

DATA BRIEFING



JOHN APPLEBY

Is Darzi wrong about GP access?

Everyone has a personal anecdote about their experience of the NHS, from the wonderful nurse to the obstructive receptionist or insensitive consultant delivering bad news. The problem is such stories are just one-off experiences – so how satisfied are patients overall across the millions of patient contacts in the NHS each year and what are they really dissatisfied with?

Top of the public's dissatisfaction list at the moment – at least according to politicians and the interim NHS review report from Lord Darzi – is problems with accessing GP services, particularly in the evening and at weekends. But is this really an issue?

In July Ipsos-MORI, on behalf of the Department of Health, published an interesting survey about GP access problems. It covered a staggering 2.3 million people, which makes its findings rather significant. As the top chart shows, 84 per cent of people said they were satisfied with the opening hours of their GP practice. That means around 31 million people out of the population in England aged over 18 are satisfied.

Of course, that still leaves 16 per cent (around 6 million) not satisfied. So who are these people? Where do they live?

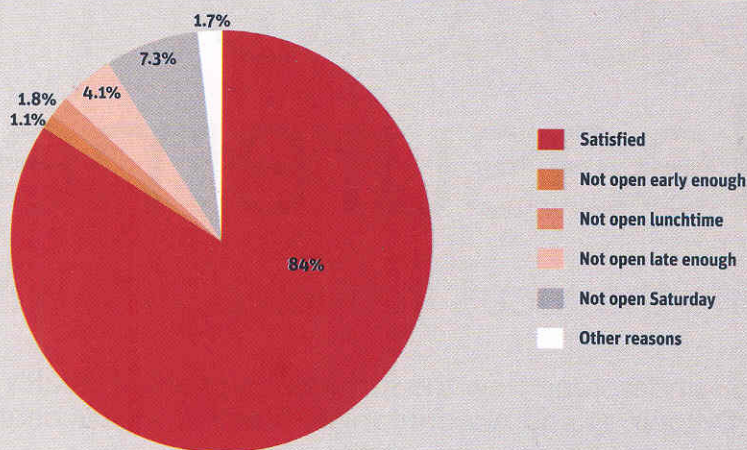
The results of the survey suggest that those who tend to be more satisfied than average include those aged over 60, people who live in the North of England, frequent attenders at GP surgeries and white people. Those tending to be more dissatisfied include Asian and Chinese people, Londoners and the young(ish). Gender, deprivation, living in a rural area, size of GP practice and the type of contract for the GP do not seem to affect satisfaction with opening hours. It should be noted that the huge sample means even very small (less than 1 per cent) differences from the average – will tend to be statistically significant.

Breaking down the reasons for dissatisfaction, just 7 per cent of those surveyed want their surgeries to open on Saturdays, and just 4 per cent in the evenings.

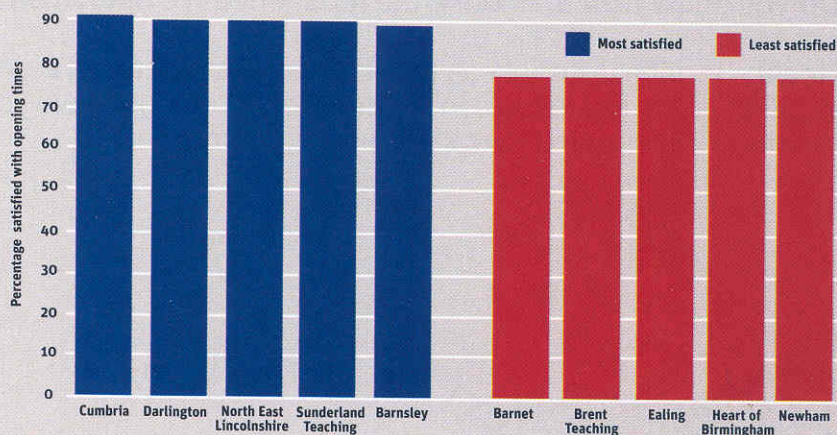
Given these responses, there are two questions it would be worth finding answers to: what are the likely costs of fixing this apparent access problem and what health benefits would the public gain from extending opening hours? This prompts a further question: what type of work do those GPs who currently operate extended hours actually do, and for whom? In particular, could there be an easier and cheaper way of giving the public better access to repeat prescriptions? ●

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OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH GP PRACTICE OPENING TIMES



PCTS WITH HIGHEST/LOWEST PROPORTIONS SATISFIED WITH OPENING TIMES



SATISFIED/DISSATISFIED GROUPS AND REASONS FOR DISSATISFACTION

Tend to be more satisfied	Tend to be more dissatisfied	Little/no difference
Over 60	Under 35	Men/women
White British/Irish	Asian/Asian British	Practice size
Frequent user (> 16 appointments)	Chinese	Type of GP contract
North of England	London	Deprivation
		Rurality

Reason for dissatisfaction	PCT	% of those dissatisfied
Not open early enough	Kensington and Chelsea	19
Not open lunchtime	Hartlepool	23
Not open late enough	Rotherham	36
Not open Saturday	Dorset	66

Upper table shows groups more/less satisfied than average, lower table looks at popular reasons cited for dissatisfaction in four of the PCT areas where dissatisfaction was highest