

**Connect Health
PhysioLine Service in
West Hertfordshire
Mystery Shop and
Survey
November 2020**





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Background

About Healthwatch Hertfordshire:

Healthwatch Hertfordshire (HwH) represents the views of people in Hertfordshire for health and social care services. We provide an independent consumer voice for evidencing patient and public experiences and gathering local intelligence with the purpose of influencing service improvement across the county. We work with those who commission, deliver and regulate health and social care services to ensure the people's voice is heard and to address gaps in service quality and/or provision.

About Connect Health:

Connect Health is the largest, independent provider of integrated community MSK (musculoskeletal) and physiotherapy services in the UK (including orthopaedics, pain, rheumatology, well-being and occupational health) serving over 350k NHS patients per year across 26 CCGs and 100+ businesses.

They are commissioned by Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group (HVCCG) to provide the Herts Valleys Integrated Musculoskeletal Service in West Hertfordshire¹ which supports patients with conditions related to bones, soft tissues, muscles, joint and ligaments. They also help with other issues such as chronic pain, fatigue and postural stability.

Why we looked at Connect Health

In Dec 2019 HVCCG held a 'deep dive' on the Connect Health provision. A 'deep dive' is a method used to investigate things that have gone awry, not understood or where independent assurance is lacking. The focus of this 'deep dive' was on delays to treatment, a rise in complaints and a rise in quality alerts as Connect Health had received 40% more referrals than was originally expected by HVCCG.

To help inform this meeting, HwH shared intelligence we had received through our signposting service. Key themes from this included:

- Difficulty getting through on the telephone
- Difficulty getting an appointment therefore appointments are not always in a convenient place or in the same place as before.
- Use of locums feels to patients that there is no continuity of care.
- Relationships with other providers are not as seamless as they could be.

¹ St Albans and Harpenden, Watford and Three Rivers, Dacorum, Hertsmere



- Restricted choice for patients (must see Connect first).
- Some doubts expressed by other providers to the patient about the quality of care given by Connect (in this case physiotherapy) .

In response to the 'deep dive', Connect Health outlined what they were doing to improve patient experience. This included:

- New call handling KPIs in place to monitor performance.
- More staff recruited to the admin function
- Upgrades to the Mitel telephony system which will improve call queuing / waiting functionality with information where patients and professionals are in the queue. The functionality within the system will allow improvements to observation and listening to calls, which we will use, to give feedback, coach and develop our team members
- Increased estates footprint (Connect Health operate out of 21 sites across the 4 localities)
- Increased staffing to meet the demand and address any backlog

A follow up meeting was arranged in January 2020 with the Service Manager and Clinical lead of Connect Health together with the HVCCG lead commissioners to hear what impact these improvements were making and to discuss ways of further improving patient experience.

As part of this meeting a number of actions around communication to patients, patient engagement and patient representation were confirmed. To support this HwH was asked to conduct some site visits to Connect Health clinics to talk to patients about their experience and review the PhysiLine service via a mystery shopping exercise.

Plans were put on hold because of the Coronavirus pandemic. Connect Health services moved to telephone/virtual appointments and face to face appointments ceased in line with government guidelines.

In July 2020, with lockdown being eased and services expected to treat pre- COVID-19 levels of patients, Connect Health and HwH felt it was a good opportunity to revive the work, although this would be reduced and modified from the original initial discussions to take account of government guidelines and service changes.

What We Did

To access the PhysiLine service, a patient will be referred by their GP or another health professional. So that our volunteers could telephone mystery shop the service, Connect Health had to create 2 'dummy' health records to put into the system as referrals so that our volunteers could use them to test the admin function and the clinical service. The scenarios



were for a 66 year old male called 'Joseph' with a shoulder problem and a 70 year old female called 'Doreen' with a knee problem.

The Mystery shop exercise was testing out how quickly phone calls are answered, how easy it is to book and change an appointment, friendliness of the staff, how a physio consultation works on the telephone and what support is available after the appointment.

It was agreed that the mystery shop calls would take place during the first 2 weeks of November (this was during the second national Lockdown). We used 4 HwH trained Enter and View volunteers for the calls. They were given a full clinical history information sheet, a checklist of what should be asked on the calls and a scoring sheet to record their experience.

None of the volunteers live in west Hertfordshire and therefore had had no experience or knowledge of the Connect Health Service prior to their involvement with this project so there were no conflicts of interest or assumptions made about the service by the volunteers.

The Connect Health PhysioLine team were made aware a mystery shop exercise was taking place, but it was agreed that only at the end of the clinical consultation, the volunteer would reveal this was a mystery shopping exercise. This would allow all the elements to be checked using the 2 'dummy records' but it would save the clinician from generating the paperwork normally required for this kind of appointment.

As we were not able to visit clinics in person due to the pandemic and official guidelines, it was agreed that a survey designed by HwH would be given out to patients attending face to face appointments. Since the re-opening of services only 1 Connect Health Clinic is currently available for Physiotherapy and this is located at Wolsey House in Hemel Hempstead.

Surveys were completed during November and scanned by the Connect Health team at Wolsey House to the HwH Quality Manager. Patients were given the option of contacting HwH by telephone or online if they preferred to give feedback in that way. Though some patients did say they would contact HwH direct, none did. Since March we have also not received any new signposting cases about the Connect Health service.



Summary of Results:

Telephone Mystery Shop of the PhysioLine Service

Testing the Admin function

Background to the service

The Patient Care Co-ordination Centre (PCC) staff are primarily based in Connect Health's main office in Newcastle (with the exception of 1 team member who works locally in Hemel Hempstead), however, they are specifically allocated to the Herts Valleys contract.

On average a PCC team member would answer approximately 40 calls per day. However this can vary massively depending on demand. For example, one of the PCC team members that spoke to a volunteer in the test week answered 72 calls on that day. Our Mystery shoppers would therefore not be easily identifiable within this volume of calls.

There had been a number of changes in the PCC team prior to our mystery shop exercise to further improve the admin function so this was a timely test of the system.

The first step to booking an appointment with a physiotherapist is to call the PCC. The experience of our volunteers making a new appointment and one trying to change their appointment is outlined below:

'Doreen's' experience

Questions	Volunteer Response
Date of call	04.11.20
Time of call	11.00 am
How many rings before the call was answered	An immediate pre-recorded welcome message and then followed by about 5 rings
How were you greeted?	A gentleman greeted me politely
Did they give their name?	Yes he did
Did they give the name of the service?	Yes, with a full name and what it is for
Did you feel satisfied with how the call was dealt with?	Yes, the appointment was booked for 11 th November
Was there anything that you felt was good practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The person, who answered the call, spoke very clear English and not too fast. The volume of his voice was good



	<p>(not too loud or too low).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• He was also very polite and helpful throughout the whole process.• He was happy to repeat the information again when requested.• While confirming the date and time for the coming telephone physio appointment, he also provided the name and the job title of that person who will be responsible for that appointment.• The whole telephone booking process was simple and fast.• Compared to phoning my GP where I can wait for 45 minutes, it was really very quick.• Not too many pre-recorded messages. Only two recorded messages before someone answered the call.
Was there anything that you felt could be improved ?	It will be helpful if they could explain more about the coming (telephone) physio appointment. For example, what will happen during that coming telephone physio appointment
From your experience of this call, how confident are you about the overall service you received? Please rate from 1 - 5, where 1 is 'Very under Confident' and 5 is 'Very Confident'	4



Our volunteer, 'Joseph', was given an appointment for 10th November that he was going to change for a new one.

'Joseph's' Experience:

Questions	Volunteer response
Date of call	06.11.20
Time of call	12.07 pm
How many rings before the call was answered	One ring virtually immediately
How were you greeted?	Very warmly and professionally
Did they give their name?	Yes
Did they give the name of the service?	Yes
Did you feel satisfied with how the call was dealt with?	Yes, the call handler was very efficient but helpful and friendly at the same time. All the caller expectation points were followed to a tee and a new appointment was booked for 16 th November.
Was there anything that you felt was good practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I thought it was good practice that the call handler made the effort to ensure they had collected all my contact information.• Towards the end of the call she identified that she did not have my email details and took them.
Was there anything that you felt could be improved?	No generally it went very well
From your experience of this call, how confident are you about the overall service you received? Please rate from 1 - 5, where 1 is 'Very under Confident' and 5 is 'Very Confident'	5



Testing the telephone clinical consultation

Background to the service

The telephone consultation is expected to lead to quick access to physiotherapy expertise and therefore to early assessment and self-management and, when appropriate, treatment. Once the appointment is booked by the PCC, the patient is given an hour time slot within which the physiotherapist will ring to start the consultation.

2 new HwH volunteers took over the identities of 'Doreen' and 'Joseph' for the clinical consultation by telephone with 2 different clinicians. As far as the clinicians were concerned these were 2 new referrals to the service. They would have received the clinical information sheet but not the case study information that was supplied to our volunteers. Their experience is outlined below:

'Doreen's' Experience

Questions	Volunteer response
Date of call	11.11.20
Time of call	12.50 pm
Was the call within the scheduled appointment timeframe?	Apologised and asked if it was ok to talk as this call was 10 minutes earlier than arranged . Offered to call back if this wasn't convenient.
How were you greeted?	Professionally
Did they give their name?	Yes
Did they give the name of the service?	Yes, The therapist introduced herself giving her name and explained about the service Connect Health and the benefits of the service in terms of waiting times and providing advice and support quickly, redirecting to other clinicians if necessary.
Triage: What information were you given? Note organisations, advice and any other information that may help us assess the	Information given : About Connect Health and how she would ask me some questions about my concerns with my knee and depending on my responses devise a care plan appropriate to my needs or arrange



<p>quality of the service. Please also refer to the expected questions checklist on the case study</p>	<p>treatment.</p> <p>Questions Expected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Duration of pain / yesType of pain / yesHistory of injury onset / yesChange in sensation / yesReferred pain / yesChanges in function range of movement, stiffness , Loss of power / yesAges and eases / yesPrevious treatment / yesDaily pattern / yesSleeping pattern / yesSocial History / yesDaily Living activity / yesMedical History / yes <p>Discussion of diagnosis / very comprehensive discussion with me about what she had diagnosed explaining her conclusions fully to me. I agreed with what she said.</p> <p>Treatment Plan / we talked about what I would like to achieve in terms of improvement of my condition, discussed with me what she thought would be of benefit to me regarding my general daily activities, dos and don'ts etc.</p> <p>We discussed strengthening exercises that would be beneficial for me including the frequency required. Additionally she informed me about the data that supported the benefits of this type of muscle building exercise and what improvement I could expect from this.</p>
<p>Did you feel satisfied with how the call was dealt with?</p>	<p>I was very satisfied with this call and felt the Physiotherapist was very professional in her manner and made me confident that she would be able to help me to improve my symptoms.</p> <p>Even though I told her that I had no email she offered to post information to me and actively looked for ways to ensure I</p>



	<p>received the information.</p> <p>I was told I could contact the office and they would arrange for information be sent electronically to my daughter if I felt that was OK.</p>
Was there anything that you felt was good practice?	<p>I felt the experience as a whole was good practice from start to finish.</p> <p>The clinician calling at the appointed time; the comprehensive questions; the advice; treatment plan; information regarding future contact if I needed advice.</p> <p>The clinician was upbeat friendly and positive she could help me to improve my painful knee.</p>
Was there anything that you felt could be improved?	<p>Having a clinical background myself (and also having prior warning of the questions) this call was not a problem for me to be able to answer all of the questions .</p> <p>I wonder if it would be beneficial to prepare clients for this type of virtual appointment by sending some information about the benefits of this type of call in terms of waiting times etc in advance and a reassurance that onward referrals will be made if necessary.</p> <p>Information prior to the phone call about the type of questions that will be asked. Suggesting having a pen and paper to make notes .</p> <p>Following the virtual appointment emailing with the agreed treatment plan (this may happen but because I then had to admit being a mystery shopper I didn't actually progress to this bit) .</p> <p>I wonder if follow up electronic updates on progress are available ?</p>



From your experience of this call, how confident are you about the overall service you received? Please rate from 1 - 5, where 1 is 'Very under Confident' and 5 is 'Very Confident'	5
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Our Volunteer commented 'I must say, she (the physiotherapist) was fantastic, asked all the questions, was really kind and professional and explained everything to me . So good to feel that I could be helped with this type of virtual appointment.'

'Joseph's' Experience

Questions	Volunteer response
Date of call	16.11.20
Time of call	2.15 pm
Was the call within the scheduled appointment timeframe?	<p>Yes. The initial call to my mobile phone was made at 1405. The phone rang very briefly and the caller (named physiotherapist) then hung up before I could accept the call. I would estimate that to be 6 seconds.</p> <p>A message was left on my answerphone at that point, stating callers name, organisation and profession and saying that 'I will call back again soon so that we can have a chat about your shoulder. If you are unable to take the call you will have to book another appointment'. The message was a bit mumbled and rushed. I had to listen to it 3 times before it was clear to me.</p> <p>At 1415 a second call was made and I answered quickly.</p>



	<p>Again the caller said ‘Hello Mr... my name is... I am a physiotherapist with the Connect Service. Are you expecting this call about your shoulder?’</p>
<p>How were you greeted?</p>	<p>Professionally</p>
<p>Did they give their name?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Did they give the name of the service?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Triage:</p> <p>What information were you given? Note organisations, advice and any other information that may help us assess the quality of the service. Please also refer to the expected questions checklist on the case study</p>	<p>We discussed my injury including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precise location of aches/pain • Duration/reminder of when did it start? • Reminder how did it happen? • Is the pain constant or intermittent? • Intensity but not a score as such • My job • Activities that cause problems • Painkillers being taken to ease the pain <p>He did not raise (and neither did I)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleep patterns/difficulty • Driving a car • Support at home e.g. for getting dressed <p>Outcome:</p> <p>He will send me an email immediately after this consultation setting out exercises to help me. This will include a video.</p> <p>After 2/3 weeks the pain/ache should ease and be restored to normal after 2/3 months with continued exercise.</p> <p>If after 2/3 weeks there is no improvement I am to contact him using the email which will include his name and number. I should</p>



	<p>go back to him and not my GP.</p> <p>You can call me again within 6 months (I presume that is when Connect close the case)</p>
Did you feel satisfied with how the call was dealt with?	<p>Overall I felt listened to.</p> <p>I was able to explain my issue, with follow up questions, and answers.</p> <p>The conversation was professional and empathetic.</p> <p>Outcome, and ongoing path was clear.</p> <p>I felt reassured that I could call him back directly if needed.</p>
Was there anything that you felt was good practice?	<p>The call was made within the allocated time slot.</p> <p>The conversation was professional and empathetic - not pressured.</p> <p>The outcome was clear.</p> <p>Next steps/path was clear.</p>
Was there anything that you felt could be improved?	<p>Given that many service users are unable to answer their phone within a couple of rings I think this requires a standard.</p> <p>We measure how long it takes a provider to answer when we call them. If the service model develops as expected within the system i.e. the professional makes the call rather than the user and face to face interaction becomes more the exception, then:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• notwithstanding that the user is anticipating a call there is a standard minimum time for the caller to wait for a response (perhaps



	<p>at least 12 seconds)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if an answerphone message is left it is standard, and clear. <p>These basic standards will be critical to reform generally.</p> <p>The injury in question may have caused difficulty for a person living alone. This was not explored. No evident links to any available support/care should that be necessary. I should have raised this to get a response I guess. It does raise the eternal challenge of patient centred services.</p>
<p>From your experience of this call, how confident are you about the overall service you received? Please rate from 1 - 5, where 1 is 'Very under Confident' and 5 is 'Very Confident'</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Had the score range been 1-10 it would be a 7.</p> <p>4 - a bit high. 3- too harsh</p>

Our volunteer commented 'Once declaring my identity and role play to the physiotherapist we discussed the call and my headlines. He welcomed the mystery shop exercise as a means of service improvement.'

Conclusion

Overall our volunteers had very positive experiences of the Connect Health PhysioLine service both with the booking of the appointments and with the clinical telephone consultation.

Calls to the Patient Care Co-Ordination Centre were answered promptly and the volunteers felt that the operators gave a high level of service with a professional but friendly manner. Even when there was a slight hiccup when the wrong date of birth was initially given out on one call and the volunteer 'acted' flustered, the operator sought to calm the caller and seek other ways of resolving the issue.



A gap in the records (no email address for 'Joseph') was picked up by the operator and both callers reported that all GDPR² requirements were correctly followed.

Our 'patients' waited less than a week for their clinical telephone consultation appointments.

The clinical telephone consultations were also on time and handled professionally and empathetically. Our volunteers felt they were given the time to discuss their medical complaints and that the clinicians gave clear information about what to do to alleviate their symptoms, what to do if this didn't work and the timeframes they should expect to see improvements.

As 'Doreen' did not have digital access, the volunteer felt the clinician tried to ensure that she was not disadvantaged by sending information in the post and exploring if a relative could support her with any online aids such as videos.

'Joseph's' clinician demonstrated a positive learning culture by welcoming the mystery shop exercise when the volunteer was worried it would be seen as time wasting during a critical period.

However there were a few areas that could improve patient experience further and these are set out in the recommendations below.

Recommendations

1. Ensure patients have information about the service and what to expect when making a call and receiving a telephone consultation, in a format suitable to their needs. This should include the benefits of the Connect Health Service and also onward referral to other services if required and hints and tips on how to get the most out of the consultation.

(As our volunteers did not go through a GP for the referral, this may already be done at referral but volunteers were clear that preparing for the call was very important and that some people may find it helpful to have someone with them to take notes).

2. Introduce a standard time for clinicians to wait for calls to be answered by patients as callers cannot always answer a phone quickly (mobility issues requiring physiotherapy) and missing calls could cause anxiety or anger which is not a good way to start the

² General Data Protection Regulation



consultation. It would also be helpful if the clinician is more specific about when they will ring back when leaving a message e.g. within the hour time slot rather than just saying 'soon'.

3. Ensure that clinicians ask questions about the patient's ability to cope and their support network and have some available support information to give to the patient irrespective of their perceived needs such as the Herts Help contact information [HertsHelp - We're here for you](#) This is particularly important during periods of restrictions such as Lockdown.

Wolsey House Clinic Survey Findings

Patients attending the Wolsey House Clinic during November were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the service by completing a survey designed by Healthwatch Hertfordshire and given out by the welcome hosts. Patients could also provide feedback direct to Healthwatch Hertfordshire though none chose to do so.

28 patients completed the survey that covered:

- Referral process
- Access and location
- Communication
- Treatment

As well as completing free text boxes, patients were also asked to rate each of the 4 areas from 1-5, where 1 is 'very unsatisfied' and 5 is 'very satisfied'.

Note: not all patients completed each question or rated all the areas.

Referral Process

When commentating on the referral process, patients were talking about their experience with their GP or hospital provider and the interaction with Connect Health.

13 out of the 27 who rated the referral process were satisfied or very satisfied and 11 rated it as a 3 (neither satisfied or dissatisfied). 3 patients said they had been unhappy with the referral process. Unsurprisingly those dissatisfied with the process had been in the system some time (one from September 2019) and had several different appointments to try to alleviate their



symptoms. Many of those who rated the process as a 3 (neither satisfied or dissatisfied) had been affected by the closure of the service due the pandemic, some highlighting the communication issues raised in our 'Covid-19 Patient Experience - What can Hertfordshire learn?' report, where patients who were just starting out on treatment felt forgotten about during the height of the pandemic and were unsure of where to find information or how to get help. This may have been with the initial hospital/GP referral or the fact that services were no longer available during the first Lockdown.

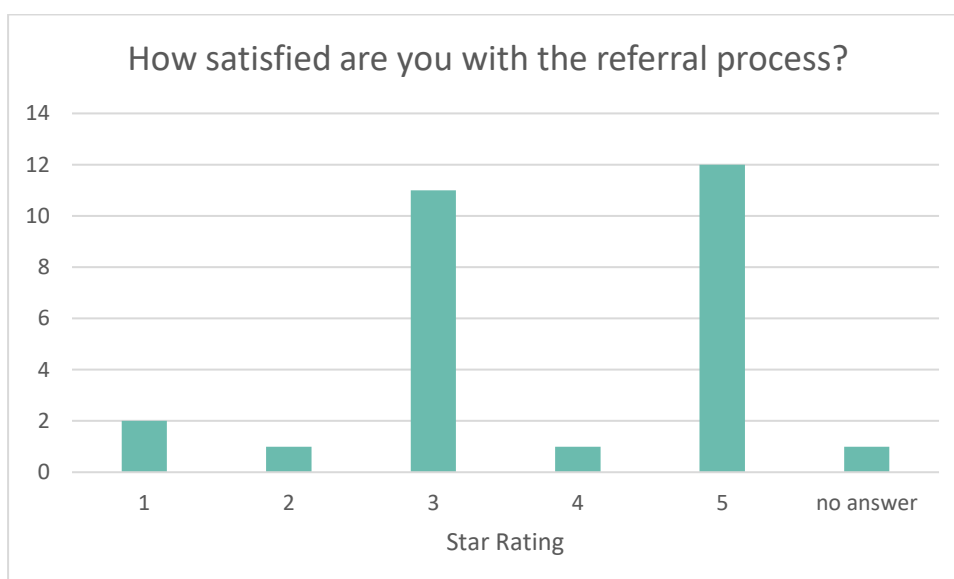
I went through the hand specialist, who was excellent, but felt I was forgotten about during the pandemic as I had to chase up several times. If I had not rung up I don't think I would have this appointment now.

Other complaints were similar to the feedback we had received in 2019 about the difficulty of getting through on the telephone and lack of continuity of care because each time the patient saw someone different.

Difficult to follow guidance on ongoing physio as each appointment with different physio and given conflicting advice

In contrast those that were very satisfied with the service referral were more recent patients and were complimentary of the whole process from their GP or Hospital consultant to Connect Health.

Referred by my doctor, all went well from doctor to phone call appointment to arranging actual visit to see the physio. Able to park outside clinic location. Parking space available for me with my blue badge - great experience - thanks to all

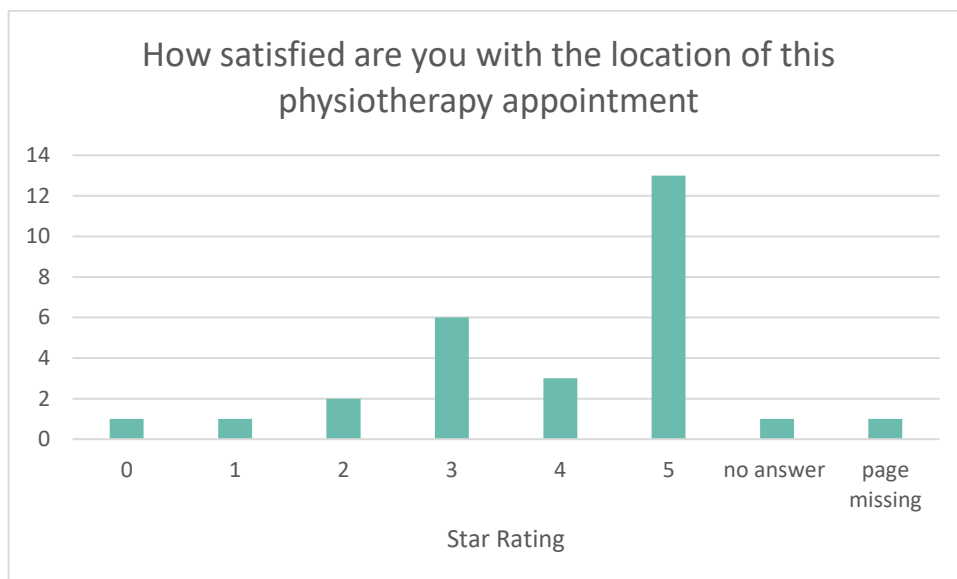




Access and Location

Before the pandemic, Connect Health had clinics across west Hertfordshire for patients to be able to be treated closer to home but most of these are now temporarily closed with Wolsey House Clinic, Hemel Hempstead being the main site for patients to attend face to face physio appointments. The question we asked obviously does not reflect the normal variety of locations the Connect Health service offers but despite this, 16 out of 25 people were satisfied or very satisfied with the location of the clinic. This was either because it was local or considered to be easy to get to and felt COVID-19 safe.

- I find Wolsey House easier to get to from Croxley Green. Parking can be an issue but I usually park in the Marlowe's and walk through if there are not spaces outside the clinic*
- Am grateful services are available - felt well run and COVID safe and secure*



Those who were less happy with the location had difficulty with transport or had conditions that made travelling and parking more of an issue.

- Foot problems can make driving painful so closer to home would have been helpful*
- I used to go to Watford. This is much further away and I can't drive to here. I took a cab and it cost me £50.*
- Because of COVID travelling from St Albans required lifts from friends not taxis or buses which relied on their availability and goodwill*



A number of patients who scored the location a 3 (neither satisfied or dissatisfied) commented that finding the clinic was difficult and would have liked more information about where it was. Another commented that they phoned the Patient Care Centre for directions but the call handler didn't know the area, and some found finding a car parking space difficult when they arrived.

Communication

19 out of 24 patients who answered this question were satisfied or very satisfied with the communication they had received from Connect Health both with the administration and the clinical elements of their treatment.

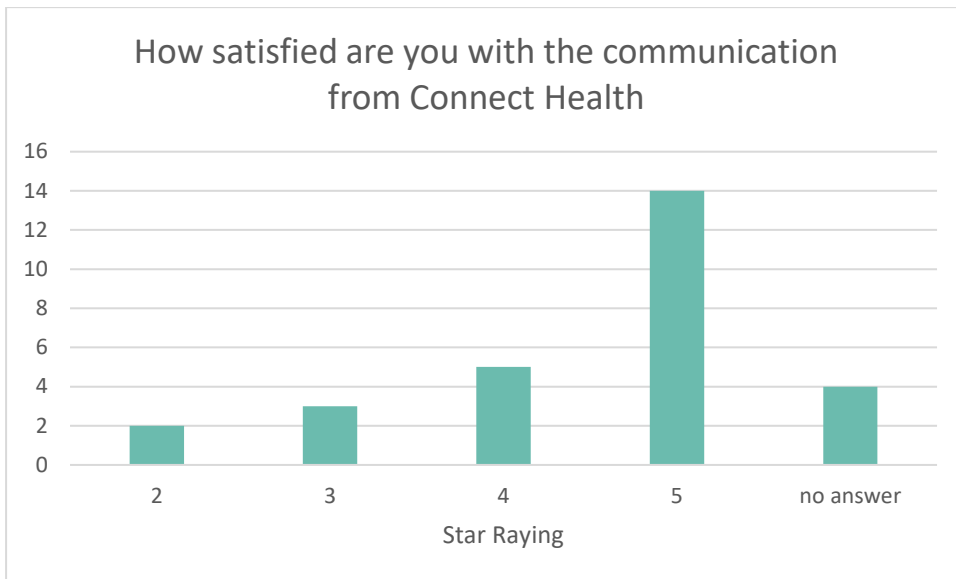
- Extremely thorough history taking*
- Phone calls good, polite and efficient.*
- Consultations real and virtual provided just what I needed*
- The physiotherapist I saw was very informative and helpful and showed sensitivity*

Those that were less satisfied with the communication they had received commented:

- Received a phone message followed up by text. Unfortunately text did not say phone call or face to face*
- Text reminders are good but that is all I have received by way of communication*

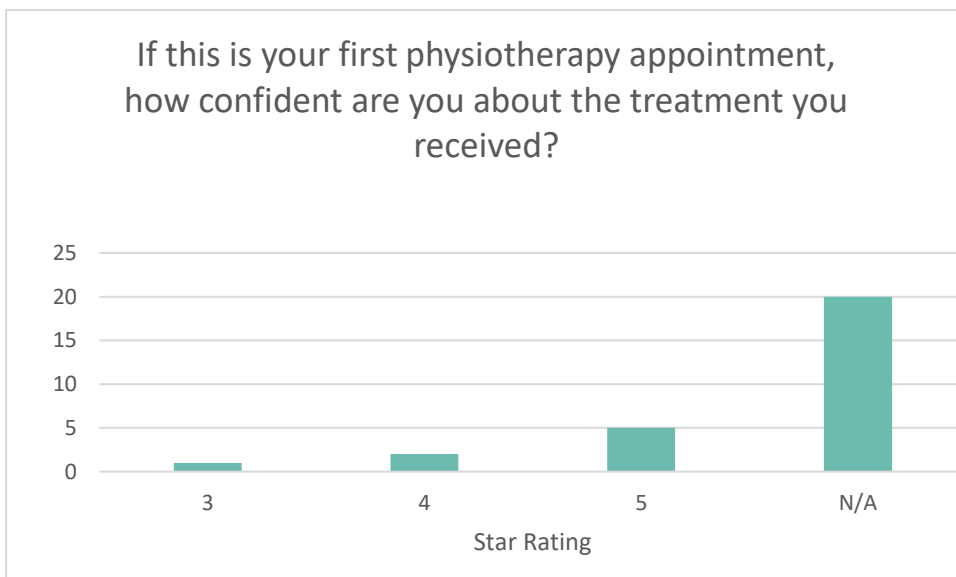
The second Lockdown had also appeared to have caused a glitch where some patients who had appointments for face to face treatment were told on the text message that they had been cancelled when they hadn't been.

- I needed to phone as text said not face to face appointment. I was not sure if new lockdown had changed in person appointment again*
- The admin texts cancelling the face to face appointment though it actually hadn't been cancelled*



Treatment

These questions were divided into those who were coming to the clinic for their first treatment and those who had been before.



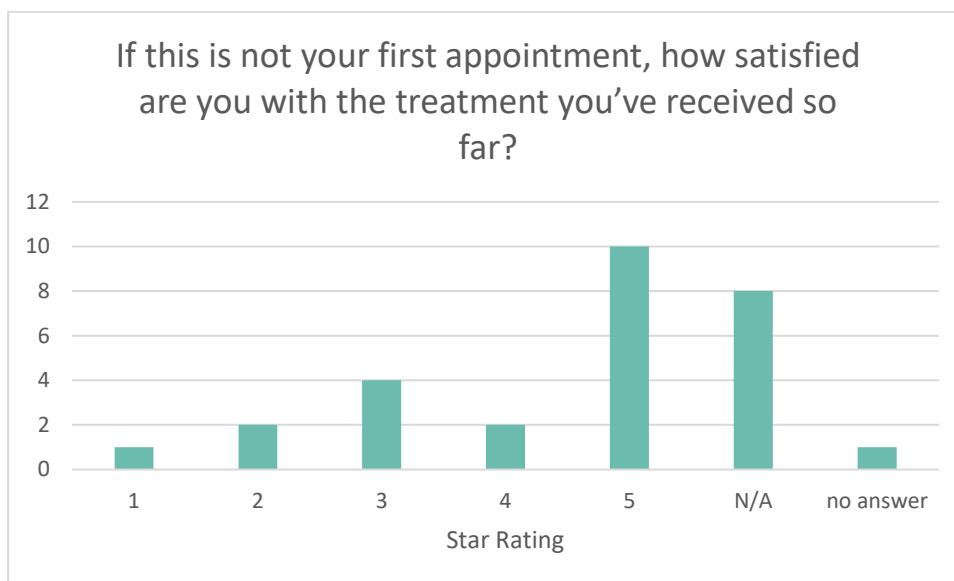
Most patients who were having their first appointment were satisfied or very satisfied with their treatment.

- All went smooth and I have a better idea of what I must do*
- Mr ... took time to explain the causes of my problem which really helped - so grateful*



12 out of the 19 patients receiving ongoing treatment who answered the question were satisfied or very satisfied with their treatment.

- Expert help from physiotherapists in Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead*
- Very attentive Physio and treatment. Takes me seriously and my injuries professionally*
- Good service, felt confident, everything well explained*



The 3 patients who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their treatment had been in the system for some time and commented:

- Different physios are giving different diagnosis and treatment plans, feels like you are unable to ask for further help as each try to tell you to try something different*
- Owing to the fact that more than 12 months have elapsed and despite seeing many specialists and attending many appointments I am no better in fact my pain is worse*

Conclusion

Overall the patients completing the questionnaires had a good experience with the service. Many were highly complimentary of the health professionals at Connect Health and their GP or consultant who referred them.

This snapshot of patient views appears to confirm the initial feedback that led to this review as the few long term patients expressed frustration with continuity of care and difficulties getting



through to staff on the telephone. There is also no doubt that the pandemic has had an impact on people's experiences of care.

However the improvements that Connect Health put in place at the beginning of 2020 seems to have positively impacted on patient experience both with call handling resulting in prompt appointments and with the clinical expertise that patients felt could be trusted.

There were a few areas that could improve patient experience further, some of which were suggested by the patients and these are set out in the recommendations below.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that patients have detailed workout plans with frequency stipulated and explanations of what, if any, pain will be experienced as a result of rehabilitation work.
2. Ensure that patients have information on how to get to the Wolsey House Clinic and that the handlers in the Patient Care Centre are briefed on how to guide patients to the location and are able to suggest alternate parking arrangements if necessary.
3. Clarify what future arrangements there may be to support patients that find it difficult to travel to Wolsey House Clinic.

For HVCCG and Connect Health:

4. During delays to treatment such as lockdowns /staff shortages, ensure that patients are kept up to date as to what is happening about their treatment and given additional support /wrap around care whilst they wait for treatment. This will need coordination to ensure that someone (GP or Provider) takes responsibility for communicating to and supporting the patient.

Just feel patients need to be updated. I know the pandemic caused terrible problems and mine is insignificant in comparison but I feel I was just dropped out of the process and only by myself chasing have I got an appointment



Thank you

We would like to thank:

- Members of the public who shared their views and experience with us.
- Our 4 amazing 'mystery shop' volunteers.
- The staff and clinicians at Connect Health for supporting this piece of work.

Response from Connect Health:



Herts Valleys Integrated Musculoskeletal Service

Wolsey House
Wolsey Road
Hemel Hempstead
HP24TU
19/02/21

Dear Jane,

Thank you to Healthwatch Hertfordshire for taking the time to conduct a 'mystery shop' and survey of our service users experience in November 2020. We truly appreciate all the wonderful feedback provided by your team and are pleased that both candidates were confident in the overall service they received. As a service, we are committed to continuing service development and your insight and feedback is an instrumental tool in helping identify areas for improvement.

In response to your recommendations on page 17 of the document please see below:

- 1. 'Ensure patients have information about the service and what to expect when making a call and receiving a telephone consultation, in a format suitable to their needs. This should include the benefits of the Connect Health Service and also onward referral to other services if required and hints and tips on how to get the most out of the consultation.'***

Thank you for your recommendation. We have a patient information leaflet available to all patients on our website detailing the services we provide, what to expect and what would happen should a patient require onward referral. I have included a link below for your ease.

<https://www.connecthealth.co.uk/app/uploads/2020/03/Herts-Valleys-Patient-Guide.pdf>



As part of our learning from this experience, I will ensure that feedback is provided to GPs to direct patients to this information at the point of referral, as well as ensuring our administrative staff direct patients to this information at the point of booking their appointment.

As part of a wider National project, we are looking at how patients are 'welcomed to the service' at the point of referral and are given the appropriate information about what to expect. We hope to make further improvements on this experience for all patients in the near future.

- 2. Introduce a standard time for clinicians to wait for calls to be answered by patients as callers cannot always answer a phone quickly (mobility issues requiring physiotherapy) and missing calls could cause anxiety or anger which is not a good way to start the consultation. It would also be helpful if the clinician is more specific about when they will ring back when leaving a message e.g. within the hour time slot rather than just saying 'soon'.***

We instruct our clinicians to remain on a call until the voice messaging service automatically connects. At this point they will leave a voice message. Where there is no voice messaging service available, we ask clinicians to remain on the line for a reasonable amount of time or until the phone disconnects.

If our clinicians are unsuccessful in the first attempt, they are advised to call the patient three times within their 1 hour time slot. As a learning point, we will provide feedback to our staff to ensure they are leaving clear and concise messages, with a more specific timeframe on when to expect the call back. I.e. 'I will attempt to call you again in 10-15 minutes time' instead of 'soon'.

- 3. Ensure that clinicians ask questions about the patient's ability to cope and their support network and have some available support information to give to the patient irrespective of their perceived needs such as the Herts Help contact information HertsHelp - We're here for you This is particularly important during periods of restrictions such as Lockdown.***

We try to ensure a holistic approach to care at all times and signpost patients to appropriate resources and onward referrals accordingly. We have a shared drive available to all clinicians with signposting information for patients on a variety of topics including: COVID-19, social and support groups, mental health, transport, exercise, smoking, drugs and alcohol and weight loss. I will ensure that our public health champion provides regular reminders to the team about accessing and sharing this information with our patients.

We are aware of Herts Help, but this is not currently a service we regularly signpost our patients to. Thank you for this recommendation. I will certainly ensure that our staff are reinforced of this service and will add it to our signposting resource pack.

In response to your recommendations on page 25 of the document please see below:

- 1. Ensure that patients have detailed workout plans with frequency stipulated and explanations of what, if any, pain will be experienced as a result of rehabilitation work.***

We provide a printed copy or emailed link to patients for access to their exercise programme. The printed exercises contain pictures and written instructions for the exercises including sets, reps and frequency of exercises. The email link contains video, audio and written instructions which also include this information. Our clinicians do normally provide verbal feedback regarding expectation for pain levels during



exercise, but as part our learning we will remind our clinicians of the importance of these conversations and where possible to document it on their programme.

- 2. Ensure that patients have information on how to get to the Wolsey House Clinic and that the handlers in the Patient Care Centre are briefed on how to guide patients to the location and are able to suggest alternate parking arrangements if necessary.**

We have some useful information available on our website regarding directions to clinic sites. This includes a virtual map with 'clinics near you'. We also have an online staff resource available for our administrative staff, with up to date information on directions to all sites in order to help direct patients, should they require some additional information. We will ensure feedback is provided to our staff-to signpost patients to this online resource as standard.

- 3. Clarify what future arrangements there may be to support patients that find it difficult to travel to Wolsey House Clinic.**

While we are not yet back to full clinic offerings due to COVID restrictions, we have significantly increased our location availability over the last 3 months. We currently have appointments available for patients at Wolsey House, The Avenue Clinic, The Lodge Medical Centre, Sheepcot Medical Centre and Hatfield Road Surgery. We are due to open up Theobald Medical Centre and Potters Bar Community Hospital in the coming weeks. We will continue to open up further clinics and increase our face to face offering in the coming months, as restrictions allow.

For those who are unable to attend the clinics available we can offer telephone or video consultations.

- 4. During delays to treatment such as lockdowns /staff shortages, ensure that patients are kept up to date as to what is happening about their treatment and given additional support /wrap around care whilst they wait for treatment. This will need coordination to ensure that someone (GP or Provider) takes responsibility for communicating to and supporting the patient.**

We provide monthly GP updates regarding the status of the service. As part of this update we will ask GPs to ensure that these messages are being relayed to patients. We do also keep our website updated with all relevant information regarding service availability.

In addition to this we have carried out some virtual user group sessions throughout lockdown, where service information will be shared and patients can communicate with us regarding any issues they are unsure about. We also have a general enquiries email address 'generalenquiries@connecthealth.co.uk' where we would be happy answer any further queries a patient may have regarding the service.

I would again like to take the opportunity to thank Healthwatch Hertfordshire for completing this 'mystery shopper' survey and for the feedback/recommendations that were provided. We are committed to delivering the best possible care for our patients and we look forward to continuing to work more closely with you to continue to develop and improve the service.



Kind regards,

Avril Fahey | Deputy Service Manager

Herts Valleys MSK Service

