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How many people do we turn away?
Measuring unmet demand on sexual health services.
Inner South East London snapshot survey

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18 April 2018

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Sexual health services in inner South East London have undergone significant transformation.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

- Inner South East London has some of the highest levels of sexual health need nationally due to its young, mobile and ethnically diverse population. There are also high levels of men who have sex with men (MSM) in inner South East London.

- Sexual health clinics in inner South East London are large, modern and popular, thus levels of attendances and diagnoses are higher compared to London rates.

- Inner South East London commenced a sexual health transformation programme in 2015-16, with the aim to develop and implement a sustainable model for delivering GUM/integrated sexual health service.
AIM OF THE SURVEY

- The aim of the survey was to identify the numbers and characteristics of people being turned away from Sexual Health (SH) clinics in inner South East London.

- The survey was interested in answering three key questions:
  - How many clients were being turned away from SH clinics?
  - Who was being turned away?
  - Had clients that were turned away from the SH clinic already been turned away from other services?

- The survey was conducted in November 2017 and intended to provide a snapshot of local SH service demand.
The survey was conducted across 7 sites in 3 inner South East London boroughs.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

- **Survey design**
  - The original questionnaire was developed as a self completed paper based survey and as an online survey by the sexual health transformation board.

- **Data collection**
  - Frontline staff at each participating clinics administered the paper survey (or shared the online link).
  - The main sexual health providers that participated in the survey were; Kings College Hospital (2 sites), Guys and St Thomas Trust (3 sites), Lewisham and Greenwich Trust (2 sites) and Brook Clinic for young people.

- **Data inputting**
  - The surveys were inputted by staff at the sexual health clinics and a registrar from the Public Health department.

- **Data analysis**
  - The analysis, conducted by a public health registrar, only included clients that were turned away from the clinic.
RESULTS: HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE TURNED AWAY?

• During the survey period 1,094 survey respondents were classified as being turned away.

• Based on sexual health activity data, it is estimated that there were around 8859 attendances at the participating clinics during the survey period\(^1\).

• This does not account for online service activity, during November 2017, 869 residents were turned away from online services\(^2\).

\(^1\) Data from Pathway Analytics.
\(^2\) Data from SH:24, Southwark, Lewisham and Lambeth online sexual health service provider.
RESULTS: WHO DID THE CLINICS TURN AWAY?

• Age and postcode information was available for 96% of respondents.
• Respondents who reported being turned away were more likely to be over 25 years and from postcode areas within inner South East London.

Postcode
• 73% came from postcodes within inner South East London.

Age
• 6% of respondents were 18 years or younger.
• 52% were aged between 25-45 years.

Figure 1. Age breakdown for survey population
RESULTS: WHY DID RESPONDENTS ATTEND THE CLINIC?

- 90% of respondents answered this question.
- **54% of those turned away reported that they had symptoms.**
- Only 11% of those turned away reported being asymptomatic.

![Figure 2. Proportion of those with symptoms/type of service required for survey population](image)
RESULTS: HAD RESPONDENTS ALREADY BEEN TURNED AWAY FROM OTHER SERVICES?

• 26% of respondents had previously attempted to access and had been turned away from another service.
• Of those who had been turned away multiple times:
  • 44% had attempted to access GP services
  • 42% another sexual health clinic.

• **We do not know** how many services respondents were turned away from previously. Therefore some of the 26% may have been turned away more than once.
• **We also do not know** if respondents attempted to access other services for the same reasons.

Figure 3. Types of services respondents had been previously turned away from.

Figure 4. Age breakdown of respondents previously turned away.
SUMMARY

The survey sought to answer three key questions; how many people were turned away, who is being turned away and had they been turned away before.

- **How many people are being turned away?**
  - 1,094 respondents report being turned away from the clinic.
  - Due to methodological weaknesses we cannot estimate the proportion that were turned away. The April 2018 survey will seek to address methodological weaknesses.

- **Who is being turned away from sexual health clinics?**
  - The survey indicates that:
    - Just over half of those turned away reported being symptomatic.
    - 4 in 10 were under 24 years old
    - Almost two thirds live in postcode areas within inner South East London.

- **Had these clients previously been turned away from other services?**
  - Just over 1 in 4 respondents indicated that they had already been turned away from at least one other service.
CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

**Conclusions**
- A notable number of clients report being turned away from clinics.
- A considerable proportion of those reported as turned away also report being symptomatic and therefore may not be suitable for online sexual health services.
- Approximately 11% of those classified as turned away may have been diverted to online services.
- Almost three quarters of respondents were from postcodes local to inner South East London.

**Limitations**
- The survey does not provide detailed information or an objective measure of symptomatic.
- Respondents that were “turned away” may have been offered another appointment that day or within 48 hours.
- The survey cannot draw conclusions on capacity within sexual health services as it is likely that demand may be driven by a number of factors within the wider system.
- The survey and clinic activity data was unable to identify unique respondents.
NEXT STEPS

• There is value in repeating the survey with improved methodology to further understand the local demand on sexual health services.

• We have taken the learning from this survey, updated the questionnaire and methodology and will re-run the process from 16th – 29th April 2018.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The patients who completed the survey

The front line staff who administered the survey

Michael Brady
Kings College Hospital

Emily Mabonga and Sue Mitchell
Lewisham and Greenwich Trust

Anatole Menon-Johannson
Guy’s and St Thomas’ Trust

Vikki Pearce
Vikki Pearce Consulting

Kirsten Watters
Public Health Directorate, Southwark Council

Jennifer Reiter
Lambeth Council

Laura Jones
Brook

Glyn Parry
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