healthwatch Bury

Prescriptions Project Report

Healthwatch Bury

May 2024

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Introduction to Healthwatch Bury

This report has been produced by Healthwatch Bury. The Healthwatch network consists of 152 Healthwatch organisations across each of the local authority areas in England. It also has a national body called Healthwatch England based in London. We are all independent organisations who aim to help people get the best out of their local health and social care services, whether it's improving them today or helping to shape them for tomorrow.

Everything we say and do is informed by our connections to local people and our expertise is grounded in their experience. We are the only body looking solely at people's experience across all health and social care in Bury. As a statutory watchdog, our role is to ensure that local decision makers put the experiences of people at the heart of their care so that those who buy (commissioners) and provide our services (NHS Trusts, GPs, the voluntary sector and independent providers) can benefit from what Bury people tell us. Our reports on various elements of health and social care in Bury can be found on our website at the following link: healthwatchbury.co.uk or by contacting us directly using the details on the back cover.

Executive Summary

Healthwatch Bury conducted a research project to explore patient experiences with the prescription process. The aim was to identify key issues and local good practice example, assess the usability of digital platforms like the NHS app, and provide recommendations to improve prescription process and patient satisfaction. Data collection involved community group visits, engagement activities, and one-on-one interviews. 122 questionnaire responses were collected as part of the project.

Key findings identified included a lack of communication and coordination among GP practices, pharmacies, and patients. This repeatedly resulted in delays and errors in the prescription process.

Participants emphasised the need for enhanced online systems for managing prescriptions. Issues such as supply management and timely medication availability were critical areas needing improvement.

The findings suggest that immediate actions should focus on improving online systems, improving communication, and providing additional support services to patients. Continuous monitoring and additional research should be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented changes and address any emerging issues. Addressing these key issues and implementing the recommendations will lead to improving patient satisfaction and healthcare in the Bury area.

Key findings

- When asked to rate their initial contact with the healthcare professional prior to getting a prescription **the majority of respondents (65%) reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with their initial contact**, suggesting that many patients are generally content with their interactions with healthcare professionals.

- **Lack of communication:** Several respondents highlighted poor communication between GP surgeries and pharmacies, leading to confusion and delays when getting prescriptions approved.

- **High confidence in pharmacists:** 84% of respondents feel comfortable and confident asking their pharmacists for further information.

- **54% reported being very satisfied, experiencing no problems in collecting their prescriptions**. This suggests that for many, the process is smooth and efficient. Several comments indicate that many patients benefit from delivery services.

- An overwhelming **94% of respondents reported no financial barriers or concerns** related to the cost of their prescriptions. This suggests that for the vast majority, the current system of prescription costs is manageable and does not pose significant financial strain.

- **NHS App**: 39% of respondents used the NHS app for ordering repeat prescriptions, and 25% for accessing medical records. However, 38% did not use the app at all, citing technical difficulties and poor integration across NHS trusts.

- **Holistic Health Approaches:** The responses indicated that the recommendations such as exercise, social prescribing, and other holistic health approaches are still not widely used. Signposting to holistic health approaches would provide a broader treatment plan for patients.

Our recommendations:

The key recommendations to local service providers and commissioners include the following:

Improve Communication and Coordination

- **Better Collaboration**: Improve communication between GP surgeries, pharmacies, and patients to avoid delays and reduce prescription mistakes.
- **Regular Training**: Keep staff up-to-date with ongoing training on the latest procedures and technologies.

Upgrade Digital Systems

- **Modernise Tech**: Update and integrate digital systems to manage prescriptions better, ensuring medicines are always available when needed.
- **Support and Educate**: Offer thorough technical support and training so patients and staff can make the most of digital tools like the NHS app.

Make the NHS App Easier to Use

- **Fix Technical Problems**: Sort out any technical issues quickly so the NHS app works well across all NHS trusts.
- **Promote the Benefits**: Highlight the app's advantages and provide clear instructions to encourage more patients to use it.

Improve Patient Support

- **Provide Extra Help**: Offer additional support for patients managing their prescriptions, including help from family or carers.
- **Set Up Helplines**: Signpost to or set up helplines or support centres to assist patients with any prescription-related questions or problems.

Encourage Holistic Health Approaches

- **Suggest Non-Medication Options**: Encourage GPs to recommend alternatives like exercise, social prescribing, and other holistic health practices.
- **Raise Awareness**: Increase understanding and use of alternative prescribing methods to give patients more comprehensive support.

Commit to Ongoing Improvement

- **Keep Monitoring**: Continuously monitor and research to ensure changes are working well and address any new issues that come up.
- **Gather and use Feedback**: Regularly collect patient feedback to find areas for improvement and make sure the prescription process meets their needs.

Background

The primary issue addressed in this report was to gather patient experiences in regard to the prescriptions process in the Bury area. Key concerns include poor communication and coordination among General Practitioner (GP) practices, pharmacies, and patients, leading to delays and errors in prescription management. Additionally, there are significant challenges related to the usability of digital platforms, particularly the NHS app, for managing repeat prescriptions and accessing medical records. The need for enhanced digital systems and better support services for patients managing their prescriptions independently is also highlighted.

Bury Metropolitan Borough has a diverse population with varying healthcare needs. The Borough had a population of 193,846 according to the 2021 Census. The borough is characterised by a diverse demographic, with a significant proportion of the population being White British (78.2%), alongside notable communities of Pakistani (7.8%) and other ethnic groups. [1]

Unpaid care provision has also been a significant aspect, with 4.5% of residents providing up to 19 hours of unpaid care weekly, a decrease from previous years [2]. Bury has a higher prevalence of certain chronic conditions, including cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. These conditions are particularly prevalent among older adults, reflecting the borough's aging population. Many rely on regular prescriptions for managing chronic conditions.[3] This demographic profile underscores the importance of a reliable and efficient prescription service tailored to meet the needs of an aging population with significant health challenges.

Several other organisations have conducted research on prescription processes, focusing on issues such as electronic prescribing, patient satisfaction, and system efficiency. Notably, studies have highlighted common problems like communication breakdowns between healthcare providers and patients, and the need for better integration of digital health tools. However, while these studies have identified broad issues, they often lack detailed insights into the specific experiences and needs of local populations like those in Bury.

For instance, broader national studies have found that electronic prescribing systems can reduce errors and improve efficiency, but they also point to significant variability in implementation and user experience across different regions and healthcare settings. These studies generally recommend improving digital literacy among patients and healthcare providers and ensuring robust technical support for electronic systems.

The findings from this report are particularly relevant to the Bury area. The report reveals that a substantial portion of the population faces barriers in using digital platforms like the NHS app, with 38% of respondents not using the app at all due to

[1] Bury (Metropolitan Borough, United Kingdom) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map and Location (citypopulation.de)
[2] Home - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)
[3] Local Authority Health Profiles - OHID (phe.org.uk)

technical hurdles. Furthermore, 26% of respondents required assistance from family or caregivers to manage their prescriptions, highlighting the need for more supportive services for those facing barriers to independent prescription management.

The feedback from local engagement activities, including park bench surgeries and community events, indicates a strong preference for better communication and coordination among GP practices, pharmacies, and patients to reduce delays and errors in the prescription process.

Overall, this report provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by the local community in managing prescriptions and offers targeted recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the prescription process in this area. By addressing these issues, local healthcare providers and commissioners can significantly enhance patient satisfaction and healthcare outcomes.

Further context:

- Pharmacy Report 2023-24 (parliament.uk)
- Prescribing exercise and physical activity to treat and manage health conditions - PMC (nih.gov)
- NHS England » Green social prescribing
- A "Prescription" that Cares for the Whole Person (mindful.org)
- Improving patient safety through feedback on prescribing errors (health.org.uk)
- The Causes of and Factors Associated with Prescribing Errors in Hospital Inpatients | Drug Safety (springer.com)
- Challenges and advantages of electronic prescribing system: a survey study and thematic analysis | BMC Health Services Research | Full Text (biomedcentral.com)
- NHS England » NHS campaign to help patients get treatment from their pharmacy

Methodology

Survey questions were produced to look at patient experiences with prescriptions.

Following its official launch in December 2023, the survey was distributed and promoted in a range of ways, including:

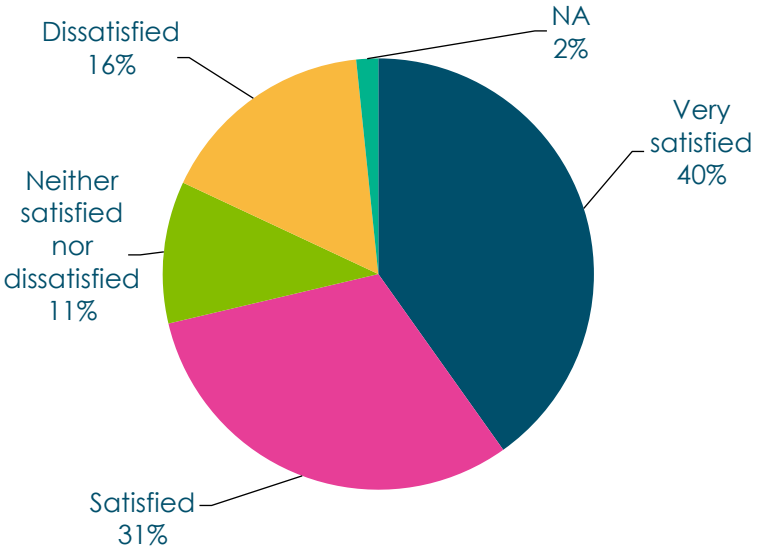
- Healthwatch Bury's website, ebulletin and social media channels (Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn)
- Face-to-face engagement, including park bench surgeries, community events and attending coffee mornings.
- Stalls at local health centres and Fairfield General Hospital.
- Visiting local groups including Breathe Easy, Speakeasy, One Step Bury, Big in Mental Health, Parkinson's Support Group, local food banks, housing support sessions, International Women's Day event and Women of Worth group.
- Posters displayed in local GP surgeries and pharmacies.
- Asking statutory organisations, health and social care providers, local businesses, voluntary sector partners and community groups to promote the survey.
- Direct emails to contacts and organisations.
- One to one interviews with patients.
- Hard copies available on request.

Findings

We received 122 responses to the survey between end of December 2023 and beginning of May 2024.

All respondents, except for one, had received a prescription from a healthcare professional within the past 12 months, ensuring responses in the report are based on recent experiences.

We asked the patients to rate how satisfied they were with the process overall:



The majority of respondents, 71%, expressed satisfaction with the process of getting a prescription. However, a notable minority, 16%, were dissatisfied, and 11% were neutral, indicating that while most people had a positive experience, there is room for improvement in the prescription process.

When asked to rate their initial contact with the healthcare professional prior to getting a prescription the responses are mixed but generally positive amongst patients. The majority of respondents (65%) reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with their initial contact, suggesting that many patients are generally content with their interactions with healthcare professionals. However, a notable portion (18%) were neutral, and a significant minority (17%) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, indicating areas for improvement.

Overview

122

responses to the survey

71%

said they were satisfied with the process overall.

Initial Contact

'It took me 3 days and numerous attempts to get in touch with a GP. Then I had to do an over the phone appointment only to be told by the GP that they needed to see me before prescribing, so had to wait a further 2 days to get in for a face to face. One week later I was able to get the medication i needed.'

- Survey Respondent

Positive Experiences

Helpful Staff Some comments highlighted positive interactions with healthcare professionals and pharmacy staff, who were described as helpful and informative.

Effective Processes Respondents appreciated the straightforward process of obtaining repeat prescriptions and the responsiveness of their GPs and pharmacies.

Convenience and Efficiency Many respondents praised the convenience of using the NHS app for repeat prescriptions, finding it easy to order medications and receive timely notifications from their pharmacies.

Areas of Concern

Access to appointments A common issue was the difficulty in securing appointments, with many patients expressing frustration over long wait times and the prevalence of telephone consultations instead of face-to-face visits.

Communication Issues Poor communication between GP surgeries and pharmacies was frequently mentioned. Patients often discovered prescription issues only upon arriving at the pharmacy, leading to further delays and the need for additional appointments or calls.

Administrative Errors Errors such as incomplete prescriptions, wrong medications, and missing repeat prescription items were noted. These mistakes often required patients to return to their GP or pharmacy to resolve the issues.

Systemic Delays around Bank Holidays and weekends, and procedural issues like the requirement to wait until only seven days of medication are left before reordering, were sources of frustration for patients.

Technology-Related Problems Some patients experienced significant delays due to the use of prescription apps, with one respondent mentioning a two-and-a-half-week delay.

Inadequate Support Several comments highlighted a lack of support and knowledge from healthcare professionals, particularly in specialised areas such as menopause treatment. Patients sometimes had to make multiple appointments before receiving appropriate care.

The overall sentiment towards initial contact with healthcare professionals prior to obtaining a prescription is mostly positive, with a significant majority expressing satisfaction. However, the detailed comments reveal several areas that require attention to improve the patient's experience. Improving appointment availability, communication between healthcare units, minimising administrative errors, addressing systemic delays, and providing better support and information to patients are crucial steps to increase satisfaction and streamline the prescription process.

Case Study:

Understanding medication changes

"I've been feeling really dodgy about going to the pharmacy lately. The medications I've been taking suddenly changed brands, and I have no idea why or what it means for my health. The chemist I go to is the only one nearby, but every time I'm there, it's chaos. The staff look so busy and stressed; I hate to bother them with my questions.

But lately, I've noticed that the dosages on the labels seem different from what I'm used to, and sometimes the labels on the packets don't match what's inside the bag. It's confusing and worrying. I'm not sure if it's a mistake or if something has changed with my prescription that I don't understand.

I wish I knew how to approach the pharmacist about this, but I don't even know what questions to ask, I can't even pronounce some of the names of the pills. I feel a bit lost and just muddle on myself. Maybe I should try to go when it's quieter, but even then, I'm not sure if I'll get the chance to talk to someone who can explain things to me properly. It is pretty frustrating because my health feels like its nearly out of my control right now, and I don't really know how to fix it."

- **82 year old North Bury resident**

The responses to the question about encountering challenges or delays in getting prescriptions approved indicate notable issues within the prescription process. With 52% of respondents reporting difficulties and 47% stating they did not encounter such problems; the data reveals that a significant portion of patients face obstacles in obtaining their medications.

Patients reported common issues like:

Lack of Communication Several respondents highlighted poor communication between GP surgeries and pharmacies, leading to confusion and delays. Patients often discover problems only when they arrive at the pharmacy, resulting in additional steps to resolve the issue.

Appointment and Availability Issues Difficulties in securing appointments with GPs and the unavailability of certain medications further complicate the process. Some patients experienced delays, specifically near Bank holidays.

Administrative Errors Mistakes such as medications being missed from repeat prescriptions or incomplete prescriptions were also noted. These errors often required patients to return to their GP or pharmacy to rectify the situation.

Systemic and Procedural Issues Situations such as not being sent their regular prescription after transferring to a new surgery or being unable to order medication until only a week's supply is left, highlight procedural inefficiencies. These rules and oversights can create unnecessary delays and stress for patients.

Technology-Related Delays Use of prescription apps has led to some delays, as mentioned by a respondent who faced a two-and-a-half-week delay due to the app.

Other Issues Instances of incorrect medications being prescribed, changes requiring payment, and GP's limited knowledge about certain conditions (e.g., menopause) also emerged as barriers.

Overall, while almost half of the respondents reported no issues, the experiences of the 52% who did face challenges highlight the need for improved communication, streamlined processes, and better system management to ensure timely access to medications.

Getting prescriptions approved

47%

had not experienced delays in getting their prescription approved.

Collecting prescriptions

54%

reported being very satisfied, experiencing no problems in collecting their prescriptions.

The responses regarding the latest experience with collecting prescriptions are generally positive for most patients but also highlight several areas of concern. A majority of respondents (54%) reported being very satisfied, experiencing no problems in collecting their prescriptions. This suggests that for many, the process is smooth and efficient. Several comments indicate that many patients benefit from delivery services, which add convenience and reduce the need to visit the pharmacy.

Several issues were identified in the responses, including delays, availability problems, and logistical challenges.

Wait Times and Delays 11% of respondents noted that while their prescription was ready, the pharmacy staff was very busy, resulting in wait times. 16% reported that their prescription was not ready when they arrived, and 10% had to return later to collect it. This indicates a significant portion of patients experiencing inconvenience and delays.

Medication Availability 5% mentioned that their usual medication was not available, and they were given an alternative, which could potentially affect their treatment. Several comments reiterated concerns about supply issues, leading to delays or substitutions.

Errors and Miscommunications 2% received the wrong medication, highlighting the risk of prescribing errors. Comments also indicate instances of miscommunication, such as medications being prescribed incorrectly or issues with repeat prescriptions, leading to confusion and multiple visits to the pharmacy.

Logistical Challenges Some patients expressed frustration with the limited opening hours of their pharmacies. While many appreciate delivery services, some reported delays in delivery or issues with coordinating delivery times.

Technology and Systemic Issues Some patients faced difficulties with online prescription systems, including delays and the inability to cancel orders. A few comments pointed to delays caused by the GP's part in the prescription process, suggesting a need for more streamlined procedures.

The responses to a question around comfort and confidence to ask further information around medication or condition show a largely positive attitude. A significant majority (84%) of respondents feel comfortable and confident seeking advice from their pharmacists.

Positive Findings

High Confidence The fact that 84% of respondents feel comfortable and confident asking their pharmacists for further information underscores the pharmacists' role as accessible and trusted healthcare providers.

Helpful and Understanding Staff Several comments highlight positive relationships with pharmacy staff, who are described as helpful, understanding, and knowledgeable about new medications.

Areas for Improvement

For the 16% of respondents who do not feel comfortable or confident, several key themes emerged in their comments:

Privacy Concerns Many respondents expressed discomfort due to a lack of privacy in pharmacies. The absence of private rooms or the need to discuss sensitive information in open areas where others can hear were common concerns. This lack of privacy can discourage patients from seeking advice.

Suggestions for improvement include ensuring that consultations occur in private rooms or more discreet settings to protect patient confidentiality.

Perception of busyness Some patients feel that pharmacists are too busy to provide thorough consultations, leading them to avoid asking for advice to not take up the pharmacist's time.

Addressing this perception could involve better managing the workflow to ensure pharmacists have dedicated time for patient consultations without interruptions.

Professionalism and Communication: A few comments indicated that some pharmacists come across as unapproachable, which can deter patients from

Confidence in pharmacists

84%

of respondents feel comfortable and confident asking their pharmacists for further information.

seeking their help. Improving staff training on customer service and communication skills can develop more positive patient-pharmacist interactions.

Specificity of Advice Patients noted that while pharmacists are knowledgeable, they often cannot prescribe medications. This limitation can lead patients to prefer consulting their GP or specialist for detailed medical advice, especially for conditions requiring prescriptions.

Clear communication about what pharmacists can and cannot advise on, and promoting their role in medication management, can help set realistic expectations. Recent Pharmacy First campaign will help to address this and will set out what pharmacies can and cannot deliver.

Physical Accessibility and Auditory Issues Comments from patients with hearing difficulties highlighted the need for better accommodation, such as private consultation spaces where they can communicate more effectively without background noise.

Ensuring accessibility features and providing alternatives for those with hearing impairments can improve the experience for these patients.

Trust and Relationship Building For some patients, trust in their pharmacist has been built over time, and this trust enhances their comfort in seeking advice. However, building such relationships requires consistent, positive interactions.

Encouraging pharmacists to engage regularly with patients and take the time to build relationships can foster greater trust and comfort.

While the majority of patients feel comfortable and confident seeking information from their pharmacists, addressing privacy concerns, improving customer service, managing the perception of busyness, and accommodating specific patient needs can further increase this. By implementing these improvements, pharmacies can ensure that all patients feel secure and supported in their interactions with pharmacists, thereby optimising the quality of care and advice provided.

Confidence in pharmacists

'Often the pharmacist talks through the plastic screen or in the open shop, rather than a private area in which I could hear better due to my poor hearing.'

Survey respondent

Accessibility

83%

indicated they received medication information in an accessible format.

A significant majority (83%) of respondents indicated that they received medication information in an accessible format. This suggests that most patients feel well-informed about their medication.

Areas for Improvement The feedback from the 7% who answered "No" and their additional comments provide insights into specific areas that need consideration.

Clarity and Readability Some respondents noted that the printing on the medication label isn't always clear, which can make it difficult to read important information. Several comments mentioned that the writing is too small, especially for those who wear glasses. Increasing the font size on labels and informational leaflets can help.

Plain language and simplicity and Understandability There is a need for information to be presented in plain English, avoiding technical jargon that can confuse public. Patients appreciate simple and clear instructions. Suggestions like asking to write instructions directly on the medication box were mentioned. Information leaflets are often too technical. Simplifying these leaflets while maintaining essential information could improve understanding.

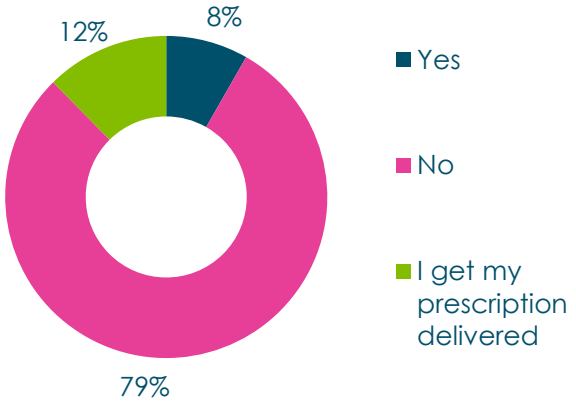
Completeness of Information Some patients reported not receiving specific instructions, such as the need to clean teeth after using certain medications. Ensuring all necessary information is provided is essential. A few comments indicated that they did not receive any explanation about their medication. Providing thorough explanations during consultations or through printed materials can help.

Accessibility to Healthcare Professionals Some respondents expressed a desire to speak directly to a GP for clarification about their medications. Ensuring patients have access to healthcare professionals for questions can help.

While the majority of patients feel that the information about their medication is accessible, addressing the concerns of those who do not is essential for improving patient satisfaction and safety.

Are there any transport issues that affect your ability to access your prescriptions?

Transport



While the majority of respondents do not face transport issues when accessing their prescriptions, the 8% who do face significant challenges that need to be addressed. Additionally, the 12% who use delivery services indicate the importance of this option in overcoming transport barriers.

79%

do not have any transport issues that affect their ability to access prescriptions

Cost of Prescriptions

94%

of respondents reported no financial barriers or concerns related to the cost of their prescriptions.

The responses show a generally positive view, with a small minority expressing specific concerns.

An overwhelming **94% of respondents reported no financial barriers or concerns** related to the cost of their prescriptions. This suggests that for the vast majority, the current system of prescription costs is manageable and does not pose significant financial strain.

6% of respondents indicated financial concerns related to their prescriptions. Although this is a small percentage, it highlights important issues that need to be addressed to ensure fair access to necessary medications.

Some respondents, such as those currently in full-time education or with medical exemptions, express worry about future costs once they no longer qualify for exemptions. This highlights the need for support during transitions without financial strain.

Issues like being required to pay for over-the-counter medications such as Gaviscon Advance, which are not prescribed, present financial burdens for some patients. Respondents on benefits who struggle to afford medications over the counter and face administrative hurdles to get prescriptions highlight the need for more streamlined processes and support for vulnerable populations.

Some patients report difficulties in accessing their prescriptions due to the need for in-person requests, which can be inconvenient and costly, particularly for those with mobility issues or living in remote areas.

Patients needing ongoing medications expressed frustration at not being able to obtain more than a month's supply at a time, which increases the frequency and overall cost of obtaining prescriptions.

While most respondents do not face financial barriers related to prescription costs, the concerns raised by the 6% who do highlight areas for improvement. Addressing these issues through targeted support and information[4], simplified processes, and better financial support can help ensure that all patients have equitable access to necessary medications without financial strain.

[4] Help with Health Costs in Bury leaflet April 2024 (healthwatchbury.co.uk)

Primary methods of arranging repeat prescriptions from the responses received:

Pharmacy Requests 31% of respondents ask their pharmacy to request their repeat prescriptions, showing a reliance on pharmacy services for convenience.

Digital Platforms 30% order their prescription through the NHS app. This indicates a significant implementation of digital solutions for managing healthcare needs

Direct Contact with GP Practices 11% ring their GP practice, 12% go to their GP practice in person to order.

Less common methods include NHS and GP Websites. A smaller percentage of respondents use the NHS website (2%) or their GP practice website (2%) to order prescriptions. 13% use various other methods, indicating some fragmentation in the process.

Challenges with Current Systems:

- Several respondents mentioned difficulties with using the phone, such as long hold times and calls being cut off. This can lead to frustration and a preference for in-person visits despite the inconvenience.
- Problems with app functionality and verification barriers highlight a need for improved user experience and expert support.
- System Inconsistencies. The transition from GP to pharmacy-based systems has caused some confusion and inconvenience for patients.

Repeat prescriptions

31%

of respondents ask their pharmacy to request their repeat prescriptions.

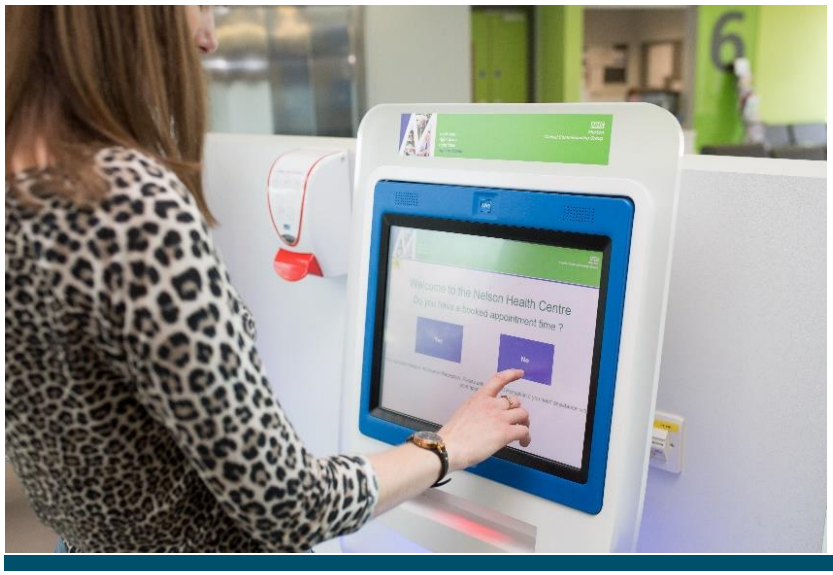
Positive Feedback on Digital Solutions

NHS App and pharmacy apps: Those who successfully use the NHS app find it convenient and efficient, reflecting its potential as a primary tool for managing prescriptions if usability issues are addressed. Specific pharmacy apps received positive feedback, indicating that tailored solutions from pharmacies can also be effective.

A significant number of patients **rely on their pharmacies to manage their prescriptions**, suggesting that pharmacies play a crucial role in the medication management process.

Despite the availability of digital options, some patients still prefer or are forced to **visit their GP practice in person** due to issues with other methods. Some patients have turned to email communication with their pharmacies as a workaround to the problems faced with other systems.

The responses show a diverse range of methods used by patients to arrange their repeat prescriptions, with a strong preference for digital solutions where efficient. However, significant challenges with phone systems and digital platforms need to be addressed. Enhancing the usability of these systems and improving integration with pharmacies can streamline the process, making it more convenient and efficient for patients.



Repeat prescriptions

30%

order their prescription usually through their NHS app.

Repeat prescriptions

The survey reveals that 34% of respondents have experienced difficulties with obtaining repeat prescriptions for their medications, while 66% have not. The detailed comments provide insights into the specific issues encountered by patients:

Online Ordering System issues include system hiccups. Problems with the online ordering system are frequently mentioned, causing delays and confusion in the prescription process. Medications being out of stock is a common issue, requiring additional trips to alternative pharmacies.

- A significant number of respondents highlighted **poor communication between GPs and pharmacies,** leading to delays and errors. Some comments indicate issues with reception staff at GP practices, which can impact the efficiency of processing prescriptions.
- Patients often need to see their GP for **medication reviews** or approval before prescriptions can be issued, which can cause delays. Inaccuracies in prescription records, such as outdated medications being listed or current ones omitted, create further complications.
- **Availability of medications and stock issues** at pharmacies is a frequent issue. Substitutions with cheaper alternatives without proper checking of allergy information or medical advice led to problems.
- **Approval delays** are caused because prescriptions sometimes remain unapproved on doctors' desks, causing delays. Problems with the timing of issuing prescriptions, such as only issuing them the week they are due, can result in patients nearly running out of medication.
- **Problems with using prescription apps** are mentioned, causing frustration and delays. Conflicting information about the prescription process from different sources (GP surgery, pharmacy, NHS website) adds to the confusion.

While a majority of respondents do not face difficulties in obtaining their repeat prescriptions, a significant minority do encounter various issues primarily related to communication, system reliability, and medication availability.

66%

of patients had not experienced any difficulties when obtaining repeat prescriptions for their medications.

Medication review

42%

of respondents found it Easy or Very Easy to schedule and attend medication reviews.

We asked respondents to rate how easy or difficult they found to schedule and attend regular medication reviews.

Ease of Scheduling and Attending Reviews:

Easy to Very Easy (42%): A significant portion of respondents found it relatively straightforward to schedule and attend medication reviews, with some noting that reviews were conveniently conducted over the phone.

Neutral (12%): A smaller group found the process neither easy nor difficult, indicating a neutral experience.

Difficulties Experienced:

Difficult to Very Difficult (23%) A considerable number of respondents experienced difficulties, citing long wait times, challenges in booking appointments, and communication issues, such as phone calls being cut off after long hold times.

Lack of Awareness and Missed Reviews (22%) Many respondents were either unaware of the concept of a medication review or reported never having had one. Some mentioned that they were overdue for a review or had not been contacted despite needing one.

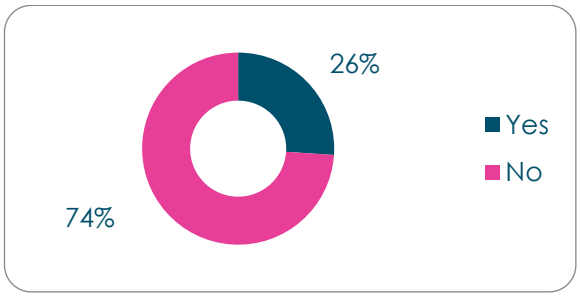
Frequency and Format. Some respondents noted that medication reviews are often conducted by phone, which they found convenient. A few reported being asked for frequent reviews, which they found unnecessary or burdensome.

GP Surgery Specific Issues. Specific surgeries were mentioned for their poor phone systems, leading to frustration among patients.

Scheduling Challenges. Several comments highlighted the difficulty of getting appointments with GPs, with some noting that it can take weeks to see a doctor or that hospital appointments are generally more accessible.

Positive feedback was given to healthcare providers that proactively scheduled and conducted reviews, especially those done over the phone, which was seen as convenient.

We asked if patient have ever needed assistance from family members, friends, or caregivers to obtain or manage their prescriptions.



26% Said Yes A significant minority of respondents indicated that they have required assistance from family members, friends, or caregivers to obtain or manage their prescriptions. **74% Said No.** Most respondents manage their prescriptions independently, without needing external help.

Dependency on Others. The 26% who require assistance highlight a dependency on social care systems, which may indicate issues with accessibility, mobility, health literacy, or other barriers to independently managing prescriptions. **Potential Strain on Caregivers** This dependency can place additional responsibilities on family members, friends, or caregivers, potentially affecting their time, resources, and well-being.

Support Services: The data suggests a need for healthcare services to offer additional support for those who struggle to manage their prescriptions independently. This could include:

- **Home Delivery Services:** Expanding pharmacy delivery services to reduce the need for physical visits.
- **Simplified Medication Management Tools:** Providing tools or resources to help patients better manage their medication schedules.
- **Enhanced Communication:** Ensuring clear and accessible communication about prescriptions, possibly through phone consultations or in-person guidance.
- **Community Outreach:** Engaging with community groups to offer education and support for those who may face challenges in managing their prescriptions.

Support from carers

26%

of respondents need support from their family, friends or carers ro obtain or manage their prescription.

NHS application

39%

of respondents use the NHS app for ordering their repeat prescriptions.

38%

of respondents does not use the NHS app.

We asked patients to share with us if and how they use the NHS app, the results below:

Order Repeat Prescriptions 39% of respondents use the NHS app to order repeat prescriptions, indicating a significant reliance on the app for medication management.

Access Medical Records 25% use the app to access their medical records, highlighting the app's role in facilitating personal health information access.

Set Up Preferred Pharmacy 22% use the app to set up a preferred pharmacy for collection, showing moderate use for streamlining prescription pickups.

Contact GP 11% use the app to contact their GP, suggesting some use of the app for direct communication with healthcare providers.

Proxy Setup for Family Members: 1% use it to set up their family member by proxy for them to order and collect prescriptions, a feature not widely utilised.

Non-Users 38% do not use the NHS app at all, indicating a considerable portion of the population either lacks access to or chooses not to engage with the app.

App Limitations and Issues:

Several respondents highlighted frustration with the NHS app, particularly concerning its inability to integrate records across different NHS trusts. This inconsistency requires users to manually transfer information between systems, which is time-consuming and clumsy.

Technical issues such as app malfunctions, verification failures, and memory constraints on devices were common complaints.

There is a notable desire for better functionality and integration, especially for those with complex medical histories and appointments across multiple trusts.

NHS application

'I tried three times to download the NHS App, went through all the steps but it doesn't go past the verification stage'

Survey respondent

Positive Feedback and Use Cases:

Some users expressed satisfaction with the app during the COVID-19 pandemic, appreciating the remote contact with GPs and the convenience it offered during that time.

The app is also valued for facilitating easy prescription orders and managing pharmacy preferences, making these processes more efficient.

Barriers to Use:

A portion of respondents reported not using the app due to medical conditions that hinder app usage, lack of technical knowledge, or preference for other methods like in-person visits or pharmacy-specific apps.

Others indicated a lack of need for the app or dissatisfaction with its performance, prompting them to avoid it altogether.

Alternatives and Workarounds:

Some users rely on pharmacy-specific apps or prefer direct communication with their pharmacists for managing prescriptions.

The app's shortcomings have led some to revert to traditional methods, such as phone calls or in-person visits, despite recognizing the potential convenience of digital solutions.

Training and guidance We identified some good practice examples locally where Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) have introduced drop-in sessions at GP practices. During these sessions, PPG members assist in raising awareness about the NHS app, providing support and training to patients on how to set up and use the app. This initiative not only helps patients become more proficient in managing their health appointments but also benefits GP services by enabling patients to cancel appointments through the app, thereby reducing administrative burdens.

We asked if patients had ever been directed to anything else other than medication.

A significant majority of respondents (76%) indicated that they have not been directed to anything other than medication. This suggests a predominant reliance on medication in their treatment plans.

Exercise is the most common non-medication recommendation, with 16% of respondents reporting this. It indicates a recognition of the benefits of physical activity in managing health.

Social prescribing, where individuals are directed to non-medical support such as community activities, was mentioned by 7% of respondents. This suggests some awareness and use of holistic health approaches.

A small percentage (2%) mentioned being directed to **books**, indicating a minor role for bibliotherapy or educational resources in their treatment. The smallest group (1%) mentioned being directed to **green spaces**, suggesting that nature-based interventions are not widely prescribed.

Various **other** alternatives were mentioned, accounting for 6% of responses:

- Beats (Bury Exercise and Therapy Service)
- Thinking ahead (Low mental health support)
- Tai chi (practice that involves a series of slow gentle movements and physical postures)
- Physiotherapy, a common recommendation for various physical ailments.
- Gym for back problems
- Counselling and therapy, Mental health support

The data highlights a significant reliance on medication, with exercise being the most common alternative recommendation. There is a diversity of other interventions, but their relatively low mention suggests an opportunity for broader implementation of holistic health strategies.

Personalised care, taking into account individual preferences and needs, appears to be fundamental for efficient health management.

Alternative prescribing

76%

of respondents have not been directed to anything other than medication.

16%

of respondents have been prescribed exercise by their health professional.

Accessing prescriptions

Positive feedback was received about proactive pharmacy services and digital solutions.

We asked patients to share anything else about accessing their prescriptions.

The responses indicate a mixed experience with accessing prescriptions, with notable areas for improvement in communication, system efficiency, and service accessibility. Positive feedback about proactive pharmacy services and digital solutions highlights the potential for technology to enhance the prescription management process. However, addressing supply issues, ensuring better coordination between healthcare providers, and improving customer service remain vital to increasing patient satisfaction.

Supply and Quantity Issues:

Long-term Medications: Many respondents expressed frustration with not being able to receive a sufficient supply of long-term medications (e.g., BP/cholesterol meds). They questioned why lifelong medication could not be provided in larger quantities.

Supply issues: Issues with stock availability and switching to generic medications without patient consultation were highlighted, particularly for those with visual impairments.

Convenience and Accessibility

Pharmacy Services: Positive feedback was given to pharmacies that provide delivery services and proactive customer services. However, the closure of some pharmacies on weekends and limited opening hours were noted as inconveniences.

Digital Solutions: The NHS app received praise for making the ordering process easier, though some found it challenging initially. Some participants suggested improving the app further and addressing delays in medication delivery.

Communication and Coordination:

GP-Pharmacy Coordination: Several respondents reported communication issues between GP practices and pharmacies, leading to delays and errors. There were instances of prescriptions not being processed in time or incorrectly issued.

Accessing prescriptions

Responses indicated a need for improvement in communication, system efficiency, and service accessibility.

Customer Service: Positive interactions with pharmacy staff were noted, but there were also complaints about GP receptionists and the need for better communication regarding medication changes and availability.

System and Process Efficiency:

Telephone and In-Person Requests: Many respondents found it inconvenient to order prescriptions via phone or in person, suggesting the need for a dedicated prescription line or an easier online system. Some preferred the old system where they could request medications over the phone.

Appointment Delays: Difficulty in getting timely GP appointments for medication reviews was a common issue, leading to delays in receiving necessary medications.

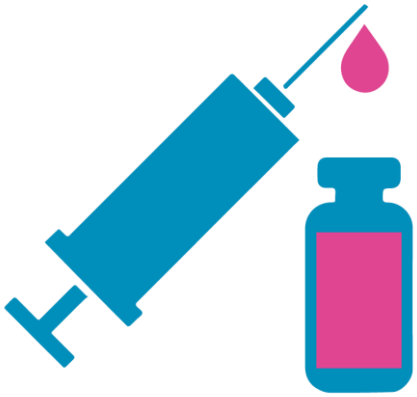
Emergency and Urgent Needs:

Emergency Prescriptions: Positive experiences were shared about receiving same-day emergency prescriptions, which was particularly helpful for those who forgot to order on time.

General Satisfaction:

Overall Experience: While many respondents reported satisfactory or excellent experiences with their pharmacies, issues with GP practices, and delays in prescription processing were recurring themes.

Improvements Needed: Suggestions included having a separate phone line for prescriptions, better coordination between GPs and pharmacies, clearer communication, and more flexibility in prescription quantities.



Case Study:

Navigating Life with a Rare Immune Condition: A Patient's Journey

Over a decade ago, a patient received a life-altering diagnosis for a rare immune system condition, which took an entire year to identify. This disease causes painful, cigarette-like burns all over the body. To manage it, the patient relies on a special medication that can only be prescribed by a hospital consultant at Fairfield General Hospital, where they attend regular check-ups.

Initially, the patient's medical journey was stable. Every three to four months, they had clinical check-ups with a fantastic consultant who deeply understood their condition. However, everything changed when COVID-19 hit. Suddenly, appointments were frequently cancelled or replaced with phone calls due to the high risk of infection. This disruption wreaked havoc on the patient's health, leaving them mostly bedbound and easily exhausted.

Since the pandemic, the patient's care has been inconsistent. Now, every three months, they see a different locum specialist, making it difficult to build a trusting relationship. For an entire year, all appointments were over the phone, which wasn't sufficient for managing such a complex condition. The frequent cancellations and changes cause immense anxiety, and the patient constantly worries about their condition worsening without proper oversight.

The medication is the patient's lifeline, but it's potentially dangerous and requires regular blood tests. Despite this, the current system forces the patient to travel to the hospital twice for each visit: once to see the consultant and again to pick up the prescription. Given their severe mobility difficulties, this is incredibly taxing. Public transport is costly and inconvenient, adding another layer of stress to an already challenging situation.

All the patient wants is some consistency and reliability in their care. They need appointments to go ahead as planned to avoid the anxiety and fear that come with last-minute cancellations. Combining consultations and prescription pick-ups into a single visit would significantly reduce the strain on their body and mind. Seeing the same specialist regularly would help rebuild the trust and understanding that is so crucial for managing their condition effectively.

Transportation is another significant hurdle. Assistance with travel costs or finding more convenient ways to get to the hospital would make a world of difference. While in-person visits are essential, telehealth could be a valuable tool for minor follow-ups, reducing the need for frequent trips and allowing the patient to manage their energy better.

Navigating this rare immune condition is a constant struggle for the patient, but with more consistent care, streamlined visits, and better support, their quality of life could greatly improve.

The demographic survey data reveals a predominantly older, female, White British, and Christian population. The high percentages of long-term conditions and disabilities align with the older age distribution. There is a notable presence of carers. The respondents are diverse in marital status. There is also a presence of minority sexual orientations and ethnicities. This shows the responses represent varied personal and cultural backgrounds.

Demographics

92%

of survey respondents were over 45 years.

Gender and Age Distribution

The majority of respondents were female (78%), with males making up 21% and non-binary individuals 1%. This may affect the survey's results, potentially highlighting issues and treatments more relevant or accessible to women.

The age distribution shows a predominantly older population:

- 32% are 75+ years
- 30% are 65-74 years
- 13% are 55-64 years
- 14% are 45-54 years
- Only 8% are under 45 years

This indicates that the survey results are more reflective of the experiences and needs of an older demographic.

Geographical distribution

The respondents are primarily from Ramsbottom, Elton, and North Manor (36%), followed by Redvales (23%), Prestwich (17%), and Radcliffe and Whitefield (both 12%).

Ethnicity

A large majority (84%) identify as White British. Other notable groups include:

- 6% from any other white background
- 3% White Irish
- 1% each for Chinese, Pakistani, African, Caribbean, Asian and White, another ethnic background, and those who prefer not to say

This may mean the survey findings might not fully capture the experiences of minority ethnic groups.

Demographics

Sexuality

Most respondents are heterosexual (83%), with smaller percentages identifying as asexual (4%), bisexual (4%), lesbian (1%), gay (1%), and other (1%). This suggests the data is predominantly reflective of heterosexual experiences.

Religion: The respondents are mostly Christian (59%) or have no religion (25%). Other religious affiliations include:

- 7% Jewish
- 1% each for Muslim and Buddhist
- 2% other religions
- 6% prefer not to say

This indicates a significant Christian representation, but also a notable proportion of people with no religious affiliation.

The respondents are varied in their **marital status**:

- 35% married
- 23% single
- 20% widowed
- 11% divorced
- 3% cohabiting
- 2% separated
- 1% in a civil partnership
- 5% prefer not to say

This diversity suggests that a wide range of personal circumstances are represented.

Health Conditions and Disabilities

- 53% have a long-term condition, which is significant considering the age distribution
- 24% have a disability
- 14% consider themselves to be carers. These figures highlight the high prevalence of long-term conditions and disabilities, reflecting the likely health challenges faced by the respondents.

53%

of respondents live with a long-term condition.

24%

of respondents have a disability.

14%

of respondents are carers.

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