

Engaging With Patients around the Blood Testing Services at Orsett and Basildon Hospitals

Healthwatch Thurrock Engagement

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Introduction

Blood Testing Survey

Healthwatch Thurrock undertook a piece of work and carried out a survey on the blood testing services at Orsett and Basildon Hospitals.

For many years Orsett and Basildon Hospital Pathology services have operated as walk in clinics with no given appointments. This service has been taken over by Pathology First and it was noted that the waiting times were lengthy and people were becoming very unhappy. This was also putting huge pressure on the staff.

It was decided that for a trial period Pathology First, the new provider would put in place a 50/50 service, 50% appointments and 50% walk in at Orsett Hospital and an appointment only service at Basildon.

Aims

1. To speak to people using the Orsett Service and find out their views on the 50/50 trial blood testing service.
2. To find out preferred methods of booking appointments
3. To find out how patients feel about the service and their experiences around this.



Methods

To gather the views of patients using the blood testing service in Orsett and Basildon Hospitals. We gathered views by:

1. Use of a paper survey completed by individuals and assisted by Healthwatch Thurrock staff and volunteers.
2. Use of an on-line survey.
3. Facilitating discussion with small groups of individuals we met in the pathology departments.

The Survey

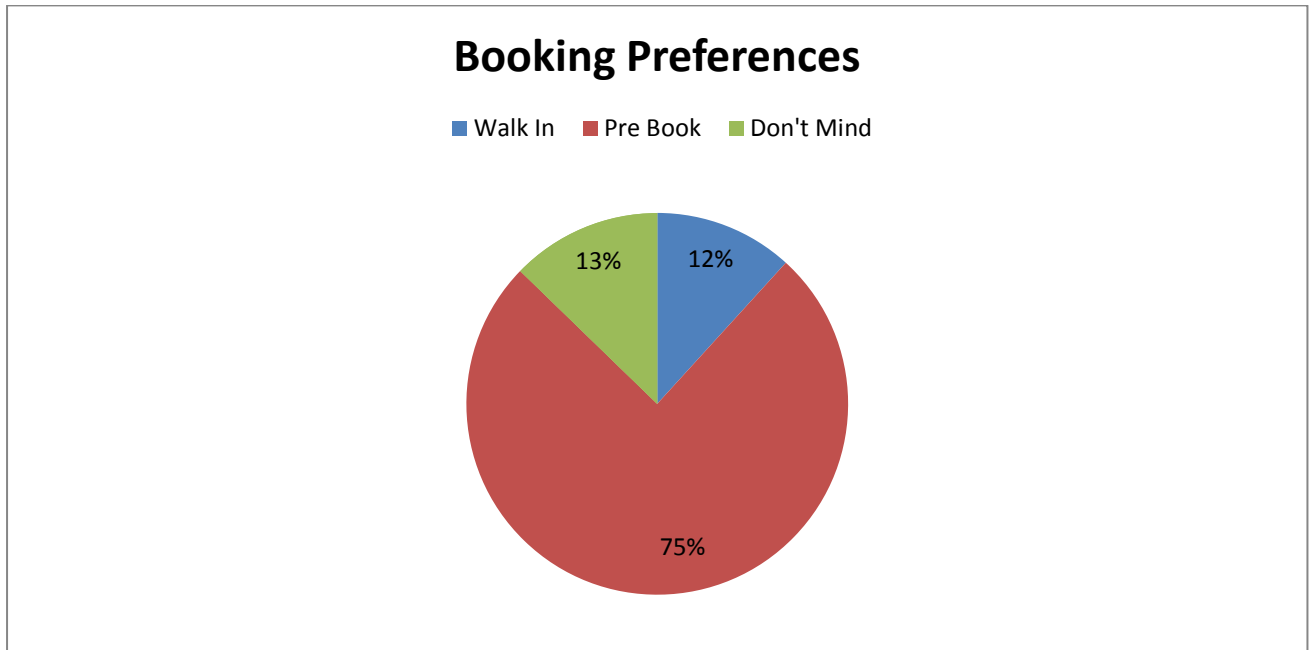
The survey created comprised of 7 questions:

- 1) Thinking of the blood testing services you use, do you prefer to:
A Have a walk in style appointment
B Have pre-booked appointments
C Don't mind
- 2) In your experience is the service better now since the move to 50% pre-booked (and 50% walk-in) only appointments?
A Yes
B No
C Unsure
- 3) Can you say why you answered as you did for q2.
- 4) How do you usually book your blood test appointment?
A By telephone
B Online
C Other, please state how below:
- 5) What's good about the blood testing service?
- 6) What is not so good about the service?
- 7) What, if anything, would make it a better service?

Findings

Total no of surveys

In total 222 surveys were filled out, 101 of these being online and 121 in person. We did however speak to many more people in general about pathology services.



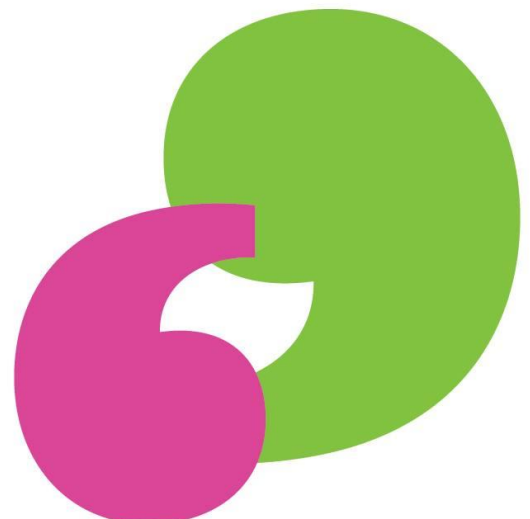
Of the people that we spoke with 75% preferred to be able to pre-book their blood testing appointments (both on line and by telephone) 12% preferred to walk in and 13% didn't mind either way. Those that booked online felt it was more convenient and that there were no waiting times, those that preferred walk in felt they were able to fit their blood tests in when they had time in their busy and or unpredictable schedules. Many of those that booked by telephone stated it was difficult to get through and the phone just continued to ring, thus making booking difficult for those that do not use the internet.

Some comments from patients;

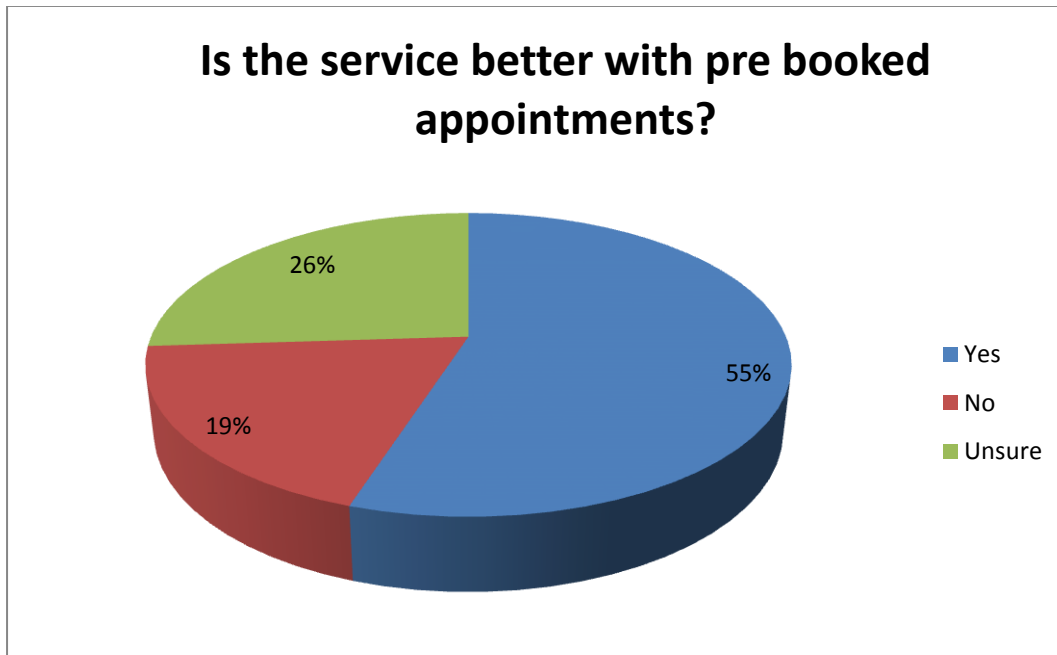
“I was in & out in 5 minutes”.

“Quicker service, no longer waiting for a long time”.

“Saves sitting around indefinitely, especially on busy days and when on fasting blood tests”.



Have Services Improved?



On completion of the survey, it shows us that 55% of those that took part preferred the pre-booking method, 19% preferred to walk in and 26% were not sure what they thought was the best option.

Some comments from Patients;

“I don't have to wait so long except in exceptional circumstances when I have an appointment”.

“We should be able to just walk in”!

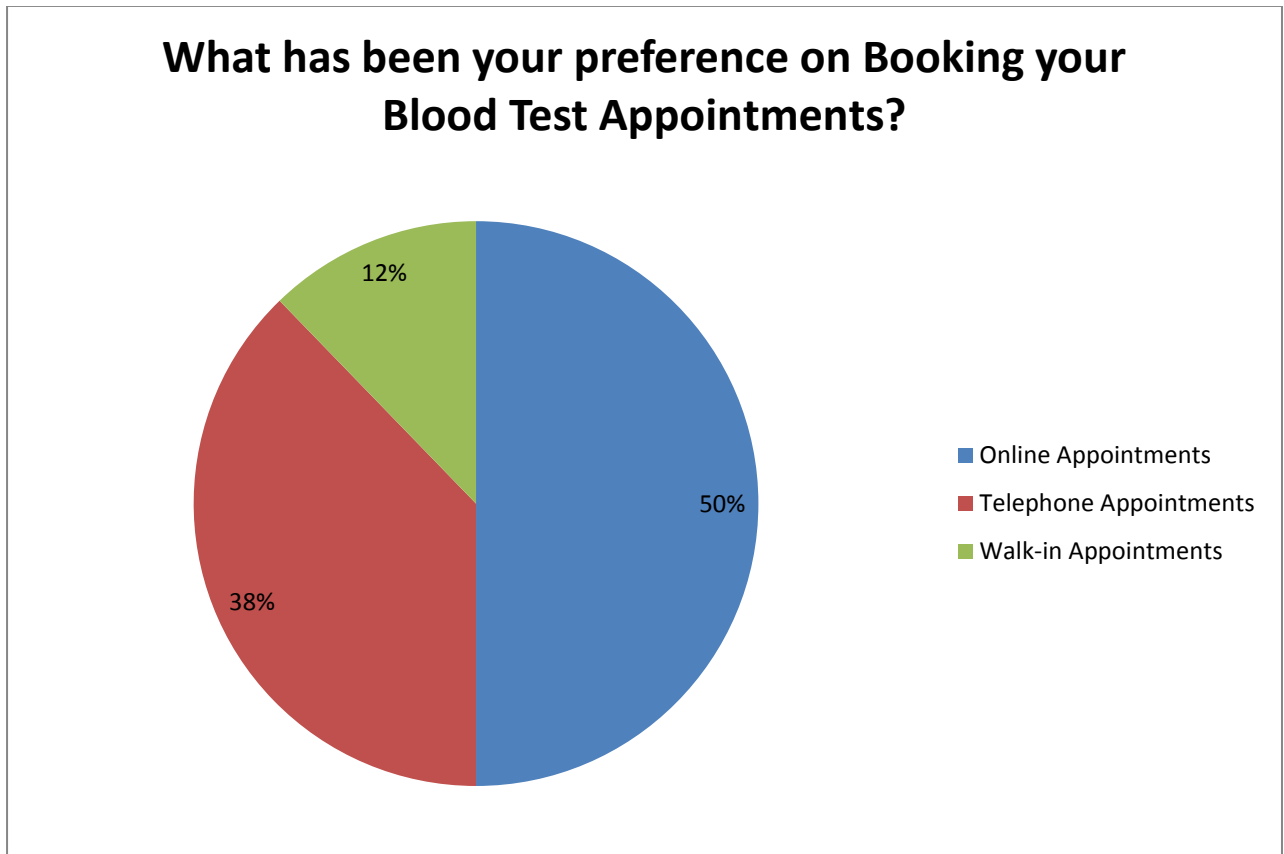
“I think this offers choice and flexibility for patients and helps to manage resources for the service provider”.

“Good experience so far, seems smoother and more convenient”.

It's so nice to know that I won't have to wait ages to have a test. And staff seem so much happier!

In and out in 4 minutes!!

Choices in the way patients booked appointments.



As you can see the majority 50%, of patients chose to book their appointments on line, although 38% still chose to book via telephone. Only 12% did not book at all and used the walk in service. When we asked people why they had chosen their preferred booking method they had varying opinions, but the main reason for the walk in service was from the older generation who did not have access to a computer, had to rely on public transport to get them to the appointment on time and found it easier to walk-in. We received many comments stating that the telephone service took a long time to answer and some patients had even taken around 3 days to book by telephone. All those we spoke to that had booked on-line appointments were happy as they felt there were plenty of appointments to choose from to fit in with their schedules.

There still remains some space for those patients needing urgent blood tests (on the day) who can attend at Orsett. Patients had come to Orsett from other areas of Essex that did not offer this service. One patient we spoke with had come from Billericay, attended at Basildon, found that it was appointment only and then travelled on to Orsett after being informed that there was a walk in service.

Recommendations:

GP's in Thurrock are showing concerns that they are unable to access emergency same day blood tests for their patients. As a result of this GP's are sending their patients to A&E at Basildon.

We would recommend;

- The system for GP's to be able to access a same day emergency service for their patients be put in place. If already in place then to be communicated to Thurrock GP's.
- Patients being given outpatient blood forms need the opportunity of getting their bloods taken on the same day. This service was implemented at Orsett whilst we were at one of our drop in sessions (we would value feedback as to how this service is working).
- To continue to provide a walk in service for those patients who prefer the flexibility of a walk in system - we recommend that 1 phlebotomist is kept free of booked appointments to cover this service and a review be carried out in 6 months to assess whether the service is being used and if it is financially viable.

Summary

In summary of our findings, it showed us that the pre-booking service appears to be the most favourable. Of the people that booked their appointments by telephone, they felt that they had to wait a very long time for the phone to be answered. Some of the people we spoke with stated that they had tried to call and get an appointment over a period of three days due to the lack of anyone picking the phone up. Of those who booked on-line, they felt this was a better more effective and convenient way to book their tests and found they were seen quickly. We were told that by booking their appointments it also had a positive impact on parking. There were still patients that preferred to be able to walk in to the service and wait for a test as they felt that this suited



them better. They did however state that they did not feel they had to wait as long as they had done in the past.

Whilst completing the survey at Orsett Hospital, we met with a group of people queuing at the other side of the Pathology unit. We spoke with about 6 people in the queue who said they were waiting for INR testing (International Normalised Ratio - A finger prick test that shows how long it takes the blood to clot). There were 33 people in the queue, all of whom had been given a 1.30 appointment and many of which had arrived at 12pm so as to be seen first so they could get on with their day or jobs. This test we were told only takes place on a Tuesday afternoon and these patients had to queue in the same place weekly, blocking both the lift and the stairs. They were then give a numbered card and had to continue to queue down a different corridor before they were called in. One lady that we spoke with and offered a seat to stated she had not sat down in the three years that she had been using the service. There was no seating area and if these patients sat in the pathology seating area they lost their place in the queue.

This INR service is not part of the Pathology First service but is an NHS service. We contacted Tom Abel the interim Director for Basildon and Orsett Hospital. He had not been made aware of this situation before and was very unhappy that patients were in this situation. Within a week of notifying him, he had changed the service to an appointment service ensuring that all patients had an allotted time and also did not have to queue or stand but could go straight to the INR service for testing within minutes.

Proof that peoples voices count.



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