

# The right to register

Mystery shopper review  
of GP registration in Manchester

December 2019

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## Recommendations

1. A constructive dialogue regarding patient registration is opened between patients, providers and commissioners which addresses the findings of this report.
2. More research is undertaken into the experiences of people who fall within the categories referred to in paragraph 4.3.
3. Healthwatch Manchester needs to investigate the support available for people who fall into these categories and ensure that this support is accessible and actively promoted to them.
4. Healthwatch Manchester needs to continue to actively promote the rights of patients in registering with a GP through its distribution channels as part of its information and signposting function and as a champion of patient rights.

## 1. Introduction

1.1 This report aims to provide a review of registration with a GP in Manchester. People have the legal right to choose a GP practice that best suits their needs. However, a GP practice may refuse to register someone because:

- it has no capacity to take on new patients
- it may not be accepting patients that do not live within its practice boundary.

In 2012, all GP practices were asked to agree an outer practice boundary. Outer practice boundaries are an expansion of a GP's original catchment area. Whereas in the past people may have had to register with a new GP even after only moving a few streets away, these outer boundaries can be a way to stay registered with a GP practice.

Since January 2015 all GP practices in England have been free to register new patients who live outside their practice boundary area. It is also for a practice to decide at the point of registration whether it's clinically appropriate and practical to register individual patients in that way.

People who register as 'out of area' patients have complained to the Healthwatch Manchester Office about their subsequent deregistration on these grounds.

Registration with a GP should be a simple process, however it has proven less so for many Manchester citizens.

1.2 In January 2019 the Healthwatch Manchester board agreed to include an investigation into GP registration within the organisation's annual plan. This area of investigation was identified as a priority due to the high volume of comments and complaints received by the Healthwatch Manchester Office from local people regarding their difficulty in registering with a GP. This report follows the impact report of July 2019: Extended Access to GP Appointments.

1.3 Key commissioned functions of Healthwatch Manchester are to:

- Inform and signpost people to local health and care services
- Respond to and investigate information received from local people regarding these services where there is cause for concern.

1.4 The review was carried out using the 'Mystery Shopper' assessment model and was conducted by Healthwatch Manchester staff and volunteers over a period of 1 week in December 2019.

1.5 The main objectives of this report are to:

- Present an analysis of the service through review methodology and key findings and
- Make recommendations regarding areas for improving registration with a GP.

## 2. Methodology

2.1 Mystery shopper style phone calls were used as the method of investigation. This provided an opportunity for Healthwatch Manchester to understand the actual, everyday experience of contacting a GP practice to enquire about registration.

2.2 Healthwatch Manchester values individuals' experiences with, and feelings about, health services. A qualitative method such as this means we can better understand some of the issues patients face.

2.3 Healthwatch Manchester conducts investigations with the aim of collecting data that is of practical use. We believe research should be used as a starting point to suggest service improvements.

2.4 Healthwatch Manchester staff and volunteers were deployed to conduct this research and analyse its findings.

2.5 Every GP practice within the Manchester locality was contacted by telephone as part of this investigation.

2.6 These GP practices were all contacted between 13<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

2.7 Callers did not disclose they were speaking on behalf of Healthwatch Manchester. This was vital to ensure integrity of results and to keep conversations as naturalistic as possible.

2.8 Callers followed an agreed script. This is included in appendix one and helped ensure a valid comparison across data.

2.9 If nobody from a practice answered the telephone on the first occasion, a maximum of two more attempts were made to contact them. Three practices failed to respond to a call on all three occasions.

2.10 There was no standardisation of what equated to a score of 1-5 on the scales for clarity, politeness and quality. Callers made assessments based entirely on their personal views. This underlines the personal and subjective nature of this investigation. Healthwatch Manchester values individual experience and believes there is a valid comparison to be made. However, we would recommend further research that takes a more standardised approach.

2.11 The results of the investigation are anonymised in this report. There is little value in assigning positive or negative responses to individual GP practices and this report may still achieve its aim of general review to highlight issues around access to the service.

2.12 Results are configured by North, Central & South Manchester and are not configured by postcode, ward or location. This could be a useful direction for future research.

2.13 Healthwatch Manchester recognises the limited scope of this research due to logistical constraints such as only contacting each surgery once. Variation in results may vary according to other factors such as time of call and respondent.

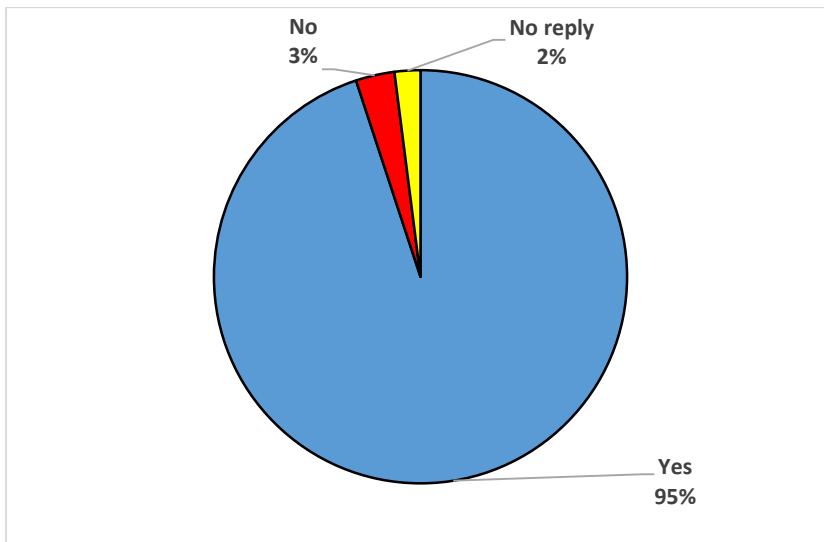
### 3. Key Findings

#### 3.1 Responses to the GP registration survey

Callers spoke to frontline staff at each GP practice in Manchester. They asked the following question: “I’m thinking of moving to the area. Is your practice taking on new patients?”

3.1.1 Figure 1 shows the proportion of responses to the above question

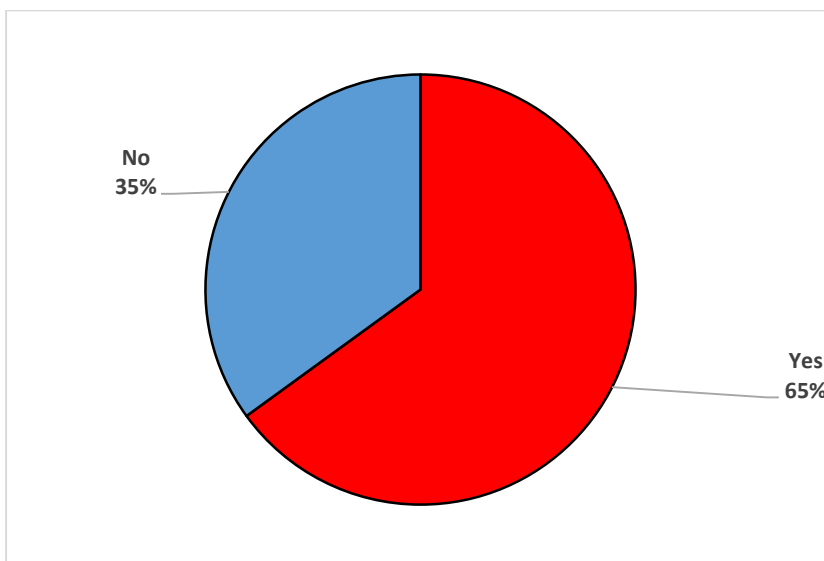
**Figure 1. Responses to the initial query regarding registration of new patients**



3.1.2 Callers did not prompt the frontline staff for further information. Where frontline staff proceeded to request forms of identification from the caller this was then noted.

3.1.3 Figure 2 shows the proportion of frontline staff requesting further identification from the caller

**Figure 2. Request for further identification made to the caller**



## 3.2 Identification requirements

3.2.1 Callers asked for clarification on what forms of identification were required. Frontline staff gave the following responses:

- Proof of address
- Proof of identification
- Both proof of address and identification

Further clarification regarding proof of identification gave one or more of the following responses:

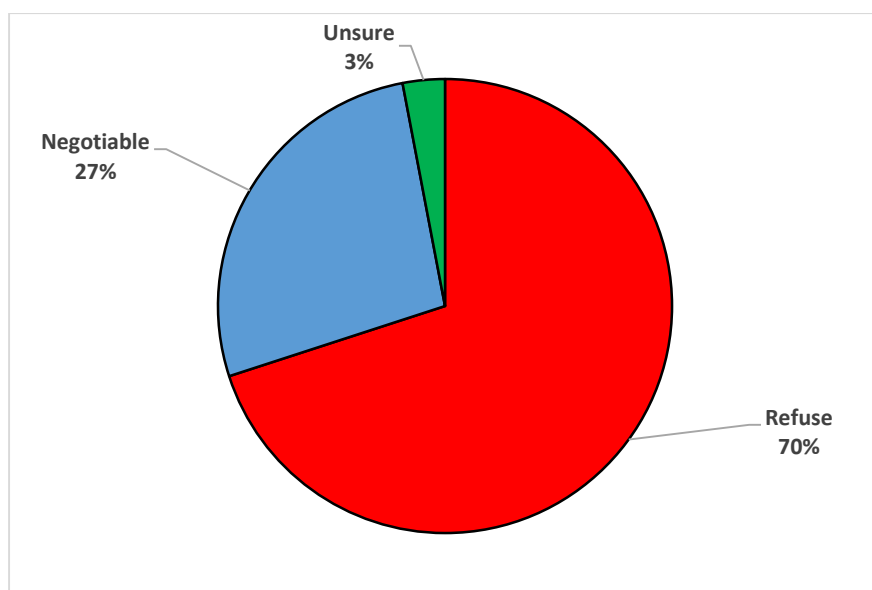
- Passport
- Driver's licence
- Biometric card
- Any other card displaying a photograph of the patient

Responses were not uniform with a small number of practices (5) also stating the patient's NHS number as a form of identification.

3.2.2 Where photographic identification was required callers then asked how to proceed if they didn't possess any. Responses varied from not knowing what to do to refusing registration outright.

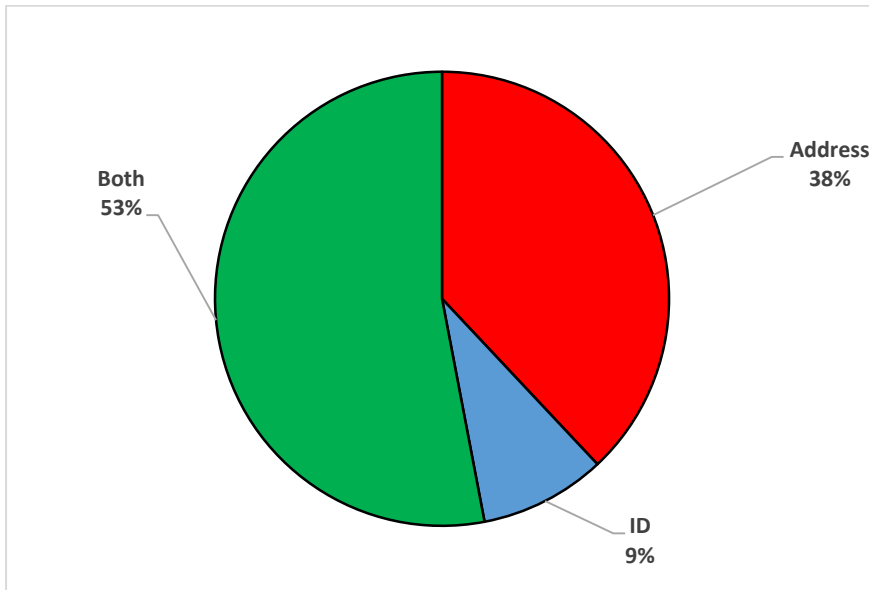
3.2.3 Figure 3 shows the proportion of responses to this query. 'Negotiable' includes instances where frontline staff proposed a compromise e.g. 'Come into the clinic and we'll sort something out'.

**Figure 3 Responses to the query on registration without photographic identification**



3.2.4 Figure 4 shows the proportion of responses regarding the requirement for identification.

Figure 4 Identification requirements expressed as a proportion of overall requirements

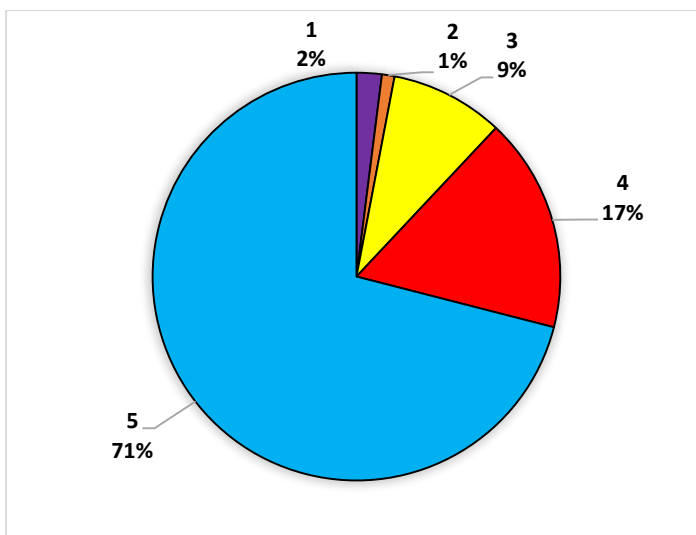


3.2.5 Full tabulated results which show actual figures for North, Central & South can be found in the Appendix.

### 3.3 Clarity of information

3.3.1 This relates to whether the caller felt information was given in a clear and easy to understand manner.

Figure 4. Proportional rating of clarity of information



Rated on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being poorest and 5 highest.

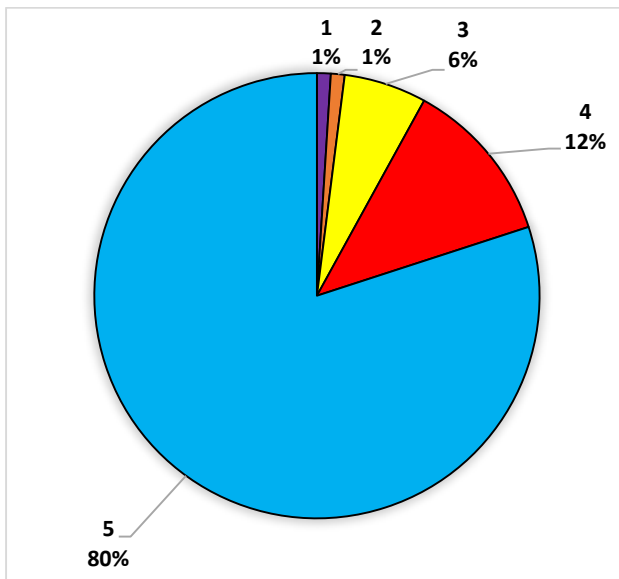
3.3.2 Overall the clarity of information provided was judged to be very good with no significant difference from the similar previous mystery shopper exercise conducted in June 2019.



### 3.4 Politeness

3.4.1 This criterion relates to whether the caller judged the telephone manner of the respondent to be of an appropriate and acceptable nature.

Figure 5. Proportional rating of politeness



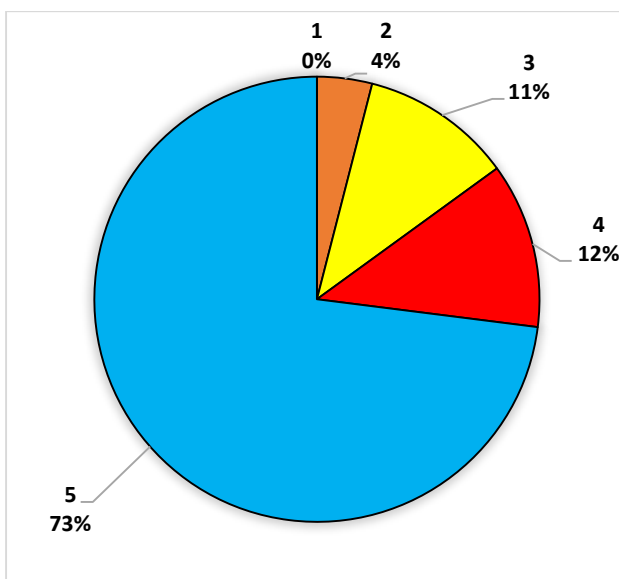
Rated on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being poorest and 5 highest.

3.4.2 Overall politeness was judged to be very good with no significant difference from the previous similar mystery shopper exercise conducted in June 2019.

### 3.5 Quality

3.5.1 This criterion relates to the quality of information provided to the caller. Practices may be rated highly for clarity and politeness but poorly for quality if they gave poor information.

Figure 6. Proportional rating for quality of information



Rated on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being poorest and 5 highest.

3.5.2 Overall clarity of information was judged to be very good with no significant difference from the previous similar mystery shopper exercise conducted in June 2019.

3.5.3 GP practices in Manchester are configured into three federations: North, Central & South. A breakdown of the key findings by these areas is available on request from the Healthwatch Manchester Office.

3.5.4 Full tabulated results which show actual figures for North, Central & South can be found in the Appendix.

## 4. Conclusions

4.1 There is significant variation across GP practices in Manchester regarding the indicated requirements for registration by new patients.

4.2 Some of these requirements may exclude certain groups of people from registering as new patients.

4.3 These groups of people include those without proof of address and/or photographic identification who fall into a number of categories including people in transitional accommodation or for whom travel abroad or driving is not possible or feasible.

4.4 From the patient's perspective it would seem that the simple process of registration with a GP can become problematic and extra support may be required for certain groups of people.

4.5 From the commissioner & providers' perspective it would seem more likely that patients who are able to register without proof of address and/or identification are less likely to use other services such as A&E; and that an agreed and standardised process of registration across Manchester may address this issue.

4.6 There is no cause for concern regarding the clarity and quality of information provided by frontline GP staff nor with their politeness.

## Appendix

### Agreed script

Procedure used by the callers from Healthwatch Manchester:

1. Sit with your listening partner
2. Call the GP Practice on speaker phone so you can both hear
3. After greeting the receptionist, explain the scenario by saying “I’m thinking of moving to the area. Is your practice taking on new patients?”
4. Allow the receptionist to say yes or no. Do not prompt them. After a slight pause thank them, say goodbye and hang up.
5. If the receptionist mentions the need for an address or identification, ask for clarification and make a note of this.
6. Thank the receptionist and hang up.

Other factors clarity, politeness and quality are rated on a scale of 1-5 with one being the lowest score and five the highest. Check with your listener and agree a score. Responses are recorded immediately after the telephone conversations and callers may also record narrative comments if they wish.

### Tabulated data

Table 1 provides the actual number of responses expressed by area and as a total

Question	Area						Total	
	North		Central		South			
	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
New patients	32	1	30	0	21	1	83	2
Proof required	18	14	17	13	19	2	54	29
Address	6		8		7		21	
Identification	2		0		3		5	
Both	10		9		9		28	

Criterion	Rating	Area				Total
		North	Central	South		
Clarity	1	0	2	0	2	
	2	0	1	0	1	
	3	1	4	3	8	
	4	6	5	3	14	
	5	26	18	16	60	
Quality	1	0	0	0	0	
	2	0	3	0	3	
	3	4	3	2	9	
	4	4	3	3	10	
	5	25	21	17	63	
Politeness	1	0	1	0	1	
	2	0	1	0	1	
	3	2	2	1	5	
	4	6	0	4	10	
	5	25	26	17	68	



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