

## Practice/Patient Open Day Report

As part of the Patient Participation Group improvements plans the Practice held an open day on the 19<sup>th</sup> June 2014 at Bangor Street Community Centre to offer patients the opportunity to express their views about quality and access to services.

Unfortunately, due to capacity, we were unable to invite our entire patient list so the Practice sent invite letters to 200 randomly selected patients and all the members of the patient participation group. Only 7 randomly selected patients and two members of the patient participation group attended the event. This was significantly lower than anticipated.

A PowerPoint presentation utilised and a copy of the presentation was given to each patient to enable them to make notes and ask questions at the end of each individual staff member's presentation.

Display boards were set up for patients to learn about conditions that require a GP appointment but also about self-care and managing minor conditions at home. Leaflets and posters were available for them to take away with them to give patients the opportunity to read and understand how they can help themselves and in doing so help the GP Practice/NHS.

### Open Day Display Boards



The Patient Participation Group had previously raised some concerns about access to appointments and it became apparent through discussion that many patients are unaware of the variety of services being provided for patients.

Staff appreciated the opportunity to explain to patients how (and why) the Practice currently handles the high demand for appointments and to offer information of the alternative treatment options available to patients. Staff hoped that the information offered would travel to a wider audience by word of mouth.

Patients were advised of the many changes that are currently taking place through NHS reforms and the improvements the Practice have already implemented following feedback received from a local practice survey carried out in 2013/14. The main areas of concern emerged as difficulty in accessing appointments and getting through on the telephone.

**NHS Reforms** – this has affected everyone who provides services through the NHS. Funding has been cut for everyone and the Practice has to adjust to these changes by continuing to provide the same service with reduced resources. Many of the patients indicated that they were not really interested in the impact of change they were more concerned with how Practices could/would manage appointments in spite of change.



Staff explained that there is a strong possibility that the national average waiting time to see a GP will increase due to an increase in patient demand increasing and a decrease in funding and resources over coming years. Patients did not react well to this as they felt they already struggle to see a GP at times one patient questioned “if this is going to get worse what was the point in having a GP”. At this point it was mentioned that there are alternative services available for patients so that they do not always need to visit the GP and it was pointed out that Patients can also help reduce demand to help free up appointments for those most in need or those with chronic conditions. Patients were informed that:

- Every year approximately 57 million GP appointments are made for conditions which could be treated by an alternative route.
- According to the Royal College of General Practitioners the national average that a patient is expected to attend for an appointment with their GP is five times a year.
- Similarly a significant number of patients attend the Accident and Emergency Department for treatment for problems and conditions that could be resolved by an alternative route.
- Shifa Surgery no longer prescribe medications for minor ailments then

**Minor injuries** – Services such as minor injuries, NHS 111, over the counter medications for fever, cough, cold etc., minor ailments medications from pharmacies for hayfever and many other illnesses were all addressed.

Patients were informed that if alternative services are available e.g. for a fall or burn then these should be utilised as they have been set up for patients and using them helps Practices manage



the demand for GP appointments. Services available at Barbara Castle Way include: the treatment room, minor injuries, ear clinic etc. which many patients need but are too often unaware they exist. Patient's suggested that that the Practice had no posters to advertise such services and that it would be useful to put up information in Practice so patients can go directly to the service as an alternative to asking for a GP appointment. The Practice has responded with establishing an information board for patients. The information board will updated each month with different services and information for patients. Staff have noted its popularity as patients have taken many leaflets and offered positive feedback. Unfortunately, it is difficult for the Practice to audit whether patients taking the information have actually accessed the services.



**Minor Ailments** – This is the most common reason many of our patients attend the Practice and therefore we wanted to tell them about home remedies and over the counter medication that patients can buy when presented with certain symptoms.

In line with Blackburn with Darwens Minor Illness Strategy, Shifa Surgery does not routinely prescribe medicines for minor conditions. This includes medicine such as: Paracetamol, Decongestants, Ibuprofen, Ear/Eye Drops, Cough Mixtures, Nappy creams Laxatives, Antihistamines, Indigestion

remedies, Dry Skin/Acne Creams, Vitamins and a range of other medications can be easily purchased over the counter. Pharmacists are trained health professionals who can identify more serious conditions which need to be seen by your GP. By visiting your pharmacist you could save yourself and the Doctor time as no appointment is needed and many pharmacies are open in the evening and during the weekend.

Many common conditions have symptoms that can take two weeks to get better so asking for advice on how long the symptoms might last and what you can do for yourself will give you confidence to deal with many common ailments at home. By visiting your pharmacist, self-treating minor conditions at home or obtaining treatment from your GP without an appointment will help allocate appointments for those most in need and free up NHS funds for the treatment of chronic and/or life threatening conditions.



It was clearly stated to that promoting the pharmacist as the first port of call for minor conditions was not intended to deter patients from coming to the Practice when appropriate but the information is given as a guide to help patients understand what sort of

conditions may and may not need an GP appointment. If medications have been purchased from a pharmacist, the GP is also helped because if the condition does not improve as anticipated then the GP can prescribe 'next stage medication'. Many illnesses are cured by simple steps but it is understood that this is not always the case and at these times there may indeed be need to see a GP.

Patients suggested that they are not always confident, especially where children are concerned, to try home remedies especially where children are concerned. To overcome these concerns the Practice suggested holding information sessions for parents when they bring their child for immunisations. The Practice intend to establish this service later 2014 to give parents opportunity to ask questions on a



one to one basis and also receive information on common childhood conditions, i.e. nappy rashes, fever, cough. It was acknowledged that some minor illnesses children experience can be quite distressing for parents especially during their teething process, and our GPs would be happy to hold a question and answer session each month, initially for new mothers initially to help them become more confident in understanding and managing their child needs. The patients agreed that this is a good idea and accepted that sometimes all that is needed is reassurance or advice and not necessarily an appointment. If the uptake on these sessions is good then hopefully the outcome will be positive for both the GP and the parents and children involved.

After the presentation a question and answer session was held and the main issues re-emerged. Although patients understood how changes are impacting upon General Practice the priority subject for patients was 'how the Practice intended to meet demand for appointments'.

The Practice Manager explained a range of changes the Practice has made over the past two years to overcome the problem of getting through on the phone i.e. Allocating additional staff members to answer calls at busy times and removing menu's from the telephone system. She went on to inform the audience that over recent years the Practice have tried, tested and tweaked the GP appointment systems in response to patient feedback often to find that such changes presented more problems than they solved. Patients were informed of walk in sessions twice a week where patients do not need to book an appointment in advance but just come to the surgery at 8am. Patients are able to pre-book in advance into our evening clinics and one afternoon a week. This was still deemed insufficient by those in attendance but the Practice Manager went on to explain that the number of patients failing to attend pre-booked appointments is very high which means appointments that could be

offered to others are less when we offer more pre-books. The audience agreed that patients should either cancel an appointment or attend it if they pre-book in advance as this is unfair on others needing an appointment and not receiving.

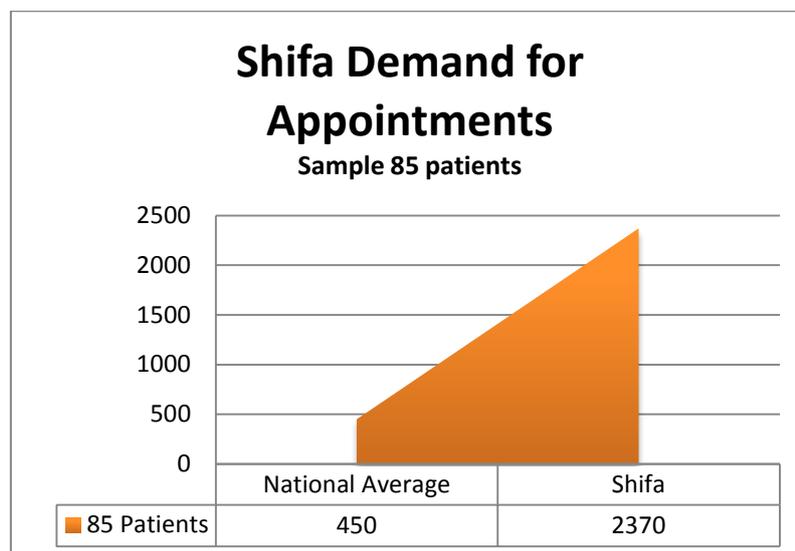
Many of those who attended said the event had been informative and agreed it was a shame that more patients had not got involved, however, staff perceived that in relation to ‘getting an appointment’ most however, remained dissatisfied and this was reflected in comments from patients which included “what should they do if they are ill?” and “If you can’t see your GP who can you see?”

Patients were thanked for their time and feedback, offered light refreshments and the event was formally closes but staff and patients continued to chat informally after the event ended.

**Additional Information**

Since the open day we have looked in greater detail at demand for appointments and we have found that the demand for appointments at the Practice is indeed very high. An small scale audit was carried out and the clinical system showed that the practice has:

- 67 patients who had attended more than 15 appointments in the last 6 months
- 18 patients had attended more than 10 times in the last 6 months.
- If these 85 patients continue their pattern of attendance over the next 6 months then **demand for appointments from this sample group of 85 patients alone is almost 5 times higher than the national average**



A clinician looked at the reasons for attendance associated with each patient to conclude that a very high percentage of these appointments could have been treated via alternative route/options.