

Patient Feedback on Online Consultations

Analysis of Patient Experience Information from the Healthwatch Hammersmith & Fulham Service (May 2020 – September 2021)



Summary Findings

- 332 reviews mentioned e-consult, Dr IQ or online consultation.
- 56% positive feedback reporting it to be easy/quick to use and or quick to get a response/appointment.
- 44% negative feedback reporting it to be difficult to use; associated with long waiting/response time; no availability of appointments via the system; don't use or can't use the system due to low digital knowhow, lack of IT equipment, no internet access, disability, language.



Pros of using the online system

- It is very quick and easy to get an appointment.
- It is a quick way to get health advice.
- It is easy to speak to doctor from the comfort of your own home.
- The form is simple to fill in.
- The online system is a welcome alternative and preference for many to attempting to get through on the telephone.
- It is a time saver.
- It is efficient.
- It works well for prescriptions.



Cons of using the online system

- It is not user friendly for many.
- It is very complicated; it asks too many questions and is too lengthy (when you are feeling unwell this is even more of an issue).
- It is not reliable.
- Only literate people, those able to use the computer/with internet access or those that speak English can use e-consult.
- Staff do not call back if they think your issue is not urgent.
- Preference for a face-to-face appointment remains.
- Patients are not given a choice to choose between telephone consultation or face-to-face.



Detailed Findings – Positives/Pros

40% (n.132) patients reviews indicated that it was easy to use or they did not have any problems using the system.

The system was reported to be 'very good', 'efficient', 'useful' and provides a 'lot of simple health information and advice'.

Patients mentioned that it was time saver for them, as they did not have to go to the surgery and enabled them to avoid having to wait on the telephone to speak to get through/ speak to staff.

The form that needed to be filled was straight forward, clear and simple.

Patients cited that the online system was 'reliable' and they were able to get a 'quick response from doctor'.

Patients indicated that the system was very good and useful during the pandemic – people were scared to go to the GP. Knowing they did not have to go to surgery and were still able to get the help they needed was important.



Patients mentioned that once they got used to the system it was 'straight forward', they could receive simple advice easily and also get a quick telephone consultation from the comfort of their own home.

Many patients mentioned that although they were originally forced to use the online system due to the context of the pandemic, they were very happy that the system was and is available.

16% (n.54) of the patients stated that using the e-consult was quick to get a call back from the doctor and to get an answer for your issue without speaking to anyone.

Patients believe it is faster to get an appointment using the e-consult than calling the surgery.

They also mentioned that it's quicker to get a phone consultation than another type of appointment. Depending on the urgency, you may get a call back from the surgery on the same day or if it's not urgent you may have to wait 48 to 72 hours (this differs from surgery to surgery).

Detailed Findings – Negatives/Cons

34% (n.111) patients cited that the online system was difficult to use.

The top issues reported were 'lengthy online form', 'not user friendly', 'irrelevant questions' and not being 'able to get the right outcome/preferred result eg call back or face-to-face.

Patients indicated that, to receive a satisfactory response, you have to 'try a few times'. For example, the patient may want or prefer a call back from the surgery after filling in the form, however, the system might tell them to go to the pharmacy. The patient is not satisfied and wishes to speak with someone so they keep trying until the result aligns with their preference.

In addition, in a number of separate instances, feedback mentioned that their surgery was reviewing the forms submitted online to decide when or whether to call back the patients. One patient explained "if they see that it is something serious, they will call you, but if it's not they won't call you back," whilst another relayed "they will call depending on whether they deem it's an urgent case. You may have to wait a few days."

In one practice the surgery only reviews the forms on Thursdays so if a patient completes it on a Monday, they will wait until Thursday for a call back.

I have noticed that in some surgeries patients are reluctant to use the online system because it does not allow them to book an appointment. Appointments are only available for a month away.

Sometimes patients do not get a call back from their surgery, which prompt them to stop using the online system for appointment.



4% (n.14) patients indicated that whenever they wanted an appointment they were asked to use the online system. However, there were never any appointments available, or appointment were a month away.

The system does not allow for emergency appointments, you can only book routine appointments. The online system doesn't cater for urgent appointments. Some patients tried using the online system a few times, but they felt it was not useful for their needs.

Some patients cited the system was only good for repeat prescriptions, that they had used it for this purpose during the pandemic, but would not use it for appointments.

2% (n.8) Patients cited that they do not have access to the internet or are unable to use the computer. Patients felt that since the introduction of the online system the surgery use the system as a first point of access for an appointment. They do not put into consideration that many people are unable to use a computer or do not have access to technology. The online system has made it difficult to get an appointment because every time they request an appointment, they are told to do it online.

Patients indicated that they should be given choice. They should make it easier for those that want to use the system and for those who are unable to use the system.



Healthwatch Hammersmith & Fulham Patient Experience Manager Feedback



The e-consult system seems to be different at each GP – at some you can book an appointment through the system, at others you cannot.

Where patients try and use the system to book an appointment, these are not available for some time (2/3 weeks+). Patients then resort to telephoning the practice to book an appointment.

Some surgeries respond to patients on the same day, however at other practices patients have to wait 48 to 72 hours to hear from staff. This again leads to patients using the telephone to book an appointment.

Surgeries that stand out as doing well with the e-consult system are:

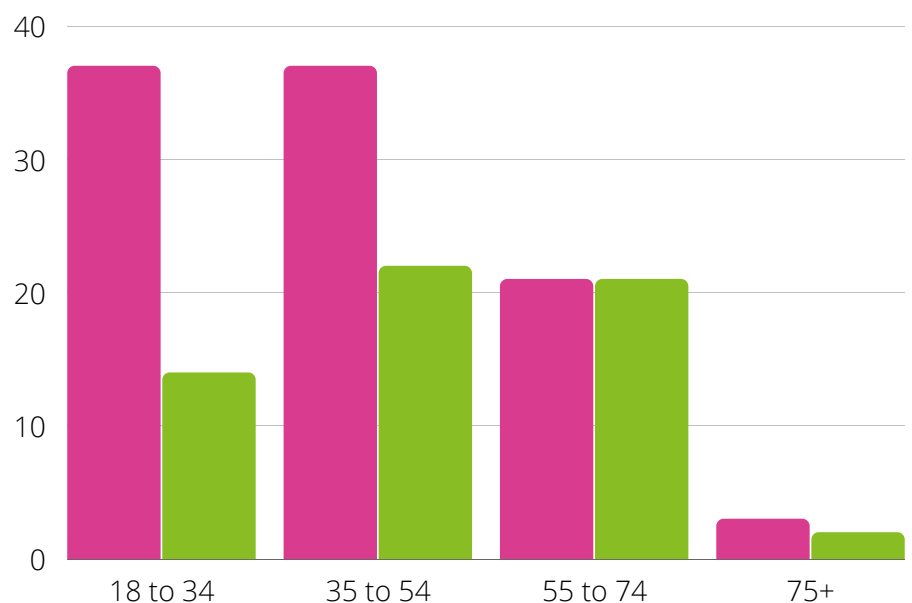
- North End medical Centre
- Ashville surgery
- Canberra Old surgery (however, more recently patients' feedback that they have to wait longer to hear back).

Equality and Diversity Monitoring Analysis

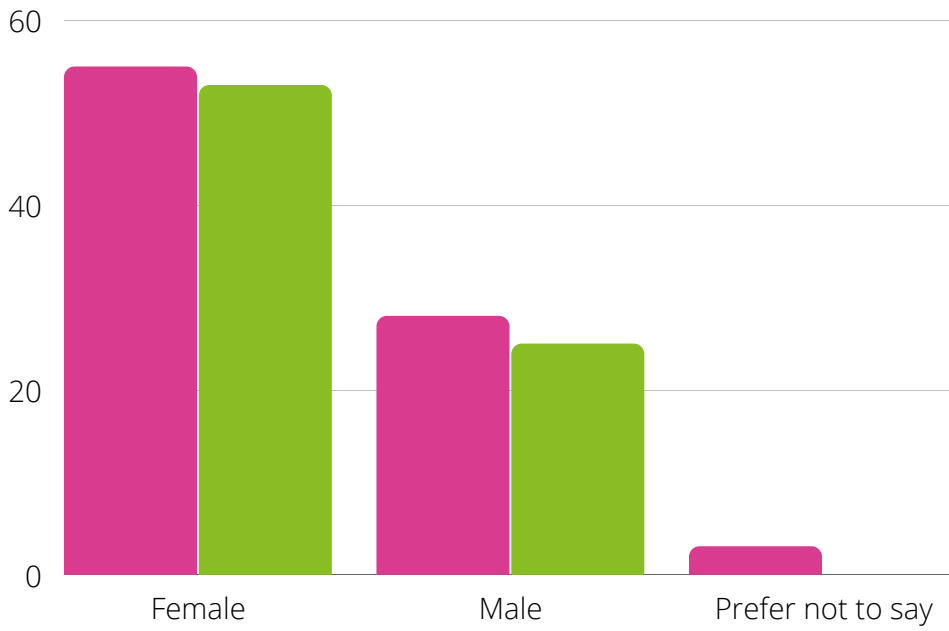
Ease of use by Age Range

Easy to use
Difficult to use

- 27% of the 18-34 age group found e-consult difficult to use. This rises to 37% within the 35-54 age group and 50% for those aged 55-74.



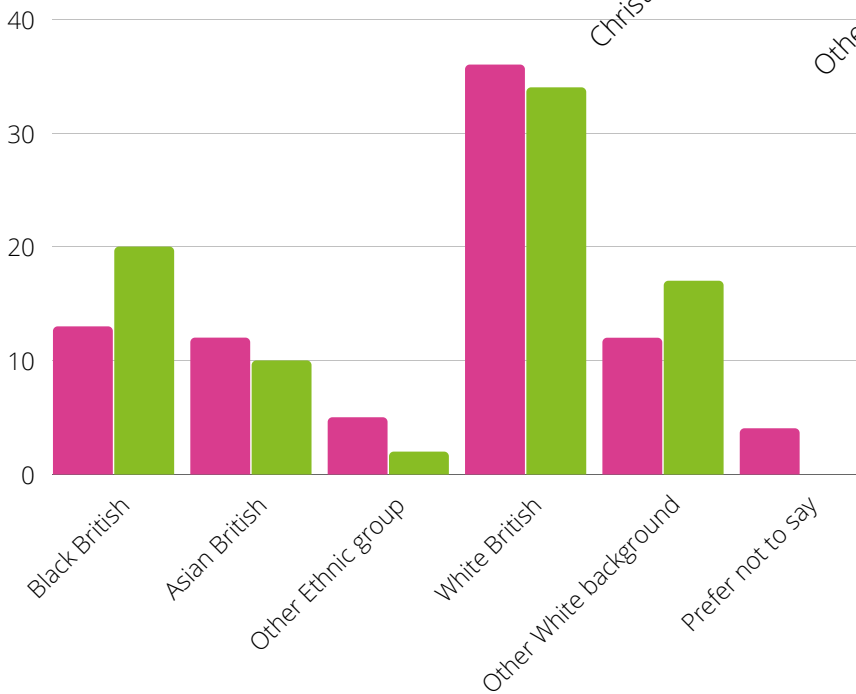
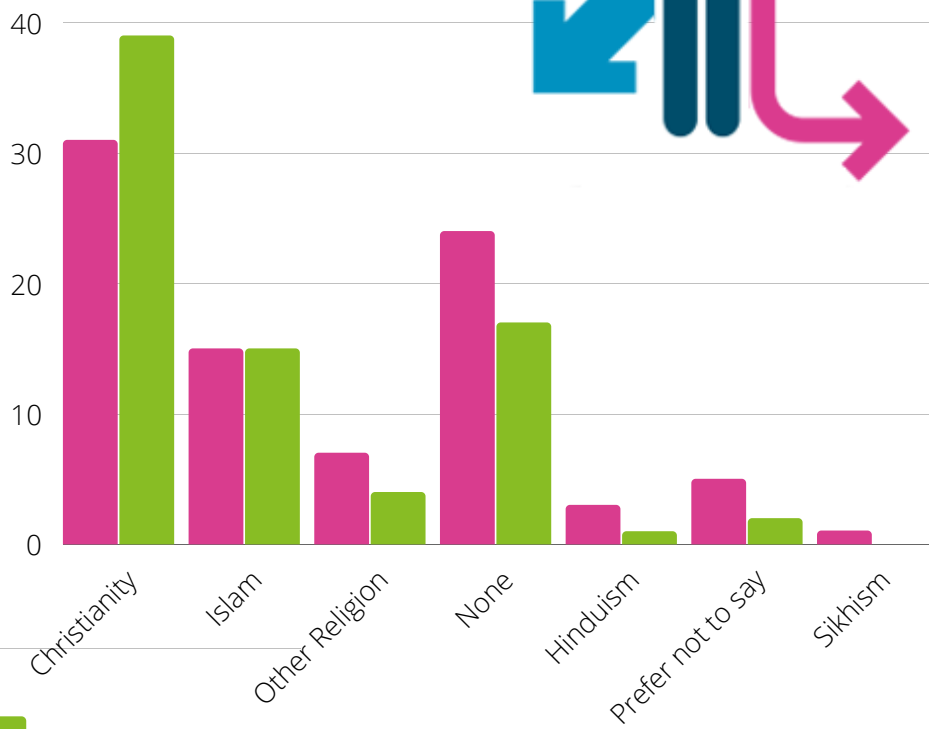
Equality and Diversity Monitoring Analysis



Ease of use by Gender
 Easy to use
 Difficult to use



Ease of use by Religion
 Easy to use
 Difficult to use



Ease of use by Ethnicity
 Easy to use
 Difficult to use