



Parent Carers' views of the proposed GP online consultation service

September 2018

1. Report Summary:

Overview

This consultation with parent carers looked at benefits and barriers of a new proposed NHS system, a GP online consultation service.

The NHS is looking into expanding the ways in which people can get support from their GP surgery, by adding the possibility of contacting a GP and getting diagnosed by an online system. This is an additional service and will not replace the current way people access their GP, for example via face-to-face appointments.

Amaze and PaCC explored parent carers' views on the new proposed online system to explore whether this added service could be beneficial to our community.

Parent carers told us that they would **prefer to receive a diagnosis from their GP or a clinician face-to-face**, however **some would be willing to use the proposed online system**.

Key findings from the consultation identified that:

- For the majority of parent carers who participated in our online questionnaire their priority is receiving a **diagnosis** quickly.
- 70% of parent carers who responded to our online questionnaire said that **booking a face-to-face appointment by phone is one of the main barriers** to accessing GPs within the current system.
- **Waiting time at the surgery** is a barrier for over 40% of parent carers
- Booking a face-to-face appointment **on line and parking facilities** at the GPs were reported as barriers by over 30%.
- Over 30% of parent carers wouldn't anticipate difficulties with the proposed online system, however over 50% of respondents are worried that the online consultation could generate a **misdiagnosis**.
- **Confidentiality** was a concern for over 20% of parent carers who responded to the survey.

Conclusions and recommendations:

- i. Many parent carers see direct access to a GP online as positive service development
- ii. The system should not replace face-to-face appointments
- iii. The system needs to be easy to access and offer the parent carer some form of control in how it works for them
- iv. The system should allow parent carers to access consultation out of hours when they have more time to interact with a GP or clinician
- v. The new system should speed up waiting times and free up doctors time to focus on patients who are a priority for support
- vi. The system should only be used for diagnosis of simple problems with quick referral upwards for more serious conditions/needs
- vii. Reassurance is needed that only qualified people will be on the live chat
- viii. The system needs to be made safe for patients
- ix. If the online consultation flags a health need which needs follow up, then parent carers want to be seen by the GP in a timely manner.

2. Report:

2.1 What Amaze does

Amaze is Brighton and Hove's 'one stop shop' for families with children with disabilities and additional needs, providing a variety of information, advice and support covering education, health, social care, leisure, finances/benefits, and training/workshops. Amaze also manages the Compass Database and the Compass Card, a free leisure incentive card for 0 to 25 year olds with significant disabilities or special needs who live or go to school in Brighton and Hove.

Since 1997 Amaze has been engaging parent carers at all levels of services provision for their child or young person, for themselves and for the whole family. Their aim is to increase parent carers' resilience and confidence which in turn has a direct effect on the lives of their children. Since September 2014, in line with the new Children and Families Act, Amaze has been supporting families, and young people with SEND themselves, up to the age of 25.

2.2 What PaCC does

The PaCC, hosted by Amaze, is a city-wide engagement group with over 350 members who are parent carers who have children and young people with disabilities, complex health problems or other additional needs.

PaCC also has nine Partners, some of them service providers, others community groups formed by parent carers. PaCC gives a voice to parent carers using different engagement methods as for example focus groups and forums to gather views/opinions and presents these to service managers to influence service

delivery. PaCC Parent Reps sit on many Local Authority Boards and strategic groups with the aim to improve services for families.

3. Online Consultation

Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) and the local Clinical Commissioning Group (B&H CCG), through their Brighton & Hove Communities and Third Sector Investment Programme (TSIP), fund Amaze and the Carers Centre for Brighton & Hove to gather views and ideas from carers around provision and delivery of health care services. Amaze and PaCC specifically consult parent carers of families with children and young people with additional needs and/or disability ([See Annex 1: PaCC engagement diagram Annex 1](#)). Some of these consultations are designed and planned in collaboration with the Carers Centre for Brighton & Hove.

This consultation looks at benefits and barriers of a GP online consultation service.

The NHS is looking into expanding the ways people can get support from their GP surgery, by adding the option to contact a GP and get diagnosed by an online system. This is an additional service and will not replace the current way people access their GP, for example face-to-face appointments.

In the new proposed system people will be able to email their GP and start a live text chat with the surgery. The aims are to make it easier for people to get a response to their query on the same day and also save time, travel to and from the surgery and increase appointment time for those who would prefer to see a GP face-to-face. In addition this new service would be available out of GP surgery hours.

On previous consultations around improving primary health care services parent carers have told us that sometimes accessing GPs isn't easy. For example, our community reported issues around booking an appointment early in the morning when parents are busy with taking their children/young people to school. Others reported the fact that the waiting room can be a very challenging experience for both child/young person and the parents.

With this consultation we want to explore parent carers' views on the new proposed online system and see if this added service could be beneficial to our community.

4. Methodology

To gather data and information for this consultation we used a questionnaire that was planned and designed in collaboration with the Carers Centre for Brighton & Hove. The online, easy to navigate survey was designed with help from Amaze's

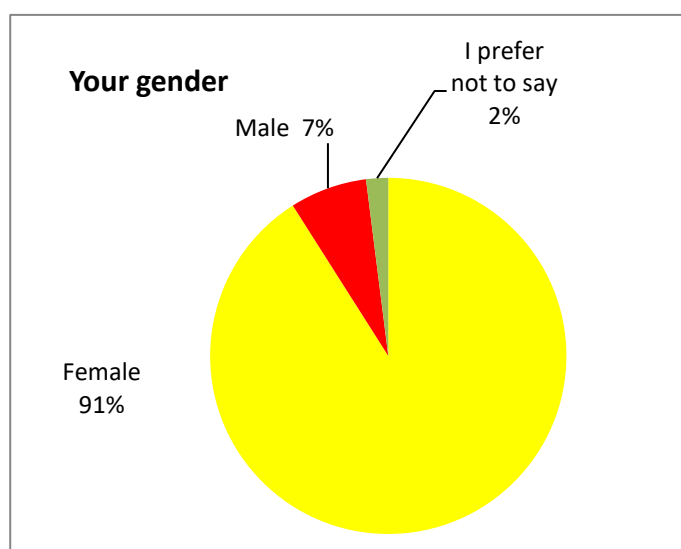
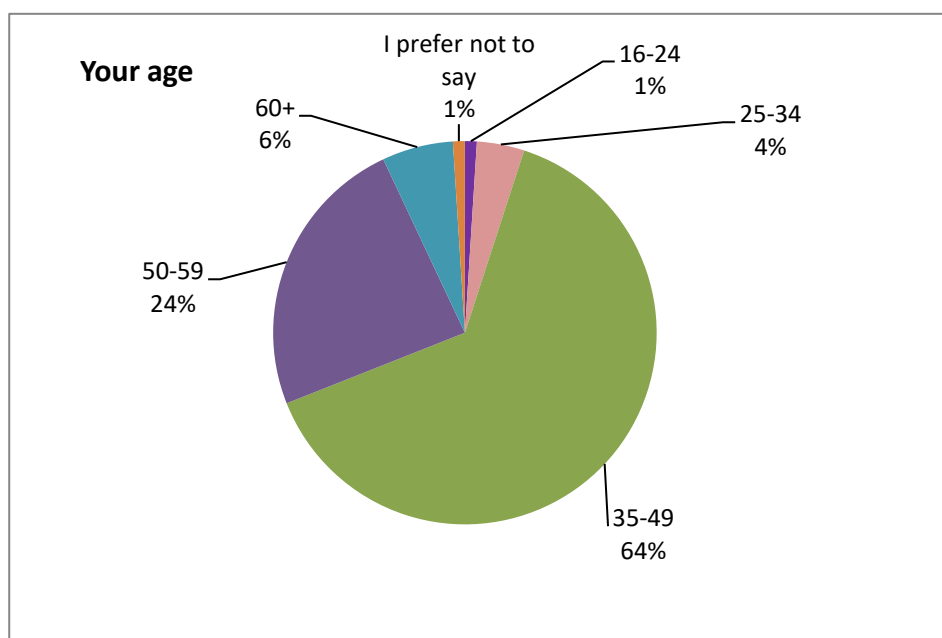
Database Manager. The questionnaire had a few questions with 'please select' and 'tick box' options and boxes to provide extra information and comments ([Annex 2: Online GP Consultations](#)). The questionnaire was sent to all parent carers on the Compass database held by Amaze and also uploaded onto PaCC and PaCC Partners' social media.

We received 95 completed questionnaires which were collated into two summaries:

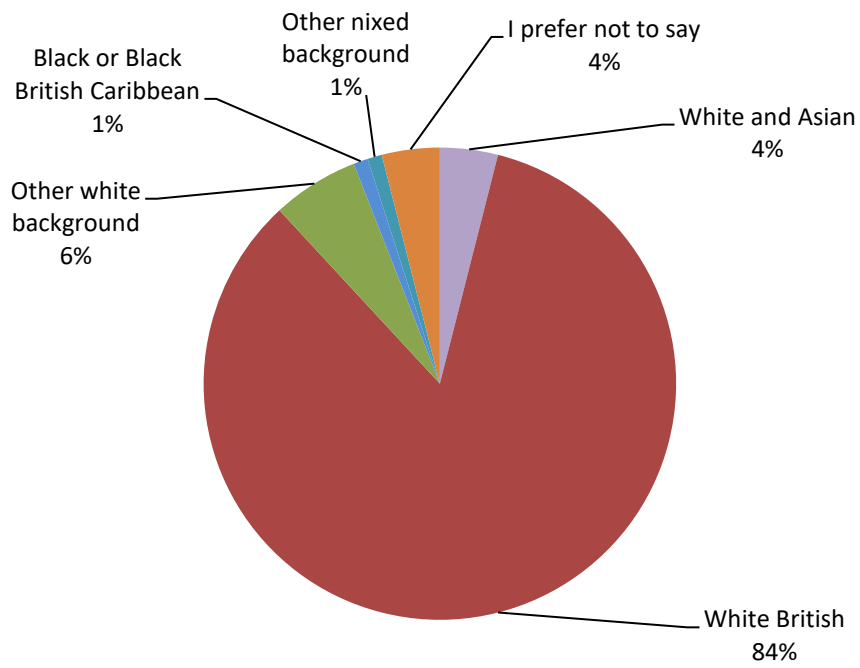
- [Annex 3 Online GP Consultations - Sharedexplore - Public-view](#)
- [Annex 4 Q 6 Collated Comments](#) (as the many comments to questions 6 wouldn't fit on annex 3).

Parent carers' contributions to this consultation are reported in verbatim to ensure the detail of their experiences is captured and considered.

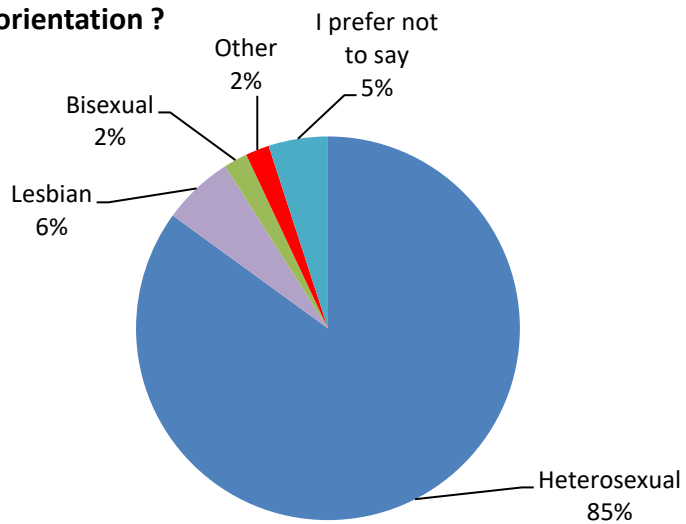
5. Demographics from the online questionnaire

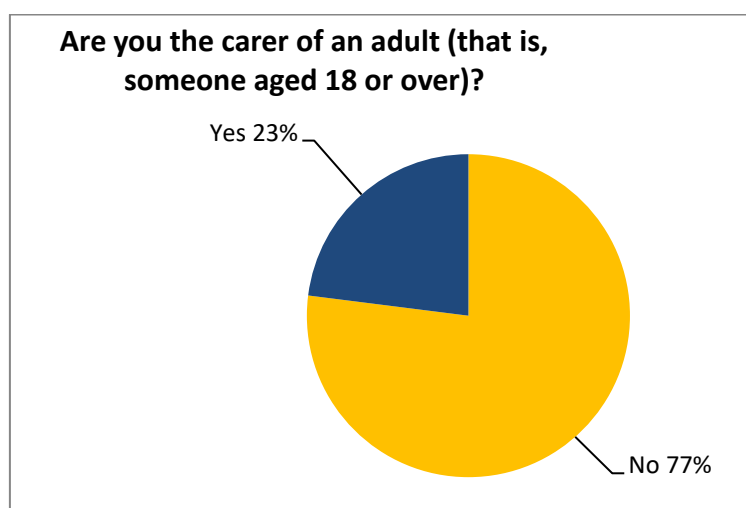
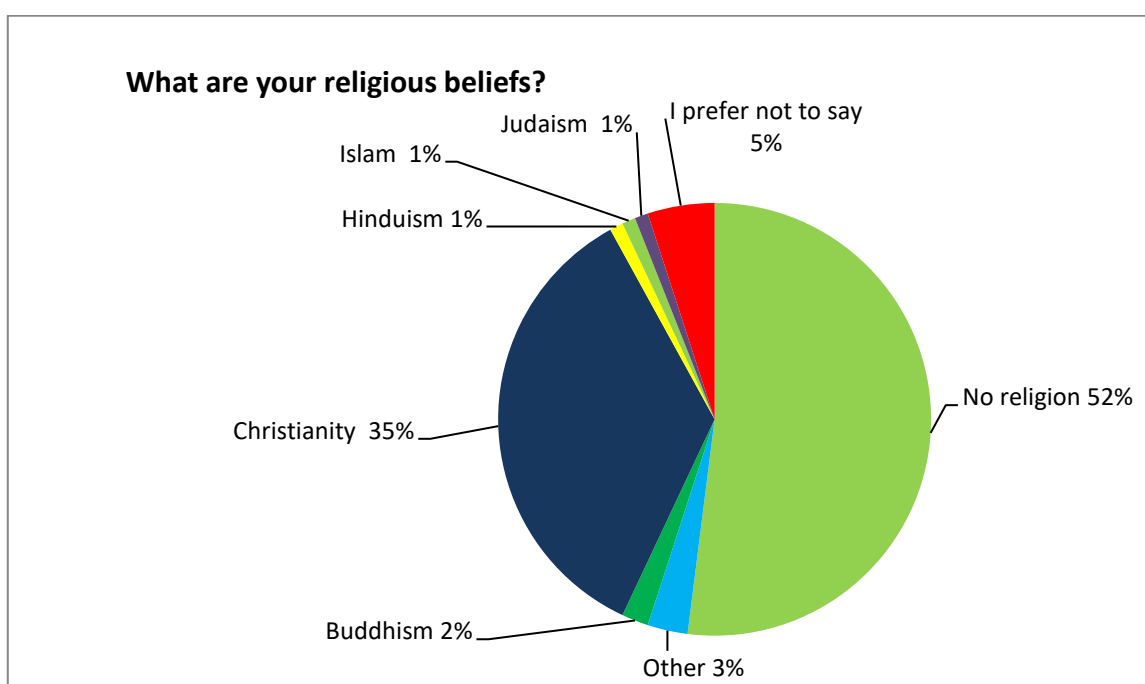
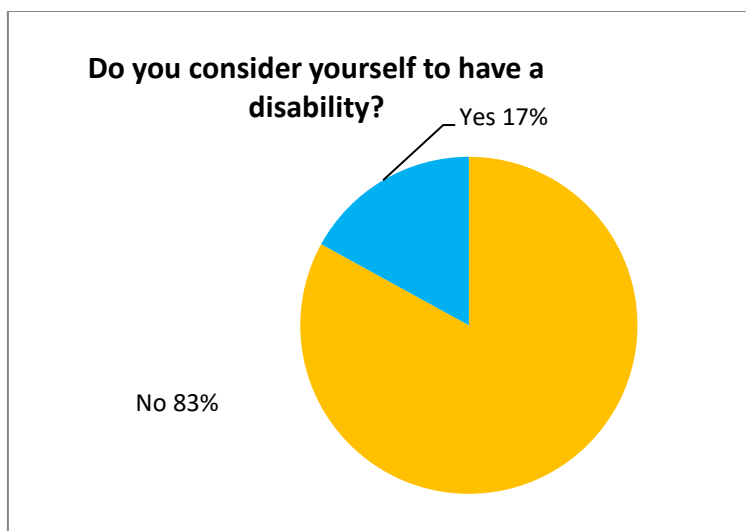


How would you describe your ethnic origin?



Which of the following best describe your sexual orientation ?

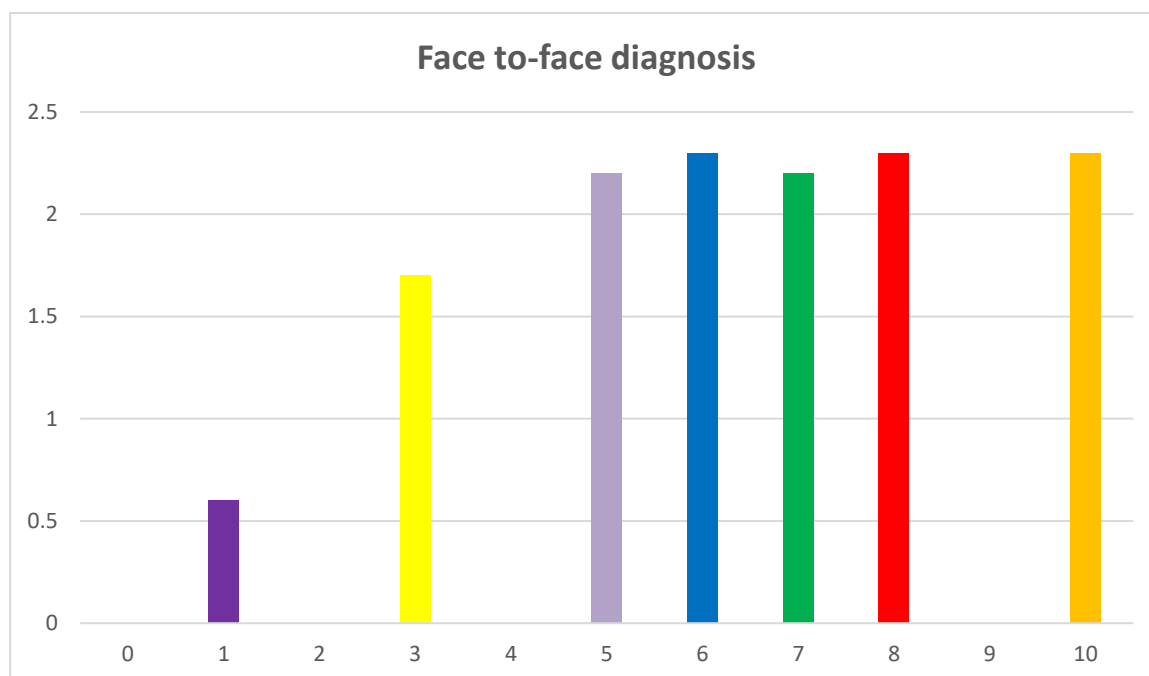




6. Findings from online questionnaire

6.1 How to receive a diagnosis

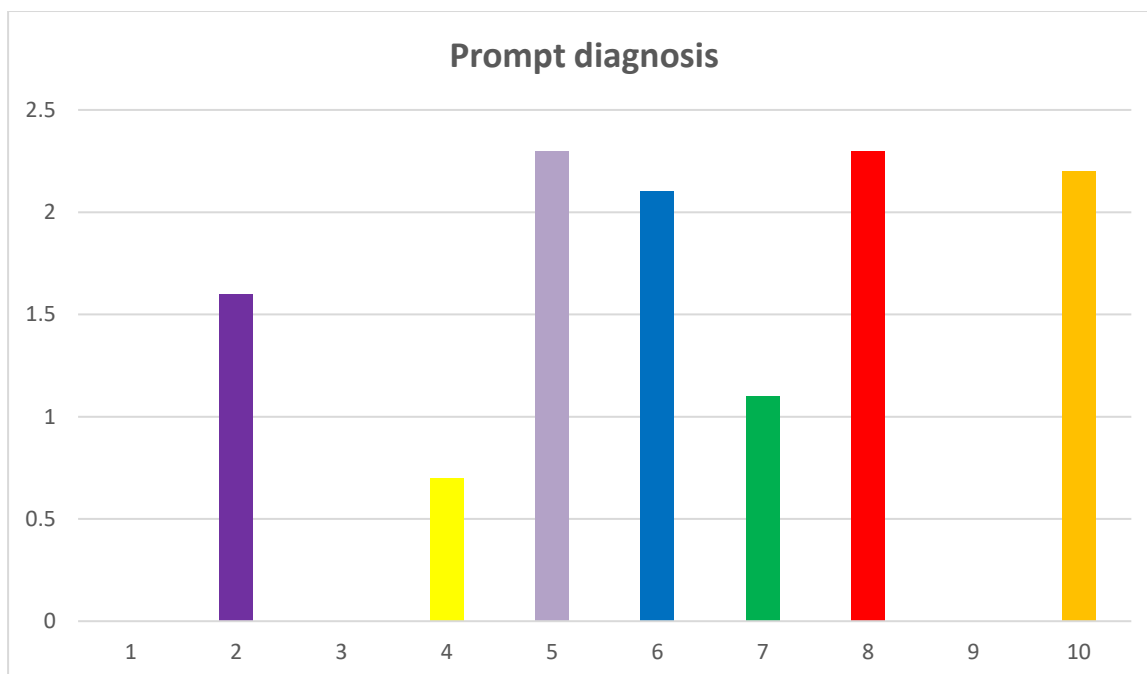
With the first question, we wanted to explore how parent carers felt about seeking a diagnosis face-to-face in comparison to online. To the question *'How important is it for you to be seen by a clinician when seeking a diagnosis? Please choose somewhere between 1 (not important) and 10 (very important),* respondents told us:



The majority of parent carers who responded to our questionnaire said it was more valuable and important to receive a face-to-face consultation than on online or over the phone. However there was also a group of parent carers who responded with a more balanced view of whether a face to face consultation was important. We can conclude that **whilst most parent carers would prefer to receive a diagnosis from a clinician face-to-face, some parent carers would be willing to consider using online or by phone consultations.**

6.2 Promptness of diagnosis

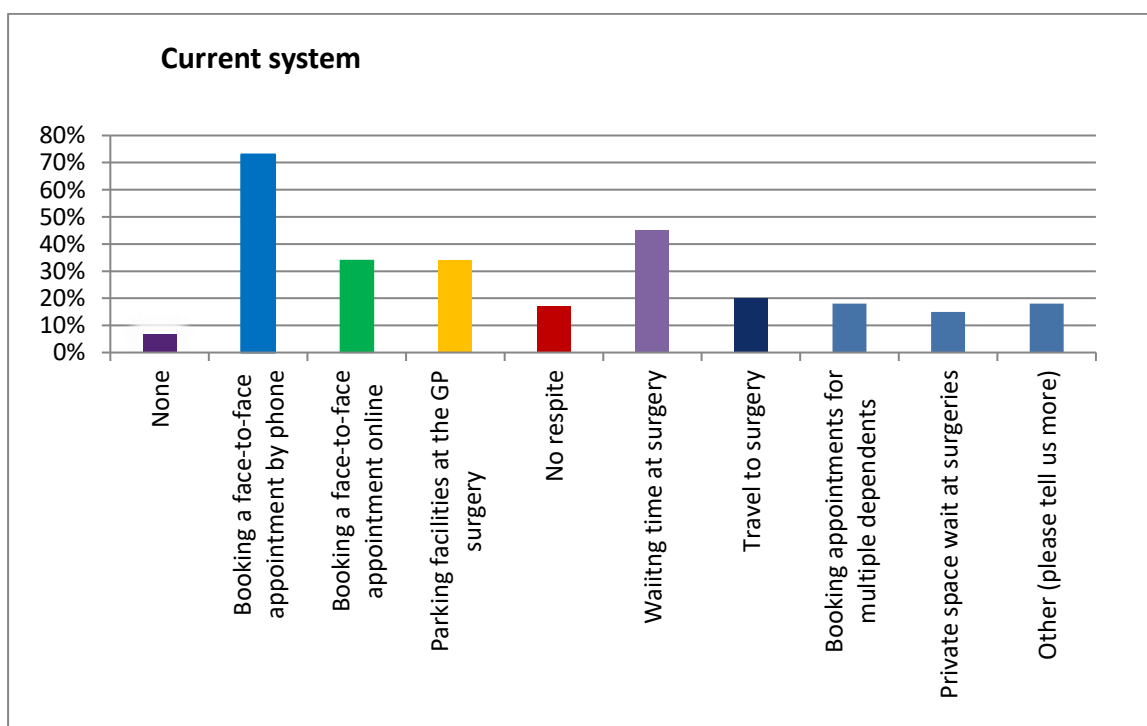
Accessing GPs and making an appointment can be quite difficult for a parent carer, which can have an impact on how quickly the parent carer might receive a diagnosis. We wanted to find out how important is for parent carers to receive a prompt diagnosis. To the question *'How important is it to be diagnosed very quickly even if online rather than face to face? Please choose somewhere between 1 (not important) and 10 (very important)* respondents told us:



For the majority of parent carers who participated in the online questionnaire receiving a diagnosis fast is a priority. Findings from this question mirror the previous one, of a sliding scale of importance.

6.3 Barriers on accessing GP within the current system

With this and the following question, we wanted to find out what barriers parent carers experience, or expect to experience, when accessing GPs. To the question *'What barriers do you feel there are to accessing GPs' services using the current system? Please choose all that apply'* respondents told us:



As anticipated, the main barrier to accessing GPs within the current system is **booking a face-to-face appointment by phone, highlighted by over 70% of respondents**. Two parent carers reported they had resorted to waiting outside for the surgery to open. One said: *It's soooo hard to get an appointment. I can't ever get through on the phone in the morning, and end up standing outside waiting for the surgery to open at 8am. It feels like a third world country with a line of the 'sick' standing on the street. It's a horrible experience when you are either ill yourself, or worried 'sick' about your child.*

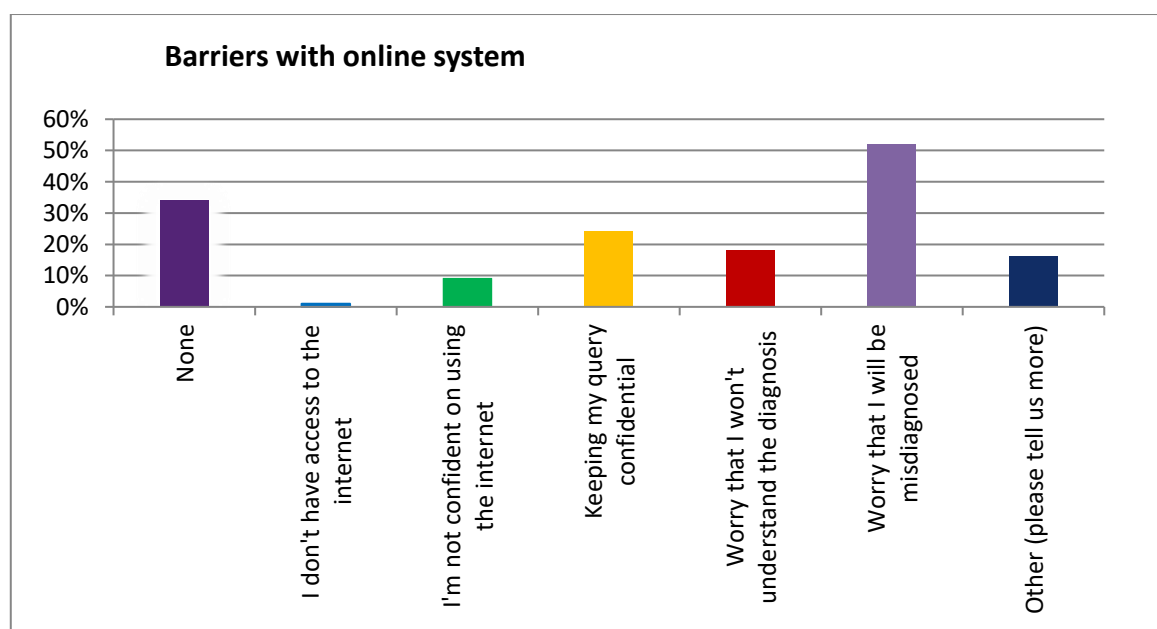
Another barrier is **waiting time at the surgery, chosen by over 40% of the respondents**. One commented on the lack of *Understanding of what autistic patients need and making reasonable adjustments.*

Booking a face-to-face appointment on line and parking facilities at the GPs were reported as barriers by over 30% of parent carers. One parent said: *Online booking is convenient but has less options available than by phone, but the queue for the phone is often very long and off-putting so I tend to use online. Finding an appointment at a suitable time avoiding school runs for my other child can be tricky.*

One parent's comments neatly summarise experiences which many parent carers reported: *1) actually getting through on the phone 2) convincing the receptionist to let me see / speak to a doctor about my child 3) "no appointments available - call back tomorrow" 4) no consistency - not able to see the same doctor each time 5) thinking I've booked to see / speak to a doctor, but the appointment is actually with a nurse, who can't help.*

6.4 Expected barriers or problems on accessing GP with online system

To the question 'What barriers or problems do you think you might have to using the proposed online system? Please choose all that apply, respondents told us:

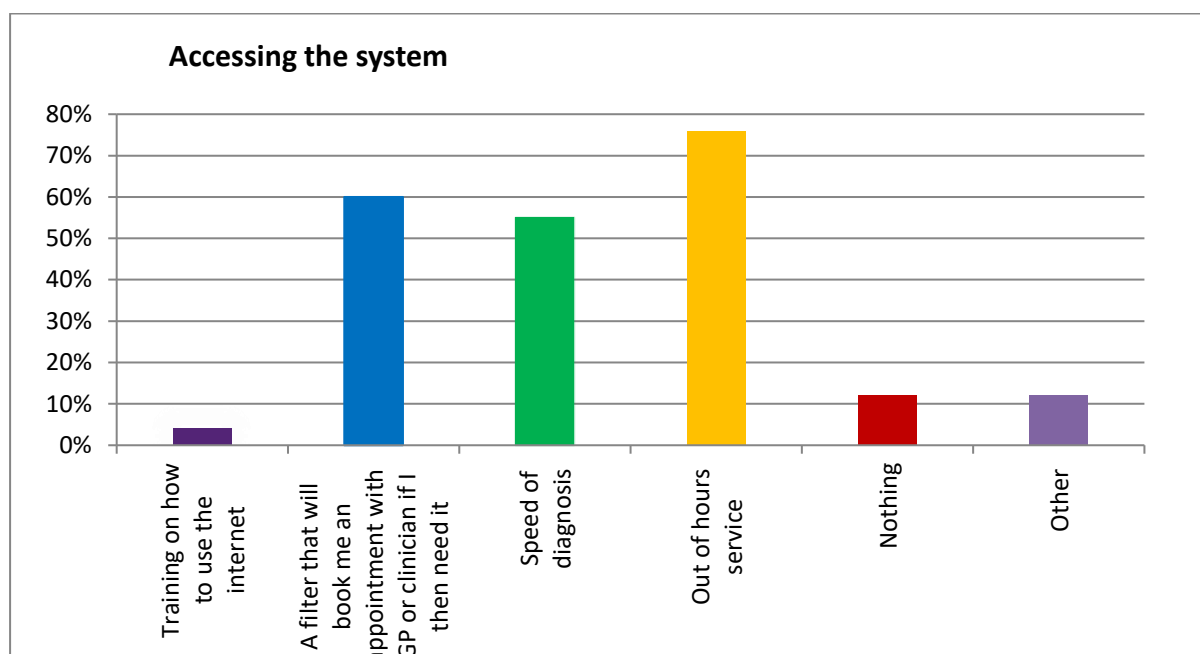


Interestingly **over 30% of parent carers don't anticipate experiencing barriers or problems with the new online system. Over 50% are however worried that an online consultation could generate a misdiagnosis:** *I think you need to see a doctor face-to-face. I think there is a huge risk of misdiagnosis. You might as well 'google' your symptoms?* Another commented: *Misdiagnosis due to comorbidities.*

Confidentiality is a concern for over 20% of parent carers who responded to the questionnaire: *Being overheard by my work colleagues.* Others commented on reliability of technology: *Technology isn't always reliable. If connection is poor, communication will be difficult, which can be problematic in a GP consultation –* and the online system used: *Chat is very limited. Why not use FaceTime, or Messenger or Skype so that the NHS doesn't spend money reinventing what already exists.*

6.5 Incentives to use online service

For new online consultation to be successful it needs many people to use it. We asked our community 'What would encourage you to use the online service as a first check? Please choose all that apply' to which respondents replied:



76% of parents who responded to our questionnaire would like the service to be accessible **out of 'normal' surgeries opening hours**, whilst 60% recommend a system that will further book an appointment with the GP or the clinician if needed.

Other suggestions included that the **service would need to be fast with over 50% of parents liking same day availability.** One parent commented on the importance of *knowing the GP will be competent and listen, and that there will be appointment availability.* Also, parent carers commented on the potential to upload photos in the online consultation and that the system would need to be easy to use.

6.6 A working online system

Finally we asked parent carers how do they see the system working best for them. Comments are grouped, for a full list of comments see [Annex 4 Q6 Collated Comments](#).

The proposed online consultation system is being presented as an add-on service and not a replacement of face-to-face consultation, nevertheless many parent carers viewed the new online consultation system a departure from a system that has not always worked in their favour: *My GP surgery currently says that they offer 'support' and 'flexibility' for carers, but the truth is they don't. It's very hard to get an appointment for my son at a convenient time. There is no disabled parking at the surgery. **Direct access to a GP via online would be great.***

Others feel that an online system is not what is needed: *As a GP I need to emphasise GPs already work flat out, more GPs and clinical staff are needed, not online consultations. Some problems can be sorted on phone, some need a face to face and proper examination which is not possible online. **This is another fudge in an understaffed system.***

Easy to access:

The system will work if it is easy to access and the parent has some control over it - *If it is easily accessible. If it will help to progress an issue speedily. **If I can track a course of a referral easily.*** Another parent liked the idea of easy access to a professional - ***Allowing me to chat to a professional when needed instead of putting it off for weeks or even months because of the difficulties in getting and maintaining an appointment. Online sounds like a fab idea.***

Appointments:

Many respondents commented on the fact that making an appointment with the current system is not always easy. One parent pointed out: ***It would be great to have the online system as it would make it easier for me.*** *Trying to fit appointments around my children and everything going on with them is really hard. I always put my own issues last and only go to the doctors for the kids or when I really have to. Especially minor issues, I'll leave them to get worse rather than go.*

Another commented: *Getting an appointment at my current surgery is incredibly difficult. I have to be constantly on the phone redialling for up to 25 minutes when they open at 8, while also getting my 2 children ready and on our way to school. This is impossible so if it's an appt for me rather than the kids, I generally just don't bother! **This would mean I would be able to access appts***

The proposed online system could be very useful for those parents who don't need a face-to-face appointment: *I recently had a very stressful visit to the doctor to get antibiotics for my son for an obviously infected spot. I could have emailed a pic and*

*been given the prescription very easily. Instead we had a nightmare travelling to the doctors after school which led to a stressful late night which are still paying for now a week later. All for a doctor to say in 15 seconds what we knew anyway. **I love the idea of an online system. Visits to the doctor are always a nightmare.***

For those families who have children and/or young people who don't find going to GPs a nice experience: *I feel my autistic son would benefit massively from this service as he finds traveling to and from the Doctors an extremely stressful situation especially when he is feeling poorly. He believes people in authority and will not be reassured by my diagnosis. **I think it will be invaluable to some.***

One parent's comment summarises: **Would speed up waiting times for queries and free up doctors to deal with things that require assistance. Also make the surgery less busy so easier for people with special needs (autism) feel calmer and seen quicker.**

Out of hours and confidentiality:

Many parents would like to be able to access this service out of normal GPs opening hours. One parent stated - **Being able to use out of hours, instead of waiting for the surgery phone line to be available and get connected quickly.** A working parent commented: *As a working parent carer I find **email is the best way to communicate and I can do it out of hours** which is often the best time for me.*

Many respondents like feel that they would have more control over when and where to use the service: **Out of hours when I can talk in private.** *Not helpful if you have to wait in for a call back from GP. If you're ringing, you can call from somewhere private, but if they call you back you may be out somewhere in public space.*

Speed of diagnosis:

The possibility of having a quick diagnose is appealing to many parents, mostly for minor issues or repeated prescription: **Diagnosis of simple problems and quick referrals upwards for more serious ones** – and - *For clarification on when to start antibiotics for my daughter or to check dosage (We have them on repeat prescription, but it is not always clear when we should start in the event of an infection)*

Concerns:

Taking into consideration that the online consultation will be an added-on service and not a replacement to current one, many parents expressed concern and doubts about the new proposed system.

A parent liked the idea of online consultation but: *I think in the age of technology this is a good idea-as long as you are not fobbed off with anything less than an actual GP - **my concern is that in order to save money they would put non qualified***

person on the live chat- but if it is going to be a GP I think it will be a great time saving idea as a carer it is not always easy to make appointments for my own health concerns so I think an application such as this would prove to be very valuable

Some respondents have doubts about confidentiality and security of the online system: *I think this is unsafe. When I have exhausted home remedies, my pharmacist, I then want to see a GP. Phoning my GP is my last option, not my first option.*

Some others just want to be able to see the GP or other clinicians face-to-face: *This could work if I roughly know what the matter might be, or I wanted guidance / diagnosis for a sick child. Seeing a GP is still really important though and if the internet consultant threw up a red flag for something I would still like to be seen in a timely manner.*

7. Recommendations

- i. Many parent carers see direct access to a GP online as positive service development
- ii. The system should not replace face-to-face appointments
- iii. The system needs to be easy to access and offer the parent carer some form of control in how it works for them
- iv. The system should allow parent carers to access consultation out of hours when they have more time to interact with a GP or clinician
- v. The new system should speed up waiting times and free up doctors time to focus on patients who are a priority for support
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8. Annexes

Annex 1: PaCC engagement diagram

Annex 2: Online GP Consultations

Annex 3: Online GP Consultations - Sharedexplore - Public-view

Annex 4: Q 6 Collated Comments