

Millgate Healthcare Partnership

Summary of the data collected by Healthwatch Tameside June and July 2018

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Introduction

Healthwatch Tameside has a statutory function to gather evidence from the views and experiences of patients, service users and the public about their local health and care services and to provide feedback based on that evidence.

On 1st April 2017, Churchgate Surgery and Windmill Medical Practice merged, becoming Millgate Healthcare Partnership. During the 12 months post-merger, Healthwatch Tameside spoke to several people who use the practice in their regular outreach sessions in the community. The comments were not conclusive, being a mixture of positive and negative. At a Tameside & Glossop Clinical Commissioning Group primary care meeting, information was shared about various changes which had been put into place by the practice. This was in response to negative feedback received by the practice. Healthwatch Tameside considered what they had heard so far and decided to investigate more deeply. We wanted to find out whether the measures that have been introduced are having the desired effect, or whether a few tweaks may be needed.

With agreement from Millgate Healthcare Partnership, Healthwatch Tameside arranged to talk to patients. The data used in this report has been collected during June and July 2018, using the following methods:

- 13 June 2018 (morning) - standing outside the Manchester Road surgery we spoke to 29 patients
- June 2018 - general surveys completed during regular outreach in the community sessions which included comments about Millgate Healthcare Partnership - 2 patients
- 14 July 2018 - Healthwatch attended Denton Community College fun day and spoke to people about their experiences of health and care generally. Any stories or survey comments about Millgate have been included in this report - 16 patients
- 18 July 2018 (morning) - standing outside the Ann Street surgery we spoke to 20 patients. We also spoke to 4 patients who said they were attending the clinic but who attended a GP practice elsewhere in Tameside. The data from these 4 patients has not been included in this report, but will be incorporated in the other primary care work carried out by Healthwatch Tameside.
- 25 July 2018 - information collected during regular outreach session - 2 patients

In total, the comments in this report are based on the views of 69 patients. We have tried to use the words that the patients used when talking to us. We appreciate this is a small sample compared to the size of the practice, but hope the comments will be helpful, when the practice is reviewing the service they provide.

Themes

At the start of each conversation, Healthwatch Tameside staff introduced themselves, and explained they were interested in hearing about the experiences of the patient in using Millgate Healthcare Partnership since the merger.

We have grouped the comments into themes, including quotations and examples. We have included both positive and negative comments.

General thoughts about the merger

Of the general comments, there were:

- 12 positive comments
- 19 negative comments

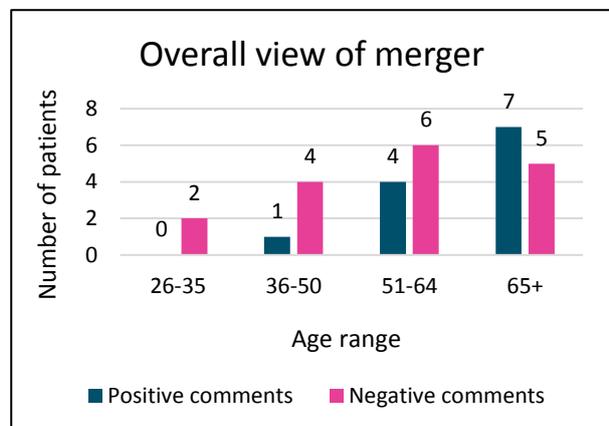
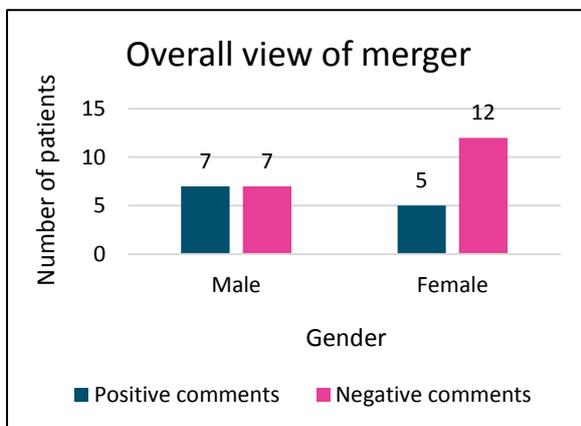
Examples of positive comments included:

- Service since the merger has been OK up to now.
- Merger made no difference.
- Merger did not affect me.
- No problems with joining of surgeries.
- I've not had any problems since the merger.

Examples of negative comments included:

- Been a patient for 29 years. Don't like the changes.
- There have been some teething problems.
- The changes are confusing for older people - which building you go to.
- Don't like the practice since the changes.
- Merger - now seems to be all over the place.
- Rubbish since they joined forces.
- Got a lot worse since the merger.
- The merger is causing problems, everyone is complaining.
- The merger was chaotic.

We have looked at whether there is any trend within the demographics (where the information was provided) to suggest there is one particular age group or gender with a different view to others. Here are the graphs.



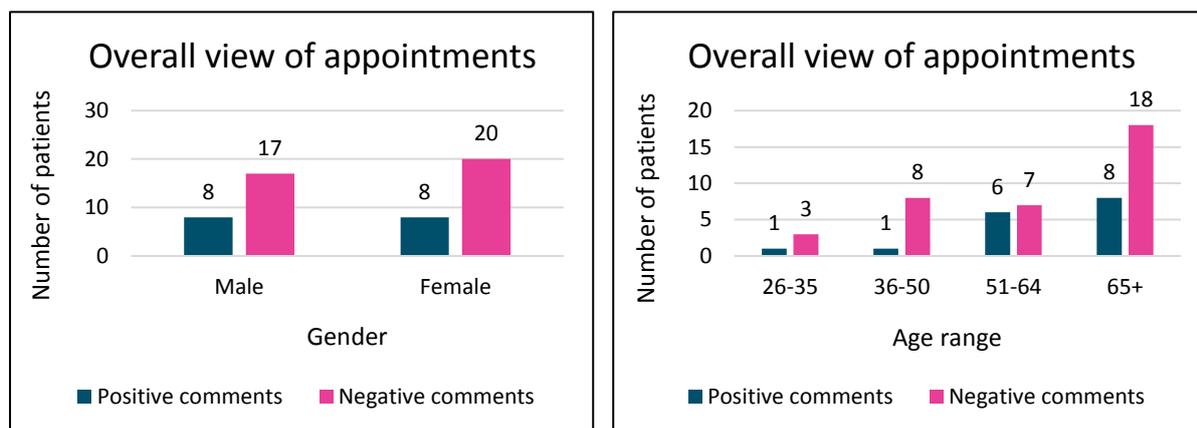
Appointments

16 people provided **positive feedback** about making an appointment, with comments including:

- Used to have problems getting an appointment. Today got one straight away on the phone.
- Appointments - no problem getting one although wife finds it hard.
- Appointments - not good for seeing GPs but seeing a nurse is OK.
- Can get an appointment because the receptionist knows me.
- Very rarely use GP but did get an appointment the same day when I needed it.
- Always manage to get an appointment on the day if need it.
- In an emergency you can get an appointment.
- Good availability of appointments.

36 people gave **negative feedback** about their experience of appointments.

As with the views on the merger, we have looked at the demographics. Here are the graphs.



We have split the negative comments into categories, although some comments fall into more than one category.

Phoning for an appointment

19 people said they had difficulties when phoning to make an appointment. Here are some of their comments:

- Appointment on the day - engaged all morning.
- To get an appointment you have to phone at 8am, spend 1/2 an hour on the phone and not get through.
- Can't get an appointment on that day if you're not at home - if you're at work you can't keep ringing.
- Can't get appointments - ring at 8:00 a.m. can't get through, by the time you do there are no appointments.
- Ringing up is stressful. You queue for 30-40 minutes, which can be difficult when you've got a young child.

- Cost of the phone call - it automatically answers so I am paying for the call and 20 minutes later I put the phone down as nobody answers.

Length of wait for a routine appointment

8 people complained about the length of time to wait for a routine appointment.

- Open at 8 - by 5 past all the appointments have gone. Have to phone the next day. Problems if going to work. Can pre-book 3 to 4 weeks ahead.
- Murder for getting an appointment, usually got to ring on 'the day' because the pre-booked ones are weeks away.
- Better to book in advance, but a 2 week wait though.
- Advance appointments - wait 2 weeks.
- Improve the length of time you have to wait for routine appointments.

Coming to the surgery to make an appointment

12 people told us why they visit the surgery early in the morning to request an appointment, including:

- Appointments can be tricky. If you turn up early you might get one. You can't get your original doctor, and you can only talk about one thing.
- Have to join the queue outside the surgery at 7.30am to get an appointment on the day. If you phone it's a 2 week wait.
- Getting an appointment on the phone is bad - it's easier to come in.
- In the past after 40 minutes on hold on the phone have walked to surgery.
- My daughter has 2 children. It is hard to get to the surgery to be there to join the queue in the morning. The phone is engaged all the time.

Delays in the waiting room

6 people told us about delays they had experienced, including:

- Harder to get an appointment - always have to wait and running late on the day.
- Can't see GP of choice. Don't stick to appointment times. Fob you off. Waited more than an hour so left.
- Hour wait to see the doctor with daughter.

Blood test drop-in

The new drop-in clinics have been set up in the mornings for blood tests, without the need for an appointment. 9 people talked about using this clinic. Comments included:

- New blood test system - good.
- Blood clinic good.
- The blood clinic where you can just turn up is a good idea.
- Just had blood test but can't get to see the doctor.
- I go near the end of the session and then I only have to wait 5 minutes.
- Getting bloods is a drop-in which is easier than getting an appointment.
- Blood clinic definitely went worse when they merged but I think that it's better than a 4 day wait.

Referrals

8 people told us about referrals that had been made for them.

- New referral system - get instant letter, appointment quick, can choose hospital (but you have to ask if you want somewhere other than Tameside Hospital).
- Referrals are OK.
- Referrals eg. x-ray - not given any choice, but Tameside Hospital is OK anyway.
- It took me 6 visits before I could get a doctor to refer me to a specialist.
- Twice I have been referred to a consultant for tests. I was told the results would take 2 weeks. After 3 weeks I rang the GP practice who couldn't find the results. The receptionist said I would have to wait and be patient - it can take 5-6 weeks. I rang the consultant who confirmed the results were sent the previous week to the GP. Now I know to push for results.
- A wheelchair referral was made for mum. I chased it up and it had been declined by the wheelchair organisation. I got a letter from the GP to make an appointment to sort this out. I phoned and all that was needed was to tick indoor/outdoor use. The locum said they would re-do the form. It still didn't go right. Does this warrant an appointment? I rang up and spoke to someone on the phone, and went through the form to get the referral right.

Appointment not offered

4 people explained that they were not offered an appointment, sometimes being sent elsewhere instead.

- If you phone in the afternoon you are told to ring the following morning or go to the walk-in centre if it is urgent.
- Over Christmas they would not let me book at all. Had to use out of hours at Manchester Royal Infirmary. They were great but rather not have to travel.
- Told to go to the Walk-in Centre - don't get seen. I've been.

Another person highlighted difficulties they had in trying to register as a new patient:

- First time I've been today. Trying to register but just moved here a few days ago, so have got nothing with address on. It looks very busy. Concerned that I need to see a doctor quickly (I have a heart monitor) but I'm feeling messed about for ongoing treatment. Was sent away without an appointment.

Online access

9 people had requested repeat prescriptions online. Here is what people said about this service:

- Use online for prescriptions - it's useful and saves time.
- Online prescriptions good.

- Online prescriptions good (they take away the chance to get some exercise, but you do have choice).
- Order prescriptions online - brilliant.
- Use online for ordering tablets which works fine. The prescription goes to the chemist and I pick it up.
- Request prescriptions online, but some mistakes have been made, with medications missing.

4 people mentioned booking appointments online:

- Booking appointments online is OK but may have to wait a long time for these appointments.
- Tried to book appointment online but system crashed each time and then appointments gone. Had to give up.
- Aware of online services, use it for repeat prescription but not booking appointments.
- I've just signed up to arrange appointments online. So far the appointments I've wanted haven't been there.

Other comments about using online access:

- Tried online but couldn't get it working. Told not registered - it was sorted within 2 days.
- I can't see my test results online and would like to. I have to phone up or I get a text (then they send a letter as well which is a waste of money).

24 people told us they did not use online access. Some of their reasons are:

- Tried to set up online access a couple of years ago but it didn't work.
- Have not signed up to online - been in to ask about it several times but they could not sign me up.
- 4 patients didn't know about online access.
- 13 people do not use computers.
- I don't use the online system although my partner can do it for me. I prefer to get out.
- I only recently heard about being able to do it online. I live very local so will carry on walking up.

Prescriptions

Here are some comments about prescriptions (excluding the ordering online comments mentioned earlier).

- The pharmacy gets prescriptions mixed up.
- Prescriptions are sent electronically to the pharmacy, but it can take 3 days.

- You see a GP at Manchester Road, and they send the prescription through to the pharmacy at Ann Street, and it is waiting for you when you get there.
- A lot of mix-ups with prescriptions. Keep having to go back - may be in pain all day waiting for it.
- Millgate have halved my prescription (2 weeks instead of 4) because I hadn't had a blood test. I was too busy looking after my husband. Had the blood test on Tuesday, but it's Saturday and I haven't had the results. My thyroxine runs out in a couple of days. (Healthwatch suggested contacting the surgery on Monday afternoon.)
- Since the merger a repeat prescription takes 4-5 days to be signed where before at Churchgate it took 48 hours.

Staff

Here are some of the comments we received about staff (many were similar, so we have only included a sample of each type of comment). We have broken these down into different staff groups:

Doctors

- You see different doctors - I like those I know.
- The GPs are OK. The one today was lovely.
- There are too many locums.
- Can't get to see my own GP. Wants the personal touch and to build relationship.
- No problems - just see any doctor - all good.
- Difficult to get an appointment but doctors are good.
- Doctors should not fob people off. They should deal with the complaint on the first visit.
- Can't see GP of choice.
- Good GP knowledge.
- Very understanding GP.

Nurses

- At Ann Street the nurses and diabetic clinic are good.
- The nurses are great, lovely. Can see them sooner than a GP.
- Can't get an appointment. In an emergency you get a nurse who is no good.

Receptionists

- Receptionist triage - OK today. Depends on how they come across whether it is an issue. Can feel intrusive. If it was personal, I would explain that I don't want to say why I want an appointment.
- Tried to get an emergency appointment at Ann Street - they said 'no' - are they trained that way?
- Don't want receptionists to become Care Navigators - prefer to see a doctor or nurse practitioner. (Healthwatch had explained this service was available in some GP practices.)
- Receptionists are good in person but not over the phone.

- When you get to the surgery the electronic check-in is often not working. You then have to wait for someone to come to the window so that you can book in with them. This can take ages as there is often no-one around. Then they tell you that you are late for your appointment.
- Reception staff at Ann Street clinic think they are little gods.
- Can't get past receptionist.
- Receptionists need training about/around available services. Ann Street don't have a clue or a mental health professional.
- The receptionists are helpful, especially at Ann Street.
- At Churchgate one of the receptionists has been rude to myself and I've heard them be rude to others. Ann Street is lovely.
- If I have any problems I go to Churchgate - they are more helpful.

Paramedic

- The paramedic employee wanted him to go to Tameside Hospital. He got an outpatients referral and medication. Feels they saved him.
- Offered an appointment with a paramedic but I refused. There was no explanation about what they could do. (Healthwatch explained.) If I had known that, I would have accepted the appointment.
- Doctor and paramedic - good medics.

General

- Staff are overworked.
- There is a lack of contact with the old staff now.
- All staff are lovely.
- Friendly staff at Manchester Road site. Need more helpful staff at Ann Street site.
- All good, the staff have a lot of patience and do very well.
- Some staff are really nice, but others shouldn't be in the job.
- They have helped so much this year.
- They were friendly, also understanding.
- Helped me when I was poorly.

Communication

These are comments about communication, excluding online access comments, which were covered earlier.

- Lack of communication between sites (referring to issuing prescriptions).
- Dad saw the nurse last week and an appointment was made for him to see GP this week. During the week he received 2 letters about making an appointment for test results and a diabetes review (it's been a long time since the last one). There is a lack of communication.
- The idea of Care Navigation is OK. I would like more information to be made available about what pharmacies do, to stop people turning up to see a GP about a verruca.

Comments about being a two-site practice

The comments were a mixture of positive and negative, with 23 people mentioning the location of services. These included:

Positive

- Having two sites is OK.
- You need to know where to go, which they are clear with.
- They let you know which of the two sites you are going to.
- Now that we know where they are the GPs are fine.

Negative

- They go to Ann Street in preference - they are more helpful.
- Should be on one site
- You end up at the wrong place on the other site. Samples at Ann Street but then on other days at Manchester Road. Every time I ring up I've got to be told where I'm going. Need to check every time.
- I went to the wrong site today.
- It is confusing where to go for your appointment (different buildings). Got memory problems.
- I don't always go to the right place, so when you do get to the right place you are late for your appointment.

Comments about the buildings

Some people gave us their opinions of the actual buildings at the two sites. Comments included:

- Need a bigger waiting room - queue past the door. Need a refreshments machine - would pay for it. Can be waiting 2 hours.
- Waiting room is not big enough.
- Facilities are totally outdated and at Millgate there is no privacy when discussing issues with reception.
- The surgery is a nuisance. Having to go to two places. Found that the one around the corner on Manchester Road is a dump. It is so dark. Too many people are going to it, all the chairs are full, the people are just stood round the walls. I avoid going as much as possible.
- Need a bigger building. Manchester Road site too small and it can be utter chaos.
- Since the merger my husband hates the Manchester Road surgery. He won't go in, he thinks that it is miserable.
- Ann Street is a massive building - why don't they all move into there? Churchgate is too small.
- I find Churchgate depressing and prefer the Ann Street premises.

Conclusion

Although it is more than 12 months since the merger, it would appear there are still a few areas where additional changes may be required.

There is a mixture of positive and negative comments.

Healthwatch Tameside have found in previous work elsewhere, that communication is often at the root of any issues which arise. There have been comments made about communication, or lack of, by Millgate Healthcare Partnership, which suggest this could be something to consider. When there have been teething problems with a service, public perception can be very difficult to change, e.g. "The merger is causing problems, everyone is complaining". Healthwatch Tameside have seen this before, when working with organisations. Good communication is important.

Many of the people we talked to told us their opinion about the appointment system - both positive and negative. However, no-one mentioned using the 7-day access appointments at the hubs. A few people had been directed to the Walk-in centre as an alternative.

Each location received both praise and criticism, with some people preferring one building rather than the other. However, the same aspect of the service can provide opposing opinions. This can be seen in the section about receptionists.

Overall, the actual care provided by medical staff was generally considered to be very good. Negative comments were mainly concerned with systems and buildings.

Recommendations

Healthwatch Tameside do not have details of any outstanding changes still to be made by the practice. When the various measures put in place so far are being reviewed, we would recommend the following are also included.

1. Communication

- a. Ensure patients always know which building to go to for each appointment.
- b. If there is a delay resulting in patients waiting much beyond their appointment time, ensure they are kept up-to-date with the situation.
- c. Explain to patients what the new services on offer are, e.g. paramedic appointments.
- d. Agree communication methods with patients, to avoid duplication of resources (e.g. text and letter), or missing information (e.g. test results).
- e. Provide information about alternative services available, such as the Minor Ailments scheme at pharmacies.

2. Appointments

- a. Consider whether the options available for making appointments are working as well as they could. Are there any other options available which may provide a more efficient service and improve the experience for patients?
- b. Ensure patients know all the options available for making appointments.
- c. Ensure patients are aware of the option of an appointment at a hub. Where people are working and are finding it difficult to take time off work to attend an appointment during the day, or receive a telephone triage appointment at work, this could be helpful.
- d. When a patient is referred elsewhere for treatment, ensure patient choice is discussed.

3. Online access

- a. Consider making test results available online.
- b. Consider whether additional appointments could be made available to book online.
- c. Review the availability of online access with patients. Not everyone has access to computers, but for those who do, some people are not aware of the option. A few people have tried in the past and given up because it did not work, so could be offered this option again.

4. Staff

- a. Consider whether patients with long-term and/or complex conditions could be offered non-emergency appointments with the same doctor each time. Ideally this would apply to emergency appointments also, but it is recognised by Healthwatch Tameside that specific doctors may not be holding a surgery on the day these appointments are requested.
- b. Ensure patients receive the same high-quality service at each of the reception desks, and on the phone, regardless of the member of staff dealing with the query.

5. Prescriptions

- a. Ensure repeat prescriptions are available in two working days (as described on your website).
- b. Explain to patients that repeat prescription requests presented in the afternoon will not be ready for collection until the third working day e.g. Monday afternoon request, collect after 10.30am Thursday.

6. Shared learning

- a. Share any lessons learned from your experience of a merger with any other practices in Tameside who may be going through the same process, now or in the future.

Demographics

All the people who talked to Healthwatch Tameside were asked whether they would be prepared to answer a few questions about demographics. Many said yes, although some chose to miss out a few questions. Here are the results.

