4
8	Doctors are interested in my general health.	87.0	89.2	86.0	85.4	86.9	87.9	93.5	85.1	87.0
9	Doctors involve me in decisions about my care.	89.0	89.9	88.4	88.2	86.9	91.2	94.1	87.2	89.6
10	Follow-up to my consultation is good.	82.2	83.8	80.9	77.2	80.0	87.6	88.8	80.8	81.8
11	Staff welcome & act on my feedback.	79.0	80.8	77.6	76.3	76.3	83.0	85.7	78.5	77.8
12	I would recommend the Acorn Practice.	88.8	88.5	89.0	88.5	85.7	91.9	96.8	88.2	87.8
	Average of averages	83.9	85.4	82.9	82.7	81.6	86.6	88.3	83.0	83.5
	Sample size	279	84	180	84	91	90	37	113	111

Note 1. : Sample sizes in sub-groups do not add up to 279, because some patients did not give their gender/ age/ frequency of appointments in the last 6 months.

Note 2. : The % of satisfaction (average scores) is determined by adding all the individual scores given by respondents, (from 1-5), and dividing it by the number of respondents within that sub-group (all/ by gender/ by age/ by frequency of appointment) to give a figure to two decimal places. A maximum score of 5.00 is possible. This is then multiplied by 20 to give a % score, which is easier to understand.

If all respondents score "5", i.e. they all agree, this would give us $5.00 \times 20 = 100\%$

If all respondents score "4", i.e. they all tend to agree, this would give us $4.00 \times 20 = 80\%$

If all respondents score "3", i.e. they all neither agree nor disagree, this would give us $3.00 \times 20 = 60\%$

If all respondents score "2", i.e. they all tend to disagree, this would give us $2.00 \times 20 = 40\%$

If all respondents score "1", i.e. they all disagree, this would give us $1.00 \times 20 = 20\%$

The Acorn Group Practice

Dear Patient,

We want to learn from your experience of using our services. What is working well for you? Where can we improve?

Our Patients Group have helped us put together this questionnaire. Please complete it before you leave the Surgery today and hand it in at Reception.

We shall publish the results for you to see at the end of March.

Question 1

Please tell us how much you agree with each of the following statements.

Please put one tick in each line.

	Agree			Disagree	
	5	4	3	2	1
1. I find it easy to make an appointment.					
2. The Surgery's opening hours are convenient for me.					
3. The Reception staff are helpful and friendly.					
4. I do not have to wait too long before I am seen.					
5. The doctors and nurses give me enough time.					
6. The doctors and nurses give me enough information.					
7. The doctors and nurses understand my condition.					
8. The doctors show interest in my general health.					
9. The doctors involve me in decisions about my care.					
10. The follow-up to my consultation is good.					
11. The staff welcome and act on feedback from me.					
12. I would recommend the Acorn Practice to others.					

Question 2

If you have ticked the "1" or "2" box for any of the statements in Question 1, please tell us why. Please put the number of the statement you are referring to before your comment.

Now please turn over

Question 3

Some people feel they would benefit from meeting others with the same condition as they have. This could be meeting them in person, or setting up a forum on the web. Would you be interested in joining such a group?

Very interested Interested Not at all interested

If so, what type of support group would be of interest to you?

Question 4

Would you be interested in booking/cancelling appointments on line?

yes no not sure

Question 5

Please tell us what method you prefer to use for requesting repeat prescriptions.

on line in person at pharmacist by post

Are you satisfied with the service for repeat prescriptions?

very satisfied satisfied not very satisfied

If you are not very satisfied, please tell us why and what method you used.

Question 6

What one thing would most improve the Acorn Practice for you?

Question 7

Do you have any other comments about the Practice you would like to add?

Question 8

May we ask you a few personal questions? This will tell us how representative our sample is of Acorn patients. It will also help us interpret your answers.

Please tell us -

1. Your sex: male female

2. Your age: up to 29 50-59
30-39 60-69
40-49 70 or over

3. Roughly how many appointments have you had at the Acorn Practice in the last six months?

none three
one four or five
two six or more

Thank you for your time and help. Please leave your completed questionnaire with Reception today.

Would you like to know more about our Patients Group? There's some information on our website, www.theacornpractice.co.uk and you can pick up a leaflet in Reception. We'd be pleased to see you at one of our meetings. Visitors are welcome.