

THE GP PATIENT SURVEY



Information for GPs and Practice Staff

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The Department of Health (DH) is running the GP patient survey again this year to assess patients' experiences of their local NHS services. Survey specialist Ipsos MORI continues to run the survey on behalf of DH. Since April 2009 this survey has been running quarterly, with the survey being sent to a sample of patients at each GP practice every quarter. Different patients in each practice will receive the questionnaire each quarter. Around 5.7 million patients in England are invited to give their views each year, which is achieved by inviting around 1.4 million patients to take part each quarter.

Why is this happening?

The GP Patient Survey is part of the Government's commitment to make the NHS more responsive to patients' needs. Providing more frequent patient feedback information will help the NHS to support general practice in providing services that are responsive to their patients' needs.

The Survey underpins a range of policies to improve the patient experience. This includes supporting assessment of practice achievement of the patient experience indicators in the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) covering 48-hour access and advance booking. Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) will also be assessed on their record on patient experience of GP services using the survey data, which will help to improve standards. The findings of the GP Patient Survey will also provide valuable information for patients about what other patients think about local services.

What does the survey cover?

Overall, the questionnaire remains largely unchanged since the annual survey conducted for 2008/09. Changes will be minimal from one quarterly survey to the next, to ensure comparisons can be made with previous survey results and improvements tracked over time.

In each quarter the survey covers a similar range of 'core' topics covered in the 2008/09 survey, such as:

- Getting through on the phone
- Accessing GP appointments
- Patient satisfaction with practice opening hours
- Consultations with healthcare professionals
- Patient satisfaction with overall care

As the questionnaire is kept under review some minor question changes or additions may be made to improve the survey based on ongoing cognitive testing. Any changes are developed and tested by Ipsos MORI who works with the Peninsula Medical School and the National Primary Care Research and Development Centre.

The survey also includes a range of subjects that will be covered each year but which do not feature in every quarter of the survey. These include sections on care planning, out of hours care, and NHS dentistry that will provide feedback at an aggregated level to the local PCT.

All changes continue to be developed by Ipsos MORI working with primary care academics.

How have patients been selected?

A random sample of patients registered at your practice is drawn from the NHAIS (Exeter) Registration systems by the Department of Health. The sample is being used by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Department, under the terms of a Data Processor Agreement the Department has put in place with Ipsos MORI. The sample is being used for survey administration purposes only. Once Ipsos MORI has completed its analysis of the responses, all sample data will be securely destroyed with no personal data being retained by either Ipsos MORI or the Department.

The following personal data is being collected as part of the sample:

- Patients' NHS number: provides a unique identifier
- Name: for personalised letters
- Address: to conduct a postal survey
- Month and year of birth: to exclude patients under 18 years of age
- Gender: for data analysis and non response bias analysis, e.g. to ascertain if certain groups are less likely to respond to the survey

No other personal data is collected from the NHAIS system. Ipsos MORI has not been given access to any NHS systems, nor has it been provided with any clinical information about patients' health or consultations.

Ipsos MORI and the Department of Health will record which patients have been invited to take part in the survey in which quarter so that the same people are not asked to take part more than once in any 12 month period.

What happens next?

- Patients selected to take part in the quarterly survey will be sent a questionnaire during one of the following weeks:
 - Week commencing 5 April 2010
 - Week commencing 5 July 2010
 - Week commencing 4 October 2010
 - Week commencing 3 January 2011
- As mentioned above, patients will not be selected to take part in more than one quarterly survey in any 12 month period, e.g. a patient who is sent a questionnaire in April 2010 will not be sent another one (with the exception of reminder questionnaires) in either the July, October or January surveys.
- Reminder questionnaires are sent to patients in the first half of the two months following the initial quarterly mailing, unless they have opted out following the initial questionnaire (see below) (e.g. reminders for the April survey will be sent to patients w/c 10 May and w/c 7 June).
- Analysis and reporting of the survey data is ongoing and is undertaken after each quarterly survey. Once published, GP Practices can access their results via the survey website **www.gp-patient.co.uk**
- From 2010, the publication of the final Patient Survey results has been brought forward to mid June, so practices and PCTs will not need to receive early access to PE7 and PE8 results. However, practices and PCTs will still need to ensure that they are able to complete the process before the end of June. This results data will be an aggregation of the data from each of the four quarterly surveys conducted in 2010/11.





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Taking part in the survey is voluntary. If patients do not wish to take part, they do not need to return their questionnaire and can disregard the reminders. If there are patients you know who should not receive mailings to their address or who have registered an objection with their GP to receiving mailings, practices should email the names and NHS numbers of these patients to **gppatientsurvey@dh.gsi.gov.uk**

As there is a possibility that some patients could receive a questionnaire at an inappropriate time, please note that we will always continue to withdraw patients from survey mailings wherever possible. Please notify DH via the email address above as soon as possible to minimise the possibility of a patient being included in future survey mailings.

The Quarterly Surveys

In previous years of the survey, the colour of the questionnaire has been the same (NHS blue). Since the survey began running quarterly, a different colour questionnaire is used for each quarter. Please see below for the colours that are used. This may help you to answer any queries from patients who receive a questionnaire that may be a different colour to one their neighbour or someone else in their household receives for example.

-  April survey (with reminders in May and June)
-  July survey (with reminders in August and September)
-  October survey (with reminders in November and December)
-  January survey (with reminders in February and March)

Confidentiality

We are aware that the confidentiality of patient details will be a major concern for GPs and the public. We take this very seriously and we will ensure with the survey administrators that the survey is conducted within the law, that the requirements under the Data Protection Act 1998 are upheld, and that the Caldicott Principles are adhered to. For more information about this please see the website address below.

Accessibility

To assist patients who may find it difficult to complete the questionnaire, Ipsos MORI has put various measures in place to help these respondents. These include:

- A website (www.gp-patient.co.uk) with a detailed Frequently Asked Questions section. These are available in English and in those other languages most commonly used by NHS Direct
- The website is fully compatible with W3C Standards which means that users can use Screen Reader software and it is possible to change the font size of the text
- The questionnaire is also available on the website in British Sign Language
- Alternative versions of the questionnaire, such as large print and Braille are available on request
- It is possible to complete the questionnaire online or over the telephone, including in those other languages most commonly used by NHS Direct
- There is a telephone helpline which will be able to answer respondents' queries and help with completing the questionnaire if necessary

For more information

Please visit the following web pages for more information about the survey, including detailed Frequently Asked Questions sections:

www.pcc.nhs.uk/201.php

www.dh.gov.uk

www.gp-patient.co.uk