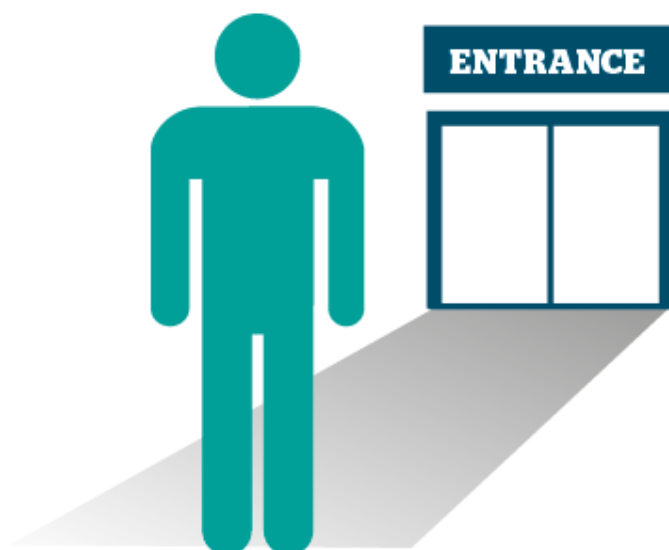


MYSTERY SHOPPING REPORT

GP registration for people without a fixed address



October 2019

Background

Healthwatch Sutton looked to investigate whether people without a fixed address are able to register at GP surgeries throughout the London Borough of Sutton.

This was in response to a report ranking Sutton as 37th in the top 50 areas for homelessness by [Shelter \(2017\)](#) and [Healthwatch England \(2018\)](#) highlighting health access issues for people who are homeless.

Standards for registering people who are homeless or without a fixed address

[NHS England](#) states:

- You do not need to provide ID or proof of address when registering with a GP, but it is helpful to do so.
- You cannot be refused registration because you are homeless, do not have proof of address, identification, or because of your immigration status.
- Where necessary, the practice can use its address to register the patient.

Our Findings

Four Healthwatch Sutton volunteers attempted to contact 23 GP Surgeries in Sutton as 'mystery shoppers'. In this context, mystery shoppers engage with health and social care providers, posing as service users. This enables them to assess how well the providers perform in terms of customer service and information provision.

Calling took place at one time of the day (from 2:30pm - 3:30pm), and it is important to note that this will not provide a comprehensive overview of how each practice registers people without a fixed address. However, our findings can be helpful in directing areas of further research. We were unable to contact 1 surgery.

Of the surgeries who did respond:

- **18** said that it would be possible to register without a fixed address.
- **3** said that it would not be possible to register without a fixed address.
- **1** said that the individual would be able to have an appointment but not register.

A sample of the responses we received are below:

“We do do it, but require proof of address, so best to speak to the practice manager to work out how this can be done if they don’t have an address”

“Would need a letter from the London Borough of Sutton to say they are within the catchment area and are homeless”

“Would need to register, could do this without ID. Would see a Dr within 48 hours of registering”

“Would have to come in and register, but could not register without ID. Receptionist said it would be difficult, but come in anyway”

“Just turn up and fill in form. We can register them no problem. Does not require ID but if they have some that would be great”

“No problem, bring past Surgery name. In the meantime, we will like you to contact 111 so that you can be seen by walk-in surgery today”

“Patients can only register if they are based in the catchment area”

“Can register. Use the GP Surgery address. Just pop-in just before 4pm as Surgery starts at 4:30pm - ID if they have it, otherwise no problem”

“Could be seen, come along as a one-off patient. Can be seen for 30 days. Later on, can renew for further 30 days”

Recommendations

Recommendations	Action
Remind GPs of the rights of access for homeless patients, with regard to NHS England's Standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthwatch Sutton to present findings at Practice Managers' Forum • CCG to reconfirm requirements to GP surgeries and create consistent narrative/registration policy for Practices' websites. • Emphasise denying access to people who are homeless could also deny access to support services (potentially through social prescribing). • Send a copy of the report to all GP surgeries with covering letter.
Investigate potential to discuss access issues directly with homeless patients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope out ways to engage with people who are homeless e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SPEAR & Rough Sleepers Forum ○ Sutton Night Watch • Look at mechanisms to capture people who are homeless' experiences of accessing GP services to help eradicate barriers.
Improve information available to homeless patients about their right to access GP services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote awareness of rights to access primary care to people who are homeless using cards/posters at Night Watch etc. • List GP surgeries that are happy to register people who are homeless (shouldn't be needed if all GPs in Sutton accepted homeless registrations).

Before collating these recommendations, we consulted the following organisations: *NHS Sutton Clinical Commissioning Group, Inspire Sutton, Sutton Night Watch Homeless Charity, Sutton Mental Health Foundation and Community Works.*

Acknowledgements

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