



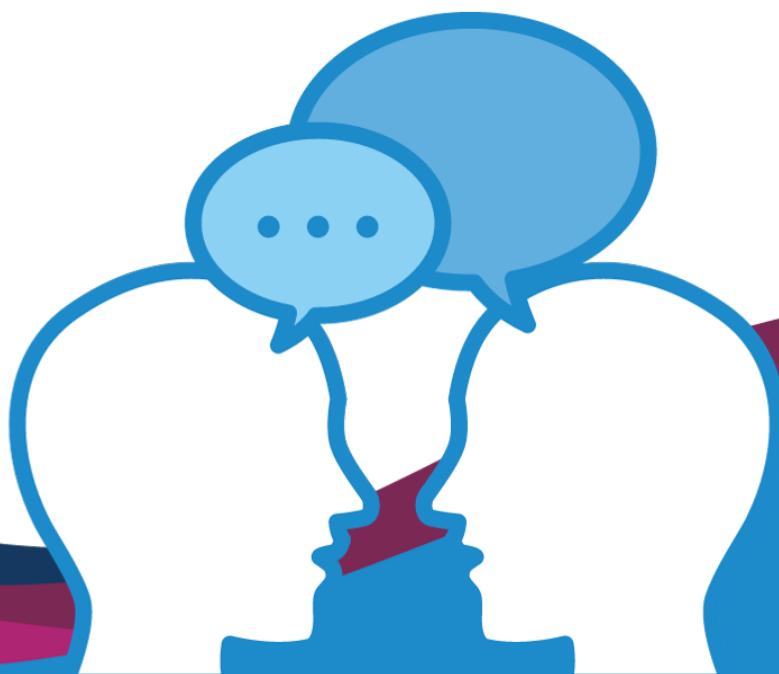
NHS

**Lancashire and
South Cumbria**
Integrated Care Board

Pharmacy First Survey report

November 2024

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Introduction

NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) is the organisation responsible for organising primary care services – pharmacy services – across the region.

To support work to promote the Pharmacy First service it is important we gain an understanding of public awareness and perceptions of both the service and of pharmacy in general.

This survey was shared primarily with members of the ICB's Citizens Panel and Citizens Health Reference Group, as well as on social media, and provided an efficient and quick way of getting some initial intelligence ahead of a promotional campaign planned to start in November 2024.

Executive summary

The survey was completed by 448 people, 72.5 per cent of which said they had heard of the Pharmacy First service. The majority of those who had heard of the service had seen adverts in their GP practice, while social media and TV advertising also scored highly.

Despite the high levels of awareness of the service, only 21 per cent of respondents said they had used the Pharmacy First service, and of those, 76.5 per cent had accessed the service via walk-in and only 12 per cent had arrived following a GP referral.

Asked to provide feedback on the service, 78.5 per cent said they had received the treatment and/or support the needed from the pharmacy, 61 per cent did not need to return to their GP practice for any aspect of the ailment, 69 per cent were able to access the required medication they needed to treat their condition and 75 per cent were satisfied with the treatment they received.

All survey respondents were asked if they would be happy to visit a pharmacist instead of their GP practice, and almost 85 per cent of those who answered the question said they would. The survey also asked if there were any reasons they would not visit a pharmacy, and the most common negative response was the lack of privacy available at a pharmacy (17 per cent).

Respondents were also afforded an opportunity to provide additional comments. Here many explained how they had trust in their pharmacy and would be happy to seek their support. Some said the Pharmacy First service was a good way of easing the pressure on general practice.

However concerns were raised, including the dangers of adding to a pharmacist's already busy workload and additional comments regarding perceived issues with a lack of privacy.

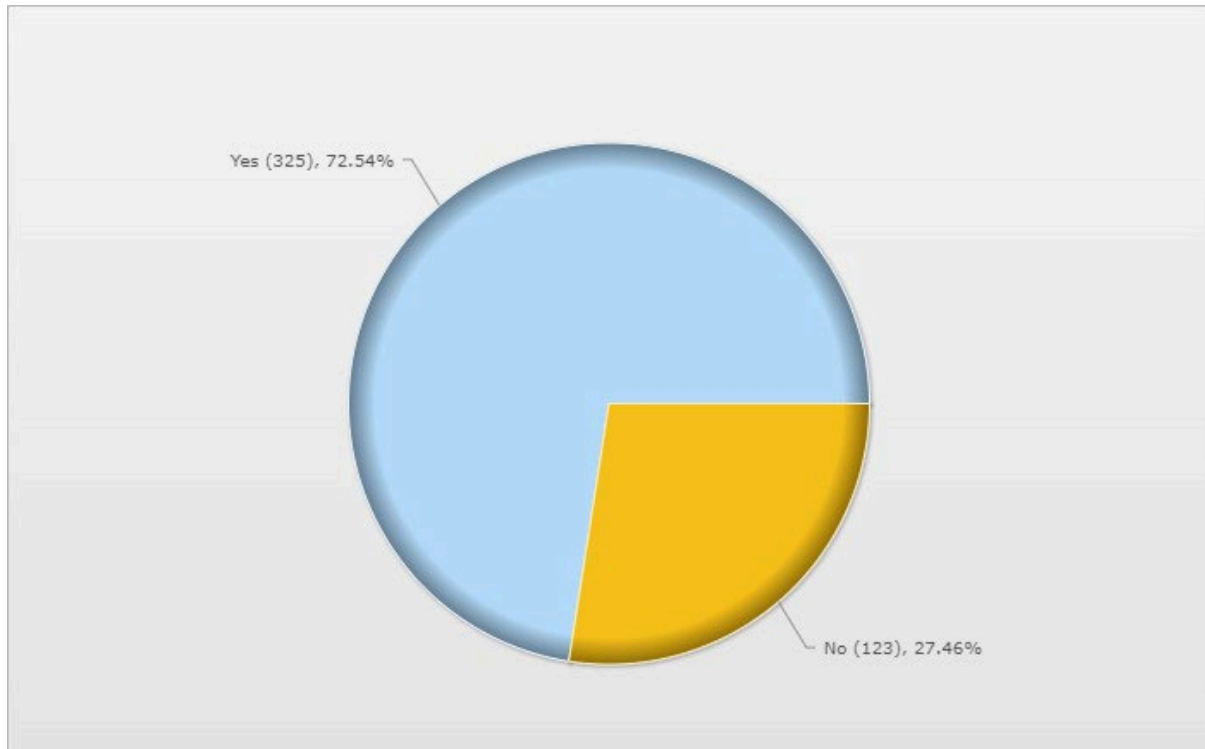
Some were concerned that pharmacists are unable to provide the relevant support, while others reflected on the limitations of the Pharmacy First service.

What did we hear?

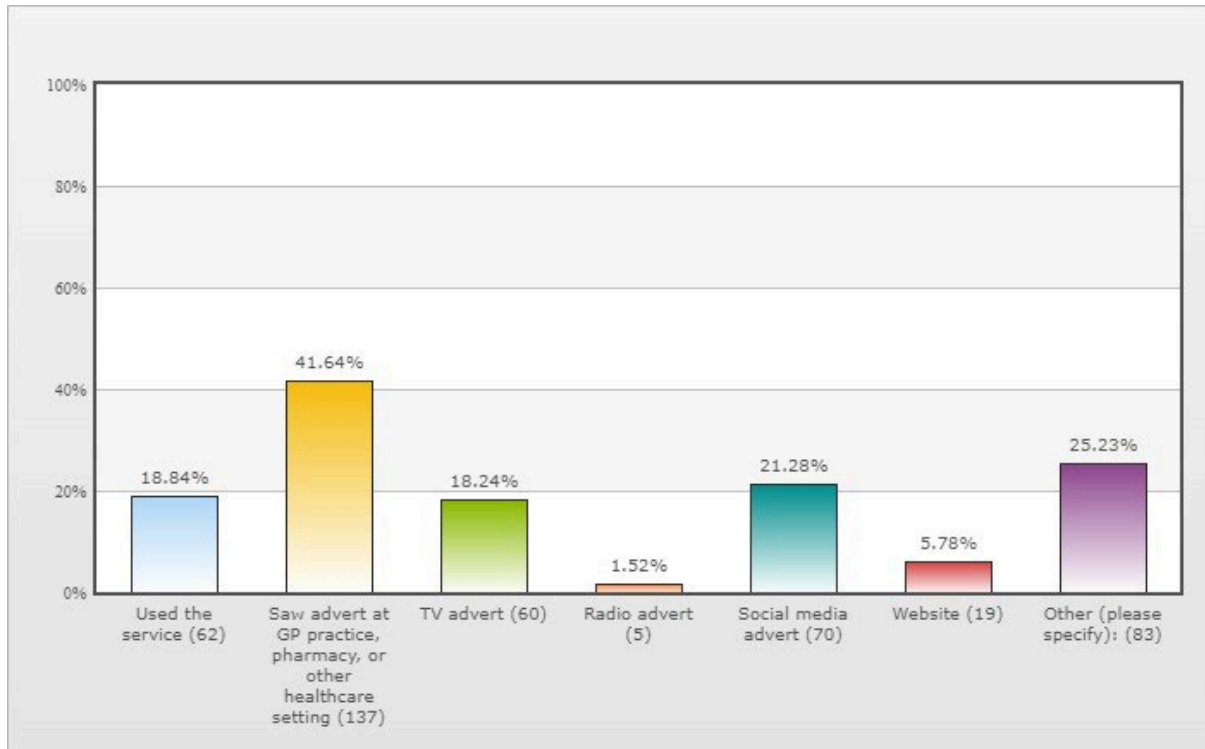


A summary of feedback received to the questions asked during the engagement is below.

Have you heard of the Pharmacy First service?

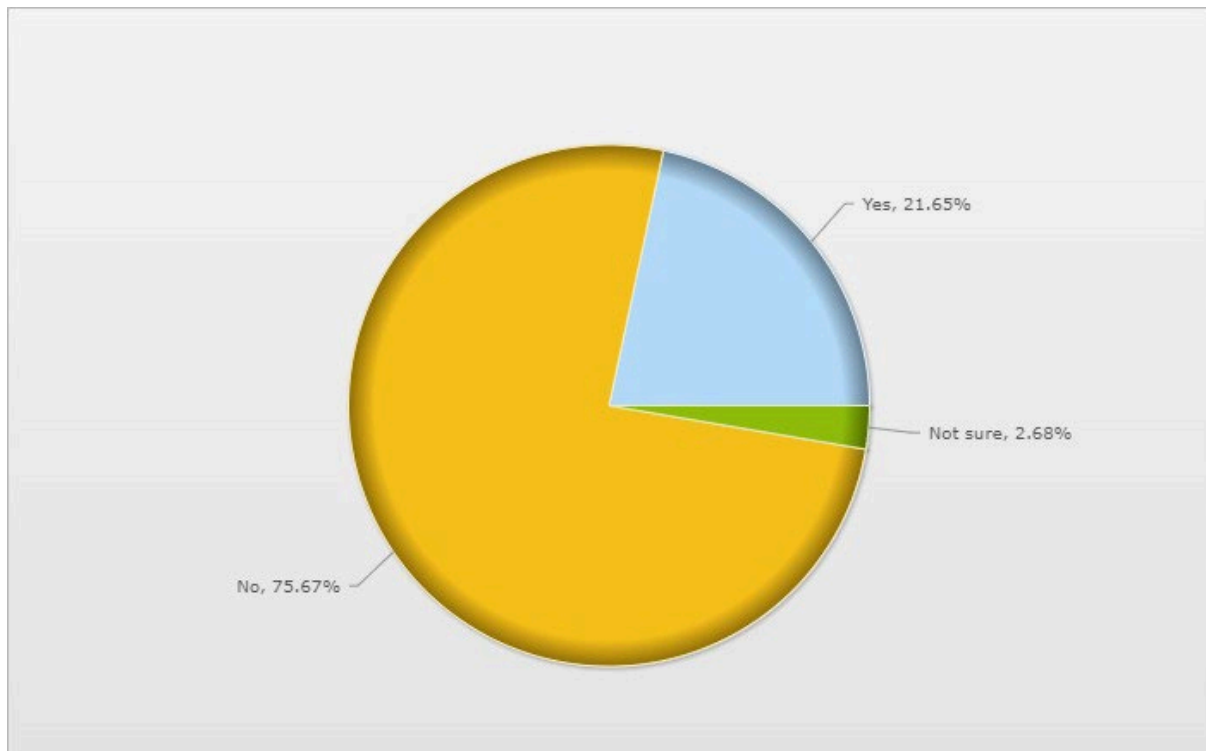


If you answered 'yes', how did you hear about the service?

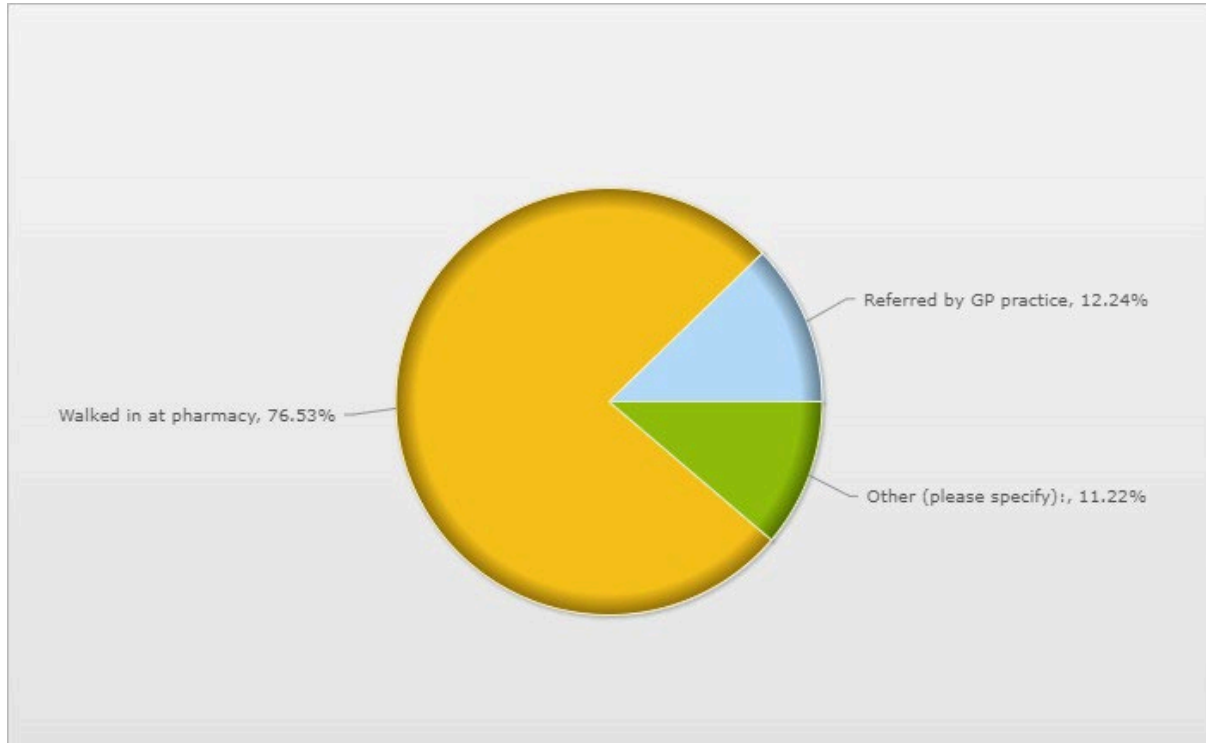


Of those who said 'other', people said they had heard about Pharmacy First through various channels, such as TV news, radio news, and newspaper articles. Some mention word of mouth, including a retired pharmacist and a GP friend, as sources of information. Others have involvement in health services or NHS work and have come across the service through community conversations or specific health settings.

Have you used the Pharmacy First service?

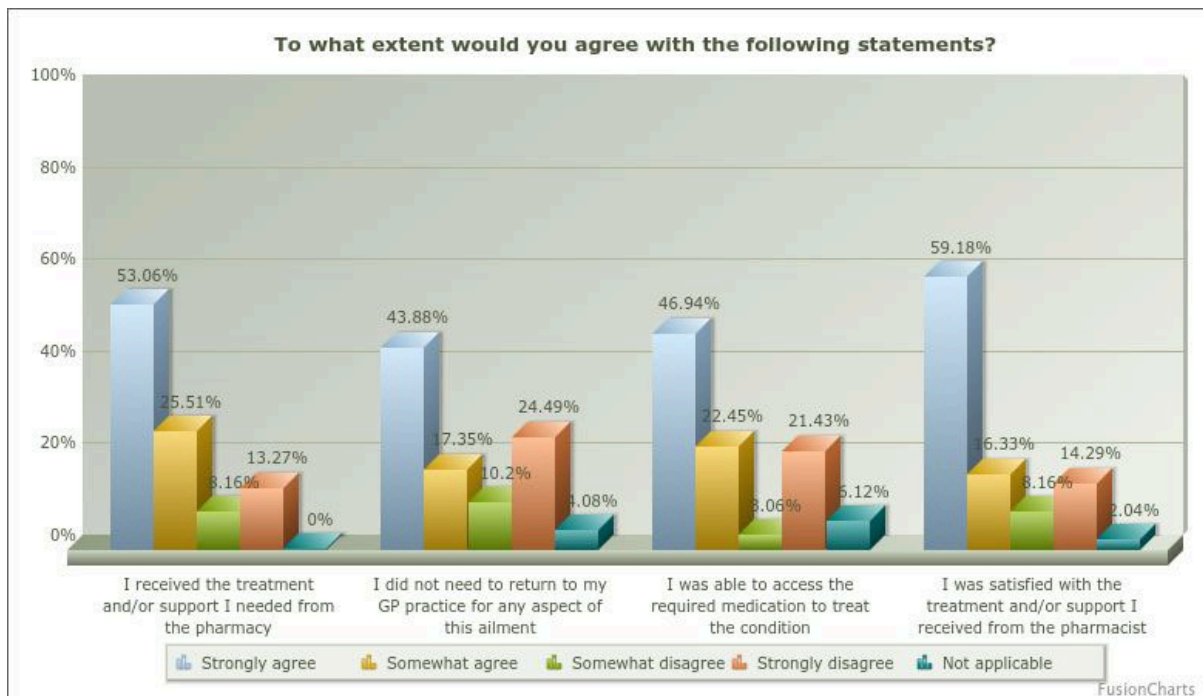


How did you access the service?



Of the 11 who selected 'other', five said they accessed the service via telephone, two via NHS111 and one said they were referred by their dentist.

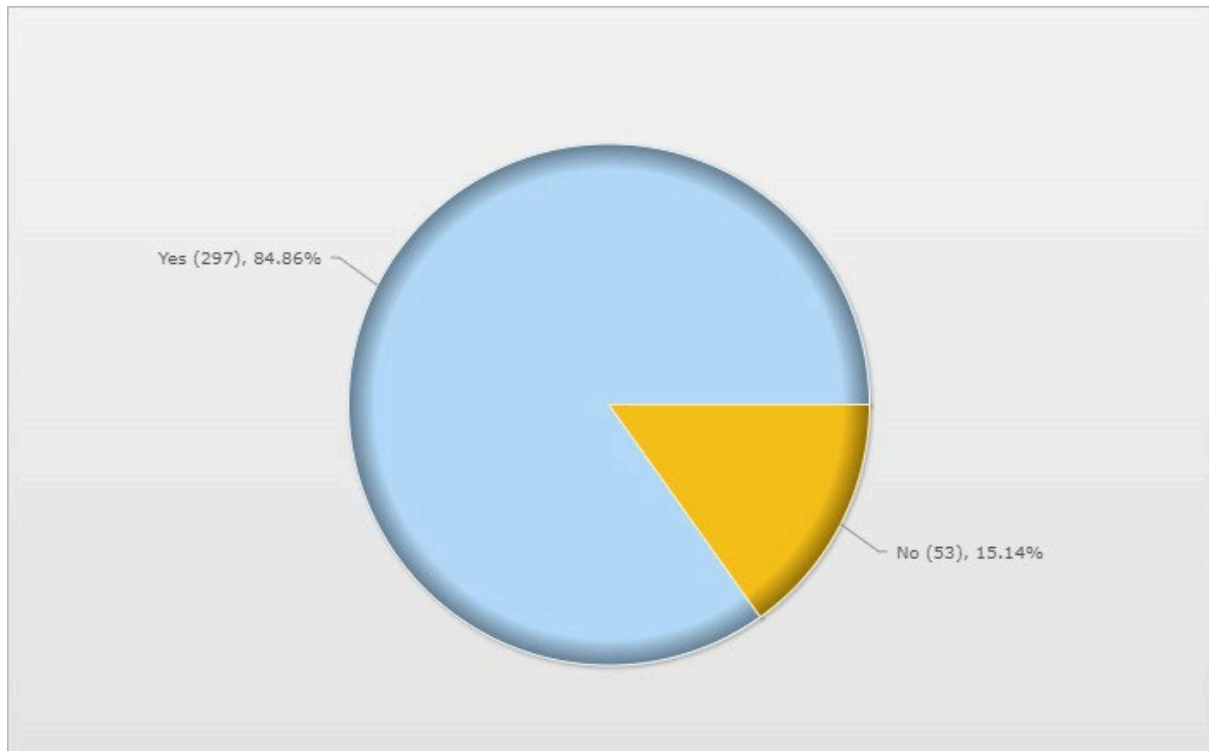
To what extent would you agree with the following statements?



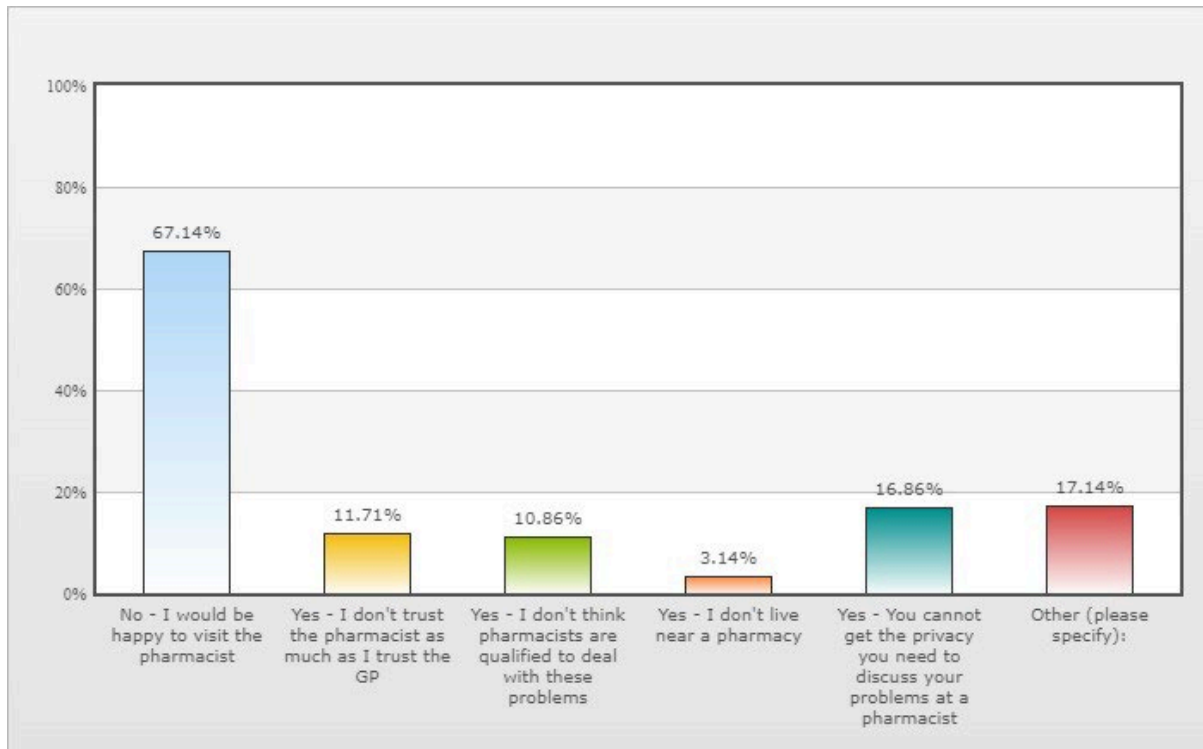
Respondents were given a space to leave comments on this question. A summary of the comments received is below.

- A number expressed frustration with the time it takes to get through to pharmacies by phone. There is a noticeable lack of understanding regarding the roles and capabilities of pharmacists, leading to confusion about when to seek their help rather than a GP.
- Some respondents praised the direct and professional support from pharmacists, particularly in urgent situations like insect bites or UTI management. However, others reported feelings of humiliation or dissatisfaction, particularly regarding confidentiality and perceived knowledge of the pharmacists.
- Several comments pointed to challenges in obtaining the appropriate medications or referrals. Some patients felt pharmacists lacked the authority or confidence to prescribe necessary treatments. Issues arose when patients were referred back to a GP after pharmacies were unable to assist, leading to further delays in care.
- There were suggestions for pharmacists to have a broader range of prescribing authority to improve accessibility to treatments for minor ailments. Overall, the need for clearer communication, better training for pharmacists, and a more seamless integration between pharmacy and GP services was emphasised.

Would you be happy to visit a pharmacist instead of your GP practice?



Are there any reasons you would not visit a pharmacist instead of booking an appointment at your GP practice?



Respondents were given space to expand on their answer to this question. Comments can be summarised as below.

- The ability to see a pharmacist versus a GP depends heavily on the specific health issue. For minor conditions, some individuals feel comfortable consulting a pharmacist, but for more serious issues or conditions they are unfamiliar with, they prefer to see a GP.
- There are concerns about pharmacists' diagnostic training compared to GPs, with some noting that pharmacists might lack the necessary knowledge to assess more complicated health problems.
- Some respondents value their relationships with their local pharmacists, expressing trust in their advice and recognizing their expertise in medication interactions and managing prescriptions.
- Many individuals have specific health conditions or a complex medical history, making them cautious about relying solely on pharmacists for diagnosis or treatment.
- Issues of privacy and confidentiality were raised, particularly regarding the physical setup of pharmacies, which may not support discreet discussions about health concerns.
- Accessibility is a concern, with some respondents mentioning difficulties accessing pharmacy services due to physical barriers or long wait times.

Comments

Responses to this free text option can be broadly themed as below:

Respondents who stated they trust their pharmacist to provide the relevant support

- "I would be happy to see the pharmacist instead of my GP if I felt it was appropriate for the condition or symptoms I had; but imagine there would be limited circumstances where this would be the case."
- "In principle it's a good idea as long as pharmacists can cope with the extra calls on their time."
- "I have absolutely no issues with using pharmacies."
- "I've asked pharmacists questions for years; it's easier than trying to get a GP appointment, and they often feel more listened to than a GP."
- "Pharmacists are very experienced in drugs, etc., and have a degree."
- "If I had any of the specified problems, I would happily go to a pharmacy—closer, friendlier, instant access."

Concerns about a pharmacist's ability to provide the relevant support

- "I don't think it is fair on the pharmacist to be loaded with a service that doctors should be taking care of."
- "With no access to a patient's medical record, the ability to diagnose would be hampered."
- "From my experience, the pharmacists are always busy, and I would feel intrusive if I wanted to speak to him/her."
- "I don't know if the pharmacist would be able to offer anything stronger or more effective than medicines prescribed by the GP."
- "I would only be interested if a pharmacist can administer prescription meds such as asthma meds or steroids when urgently needed."
- "My wife did use a pharmacist; he misdiagnosed and sold her a medication that made her condition worse."

Privacy concerns

- "Pharmacy may not have the same degree of patient confidentiality/space or time for consultation."
- "Privacy can be an issue, especially when visiting some of the smaller ones. Done do have a room but it's more like a closet."
- "Not enough privacy at the counter to explain the problem."

Accessibility concerns

- "Happy to visit first, but as I'm 67, I seem to get told to go to my GP."
- "My local pharmacy is very helpful; however, in my area, there are no local pharmacies open at weekends."
- "The number of pharmacies is declining, so for some people, there may not be an easily accessible one."

Suitability for minor issues

- "For some symptoms, I would go to the pharmacy but with a transfer to see the GP if needs further investigation."
- "I would go to a pharmacist for simple treatments to help simple conditions."
- "If more people would use pharmacy first, it would help both doctors and the hospitals' urgent care centres."

Limitations of services offered

- "As the range of medications offered is not comprehensive, I would need to see my GP for many conditions."
- "I think this is a very good move to free up the GPs, but I have concerns about the lack of access to medical records a pharmacist will have."
- "The range of things the pharmacist can prescribe for seems reasonable, but I'm not sure pharmacists will always have sufficient training to diagnose."

Promotion and awareness of the service

- "This service needs some serious advertising to make people aware of it; otherwise, it is going to fail to reach its potential."
- "It would be helpful if GP practices promoted the use of pharmacy more."
- "I think there could be more promotion, perhaps by using local community group Facebook sites."
- "Need to assure the public that they can get Pharmacy consultations and help with the conditions mentioned."
- "My local pharmacy is very helpful; however, I work in health and social care within Blackburn with Darwen and I'm pleased to see that you have created a survey to understand people's views."
- "Many people are unsure of the benefits and validity of this service."

Reducing pressure on GPs

- "If more people would use pharmacy first, it would help both doctors and the hospitals' urgent care centres."
- "I think this is a very good move to free up the GPs."
- "Great idea to reduce the burden on GPs. Pharmacists should be supported and paid appropriately."

Concerns about overloading pharmacists

- "I think the pharmacist is stretched to breaking point."
- "I believe this puts a lot more pressure on pharmacists who are already stretched."
- "It seems that giving more responsibility to pharmacists is just another way of unburdening the NHS, which needed attention years ago."