



Healthwatch Darlington
Back Pain Report
November 2015



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What is Healthwatch Darlington?



We believe, no matter who you are, where you live or how old you are. You do have a voice and you have the right for that voice to be heard.



Healthwatch Darlington helps you and your family get the best out of Health and Social Care services in Darlington.

Healthwatch Darlington is a charitable company limited by guarantee which makes us a totally independent organisation. We raise your views and opinions on Health and Social Care in Darlington and help make your voices heard.

Healthwatch Darlington is representative of diverse communities.

Healthwatch Darlington's vision and mission focuses our work on what needs to be achieved to improve Health and Social Care services for local people.

What we do:

- Enable local voices to influence the delivery of local Health and Social Care services
- Use local volunteers to gather views and experiences from local people





Tell us your experience of local Health and Social Care

GPs and Practices - Dentists - Mental Health Services - Hospitals -
Opticians - Nursing Homes - Care Agencies - Pharmacists -
Community Health Services - Carers Services - Children and Young
Peoples Services

- Involve and engage local people, putting YOU at the heart of Health and Social Care service decision making
- Enable local people to make informed choices about their own, their families and friends' Health and Social Care
- Influence the way services are planned, designed, commissioned and delivered
- Have strong relationships with Health and Social Care providers as a critical friend using community views to influence and improve planning and delivery of services
- Provide information, advice and support about local services and signpost to them

Tell us your views and enable us to influence change and improve Health and Social Care in Darlington



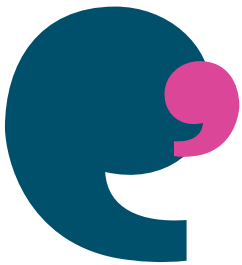
We are independent and powerful, we make Health and Social Care providers answerable to the people who use their services.

We can help you to find the right services you need through our Information and signposting services

We have the power to Enter and View - to go and see for ourselves

We tell providers what YOU think about their services





North of England Commissioning Support Unit

NECS is a Commissioning Support Unit (CSU) working across England to support NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and others in carrying out commissioning functions which achieve great healthcare commissioning outcomes and efficiencies.

We are partners in improving local health. We release time for our customers to concentrate on what they do best. We know from customer feedback that our flexibility and commitment to adapting our services to meet their unique needs is what makes us special.

We are guided by our principles: **Our first responsibility is to our customers and the patients they serve.** We need to be commercial but we will always uphold the principles of the NHS. We aim to achieve excellence and delight our customers by exceeding their expectations. We will charge fairly for our

services to make a reasonable profit. We will re-invest in NECS, our people and our products, for customers' benefit.

We will challenge ourselves to be the best we can possibly be.

Continuous improvement is our priority. We will support and empower our people to find and solve problems and share best practice. We will innovate, learn from the best and we will have the courage to make changes.

We will be a responsible and conscientious member of the community. We have a social purpose and aim to make a positive difference in everything we do.

Why NECS?

We bring together the best for you. We combine the unique knowledge and specialist skills of our experienced workforce with market leading applications to provide customers with high quality services and creative solutions. We work across





boundaries and organisations, for example helping all partners manage winter pressures across the north east by leading on monitoring, information sharing and communications. We share best practice and continuously learn and improve. Working closely with our customers we have developed an online Commissioning Knowledge Hub to share innovation and best practice. We innovate and lead the way on national issues, in partnership with our customers, such as personal health budgets, seven day working and '111'. We develop creative solutions, working with customers to make sure we meet their specific needs. RAIDR, our business intelligence tool, was originally designed in collaboration with GPs and our customers continue to shape its development. Our scale means we offer resilience and can increasingly drive efficiency. Our in-depth

knowledge and considerable experience means customers benefit immediately from the valuable intellectual capital that we have accrued.

Our customers

Our headquarters are based in the north of England - distance isn't a barrier. We work right across the country, from Cumbria to Suffolk. Our current customers include CCGs, GP practices, Foundation Trusts, other CSUs, NHS England and Local Authorities. We value each customer as an individual and respect their specific needs. We have dedicated relationship managers to give each customer a single point of contact, as well as access to experts across the many specialist areas in our organisation. We bring together the right people, the right tools and the right attitude.





Our values

Our values drive everything we do and the way we do it. We pride ourselves in being highly professional, acting with honesty and integrity, delivering to the highest performance standards. We treat everyone we work with, our customers, our partners and our own people, with the greatest respect and dignity. We believe that a happy and fulfilling place to work is best for our people and our customers.



Finding out about patient experience of back pain in Darlington

Improved care for people with back pain is being implemented in Darlington by NHS Darlington CCG as part of a regional programme, based on national best practice.

Before this happens, we are trying to

find out about local experiences of services for people with back pain and sciatica (leg pain).

We have been carrying out a survey to find out about this, but would like to know more from those who have not responded so far. We asked Healthwatch Darlington to carry out some focus groups on our behalf.



Context and Background

Background

North East Commissioning Support (NECS) contacted Healthwatch Darlington (HWD) to help gather feedback from patients, carers and users of services within the Back Pain Programme. A survey was produced by NECS and distributed via different routes including HWD networks. NECS have received 50 responses but felt that some key demographics are missing these include;

- * Male population
- * BME residents
- * People aged under 40
- * Carers

NECS wanted to build on this information and target specific areas to ensure a full cross

section of public involvement.

Healthwatch Darlington (HWD) were approached by NECS to gather patient carer views on the current back pain services.

Purpose of this Research Programme was to

- Obtain the views of patients using back pain services.

HWD (an independent organisation) accepted the project and began gathering patient experience of the current services. HWD conducted 3 targeted focus groups as well as face to face interviews with people using the services. We collated the information gathered with the objective of producing a feedback report based on the findings of the focus group meetings and face to face



interviews. We agreed the report would help to identify how the services are currently working and give commissioners information from patient and carer based on the actual needs and experiences of local people.

The Project Proposal

Provide independent feedback on the current back pain service provided by the local NHS services. Gathering information on patient experience by using the survey designed specifically for gathering this information provided by NECS to conduct face to face interviews and focus groups, noting experiences, expectations and areas for improvement.

The aim was to:

- Understand the positive/

negative status and quality of the current services.

- Evaluate patient experience.
- Identify what works well and what does not for people using the services.

Our Target Audience

Who did we talk to and how did we get the information we needed?

- The teams at HWD gathered groups of the above demographics to form focus groups and completed questionnaires with them whilst having focused conversations around back pain services.
- HWD conducted face to face interviews with patients visiting the services.

Our Approach

We used the survey provided by NECS to gather evidence in preparation for the final report.

- Talked to patients who have used the service in person.
- Contacted groups and pulled together focus groups of specific demographics.

Methodology

HWD gathered information and evidence:

- Completed individual surveys with patients and carers at NHS locations.
- Contacted HWD networks to organise 3 focus groups.
- Promoted the survey through HWD website, ebulletin and email .
- Produce a detailed report on the outcomes.

The approach was a simple but direct way of gaining views and opinions.

1. Survey/Individual Interviews

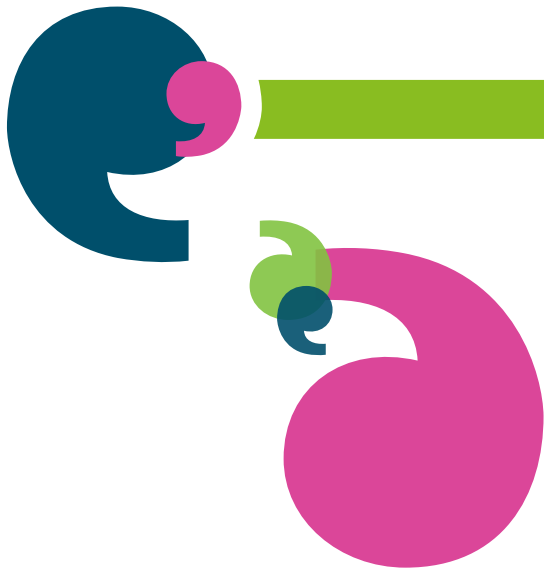
We used the surveys to gather the statistical information needed to evaluate the impact of the service has had on the patient/carers; whilst also providing an introduction to gathering patient stories' for some more qualitative feedback.

2. Established a Time Line

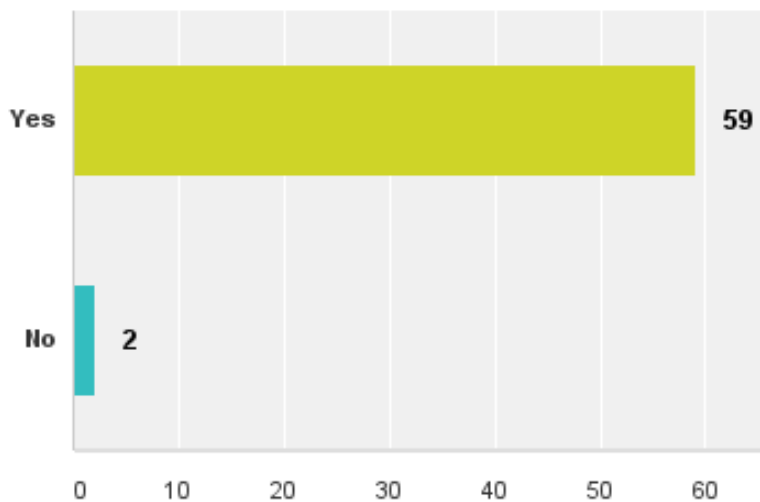
- HWD gathered views via face to face interviews with permission from local NHS services via NECS contacts for these services.
- 3 Focus groups were established ensuring the groups included attendees from the specified demographics.



Survey Responses



Q1 Have you ever suffered from back pain or sciatica (leg pain)?



59 of the 61 respondents had suffered from back pain or sciatica.

Q2 Which of the following services have you contacted or seen about your back pain?

- 1 - GP - **86.4%**
- 2 - NHS Physiotherapist - **55.9%**

- 3 - Nurse specialist/practitioner - **6.8%**

- 4 - NHS 111 - **3.4%**

- 5 - Urgent Care or Walk-In Service - **8.5%**

- 6 - Minor Injuries Unit - **0**

- 7 - A&E - **15.3%**

- 8 - Orthopedic Surgeon - **18.6%**

- 9. Nuero/Spinal Surgeon - **11.9%**

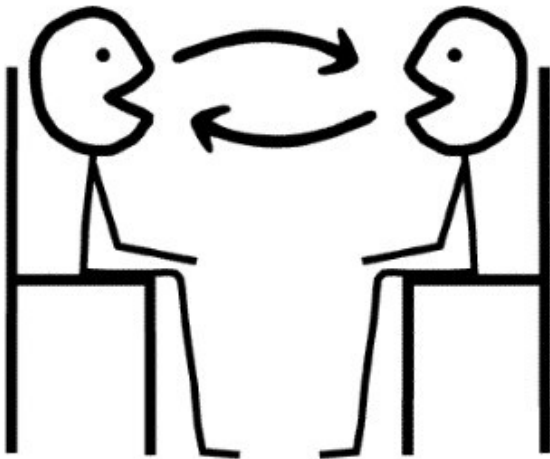
- 10 - Pain clinic or pain specialist - **16.9%**

- 11 - Private Physiotherapist - **20.3%**

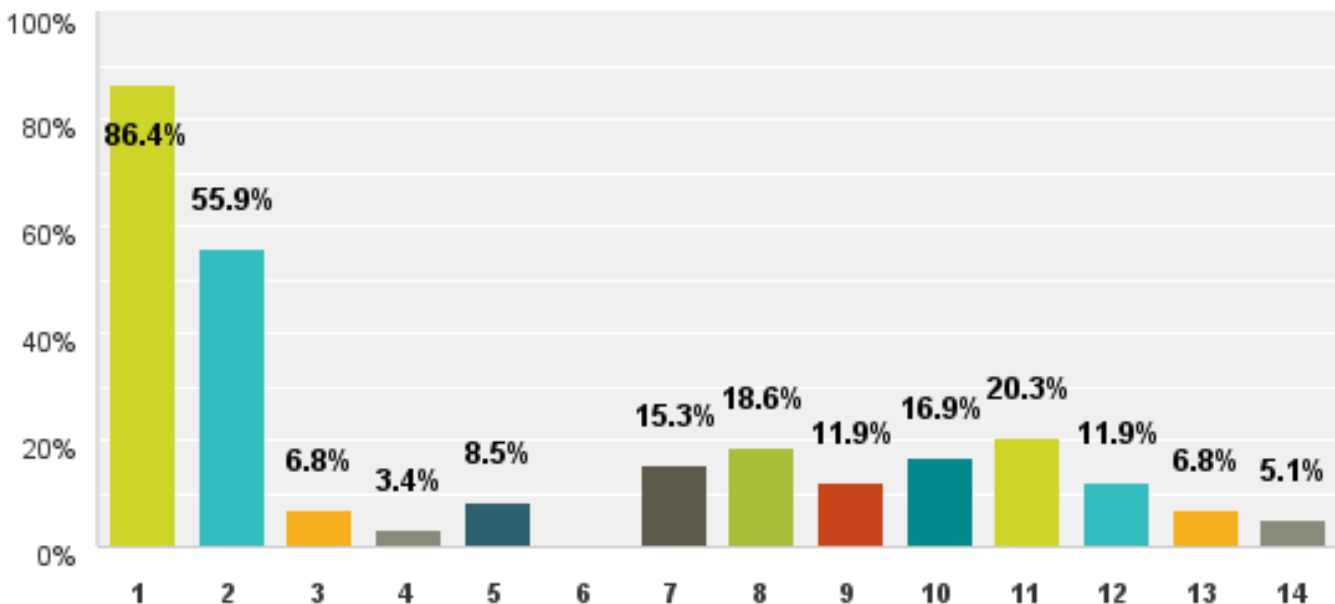
- 12 - Chiropractor - **11.9%**

- 13 - I have not contacted or seen any service - **6.8%**

- 14 - Other (please specify) - **5.1%**



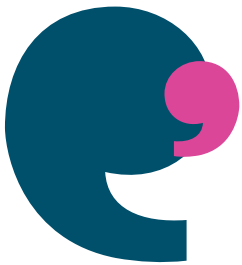
FACE TO FACE FINDINGS



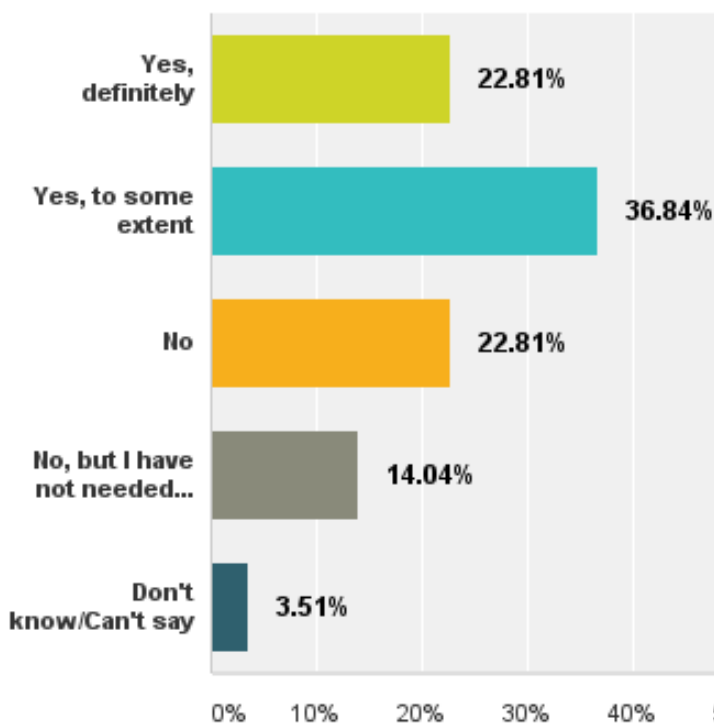
The majority of people we spoke to or whom completed the survey had contacted a GP about their back pain or sciatica. Slightly over 55% of the responders had used NHS Physio and over 20% had used Private Physio, with approximately 15% of people using an orthopaedic surgeon and the same number using a Neuro/Spinal surgeon.

Approximately 13% had used a chiropractor. Less than 10% of people had used a Nurse Specialist, A&E or Urgent Care or Walk in Centre.

3 responders marked 'Other' as Hospital, NHS physio and physiotherapist.

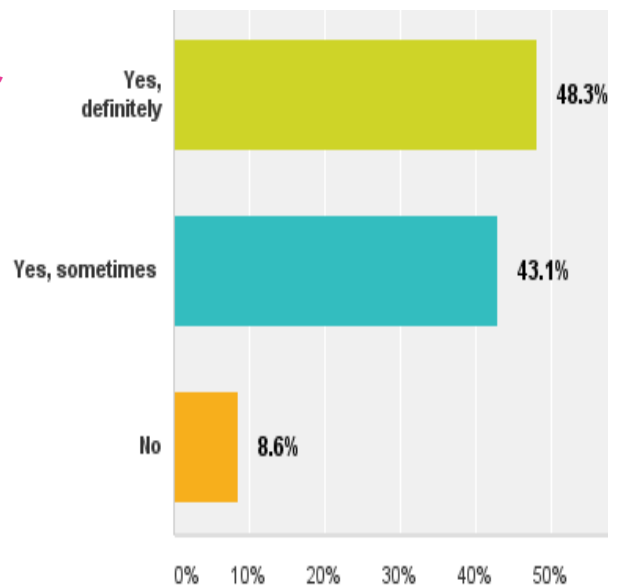


Q3 In the past 12 months, have you had enough support from local organisations to help you to manage your back pain? (Please think about all services and organisations, not just NHS, such as chiropractor or exercise classes?)

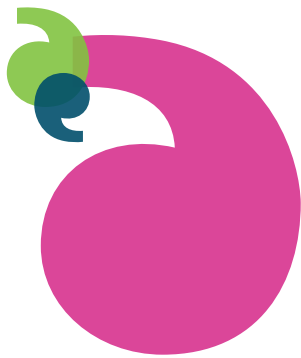


Approximately 60% of people said they had received enough support and 25% said they had not.

Q4 Were you involved as much as you wanted to be in decisions about your care and treatment?

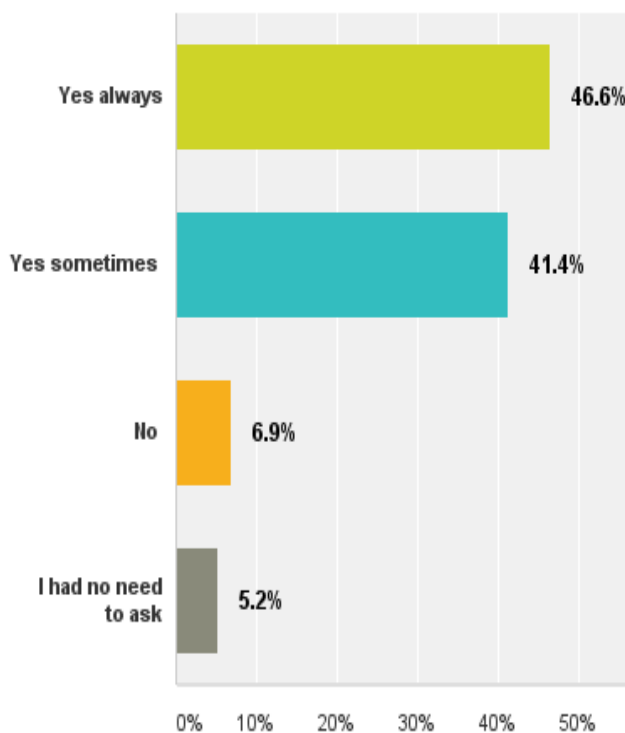


Over 90% of people said they were sometimes or definitely involved in decisions about their care and treatment. Only 5 (8.6%) people said they were not.



SURVEY RESPONSES

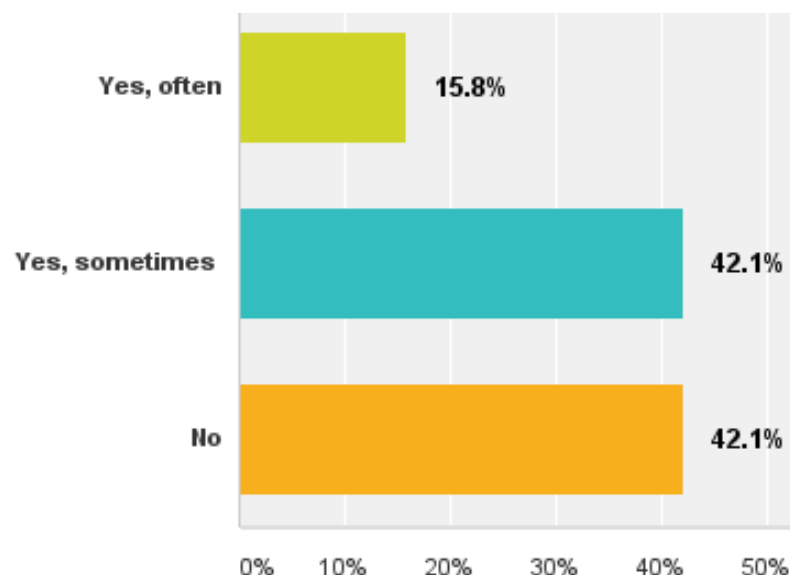
Q5 When you had important questions to ask a health professional about managing your back pain did you get answers you could understand?



Over 87% of responders answered yes sometimes or yes always.

3 (6%) people had no need to ask and 4 (6.9%) said they had not received answers they could understand.

Q6 Sometimes when receiving advice or treatment for a health problem, a member of staff will say one thing and another will say something quite different. Did this happen to you when being treated or advised about your back pain?

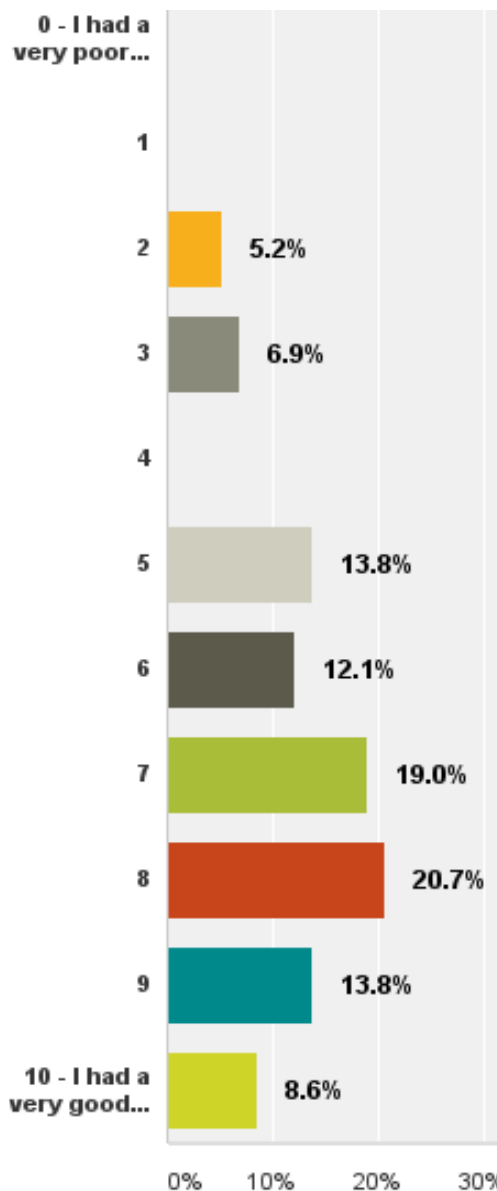


Almost 58% of all responders said this had happened often or sometimes. Approximately 42% of people said it had not happened to them.



Q7 Overall ... (Please circle a number)

0 - I had a very poor experience -
10 - I had a very good experience



Q8 Please write any comments you may have about what is good, or what could be improved in your local NHS service for back pain, in the boxes below.

Respondees were asked in two separate boxes to record what was good about the services and what could be improved. There were 31 responses given in the first box for what is good, although many of them were not actually positive. (We believe most people chose to write their positive or negative feedback in the first box.) There were 21 suggestions in the 'what could be improved' box although many of the initial 31 were suggestions for improvements and some of the comments were completely neutral or stating a wish. We have chosen in this report to record the comments with their true sentiment regardless of which box the comment was placed in.



FACE TO FACE FINDINGS

We received the following comments about what was good about the service.

- ◇ You can get pain relief
- ◇ Appointments available to give help at short notice. Exercise easy to follow
- ◇ Professionalism, high standards, quality care.
- ◇ The referral to the specialist was pretty quick and the transfer from one specialist to another was equally seamless
- ◇ One Life Centre in Middlesbrough are extremely helpful
- ◇ very useful clear information from physiotherapist
- ◇ Only seen GP in the last 5 years - GP is excellent
- ◇ Good source of info
- ◇ It is easy to access
- ◇ They understand about pain, mentally and physical.
- ◇ Greeted in a nice manner. Explained things well to me. Gave good advice.

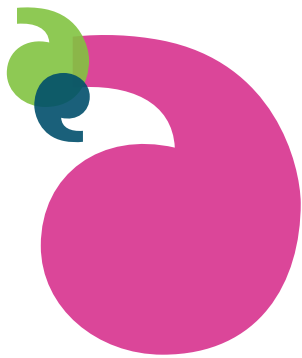
- ◇ I appreciate the various exercise and strategy for strengthening core muscle to protect the back (although wear and tear continues to give me severe discomfort at times)
- ◇ very good and informative
- ◇ My GPs have been or tried to be very understanding
- ◇ Good

We received the following comments about what could be improved about the service.

- ◇ More support for patients and more empathy.
- ◇ Improve - Appointments need to be more readily available
- ◇ Nothing, the referral for the musculoskeletal system was going to take 6 weeks but I was in too much pain to wait so had to go private
- ◇ I have had injections in my back but now doctors are very reluctant to give you these I found the Hydro pool very good but again you can't always get to use it.



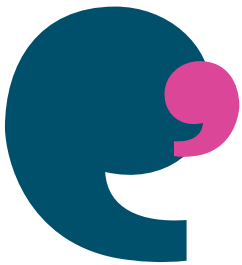
- ◇ I wish there was a way to repair my damage back especially my spine I can't hardly bend my back especially to tie my shoelaces
 - ◇ Sometimes I feel as if x rays and scans are hard to get, sometimes actually I feel I am getting worse but haven't yet asked for more scans to see if I am, but I am afraid to ask my G.P because I know they are so expensive and my G.P has not suggested it. Also I would like to know ways of managing my mobility better e.g. occupational therapy
 - ◇ Only getting 6 weeks of physio not always helpful (having to pay for more treatment) as 6 weeks wasn't long enough! Back pain and sciatica came back and I had to go private to get it sorted again.
 - ◇ I have various reactions one Dr at hospital told my GP he didn't want to see me again, but he didn't tell me. I
- wasn't happy at the last appointment he said he would send for me to go back for the results of tests.
 - ◇ Too long a wait for treatment and to see specialists. This does not help at all. I have pain 24/7
 - ◇ Support from physio/ podiatrist made problem worse
 - ◇ The waiting times for an appointment was always 4 weeks or longer and I was never seen at my allocated time.
 - ◇ The services on the NHS are very poor long waiting times, treatment not consistent or effective. Much easier and effective to go private physio.
 - ◇ The waiting time to be seen can be too long the professionals I have seen have been very good.
 - ◇ I went to GP about back pain. They advised me to fill in a form to get an



SURVEY RESPONSES

- appointment through the NHS but I couldn't wait as I was going on holiday so I went private as it was urgent.
- ◇ 3 months had it, no progress as yet
- ◇ None
- ◇ After 1 year I finally got back surgery with a neuro surgeon, by that time I had nerve damage to my right leg. This happened 15 years ago.
- ◇ Suggestions on what to do if you decide not to go ahead with surgery. Referral to dietician and physio
- ◇ Timescales to see referred physio. Communications between GP and other aspects
- ◇ Pain killers didn't relieve pain
- ◇ Shorter waiting times to avoid pain and time off work.
- ◇ More time given to listen to people and not just think people are pulling the wool over their eyes, severe back pain has a severe effect on your whole well being and can bring on depression. I think there should be a special clinic for sufferers of back pain.
- ◇ I don't know the answers to my damage back
- ◇ More follow up after diagnosis instead of being offered tablets or just having it said that the pain will go and I will just have to live with it. More actual help and support
- ◇ Longer physio treatment being able to return without going through whole process again.
- ◇ Different depts give conflicting advice which compounds the issues.
- ◇ Physiotherapy from NHS was a privately run service which was really badly run and useless senior physio at Darlington rugby club
- ◇ After the first diagnosis I found the after care was poor. I have drop foot and was more or less told I would have to live with it.





- ◇ More constant service. Better trained individuals
- ◇ Length of time in waiting for an appointment
- ◇ Waiting times too long
- ◇ I never ended up asking for an appointment so I dont know but my private physio was great.
- ◇ After doing a course for 5 weeks which helped considerably, there were no comment, questions or follow up from the doctor. It was never mentioned from the time he referred me originally.
- ◇ test/more research/not easy info
- ◇ none
- ◇ explore the root cause of back pain
- ◇ Often my comments on back/neck pain were either ignored or I was just prescribed pain killers. I contacted a chiropractor who diagnosed a tilted pelvis and treated it successfully. I now have neck and shoulder pain. On complaint to Dr. response "Yes it does crack!!!"



Q9 Please give the first four characters of your postcode (the first half e.g DL1)

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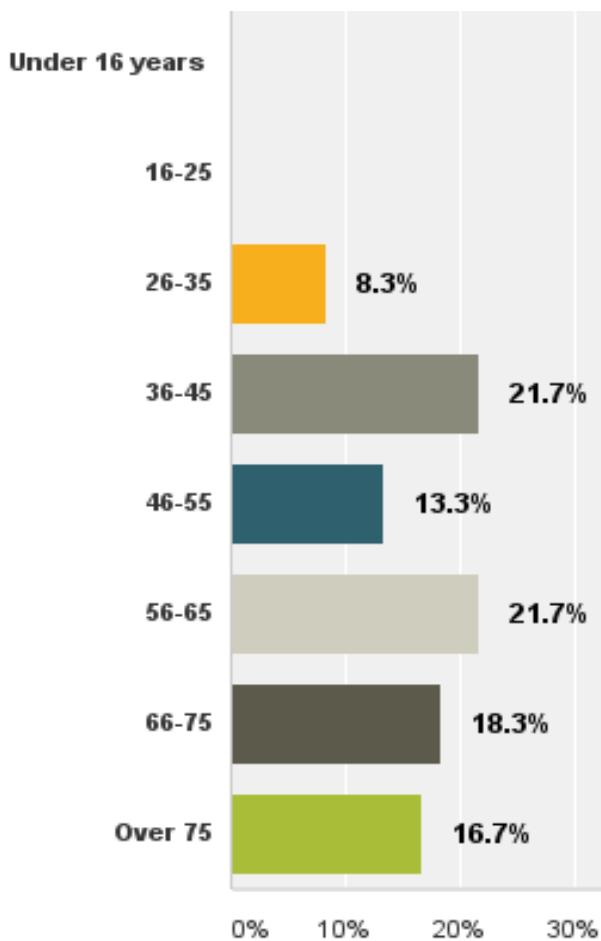
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One person did not answer this question.

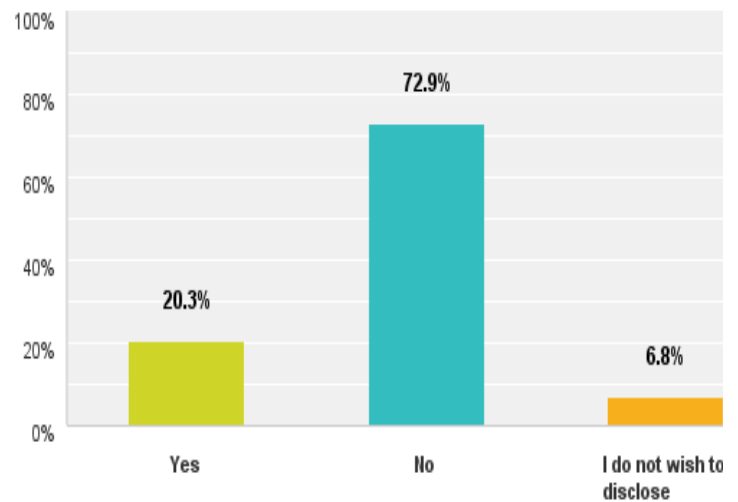
We received 50 responses from Darlington postcodes and 10 from other areas. 6 from Newton Aycliffe (County Durham) and 4 from Teesside.



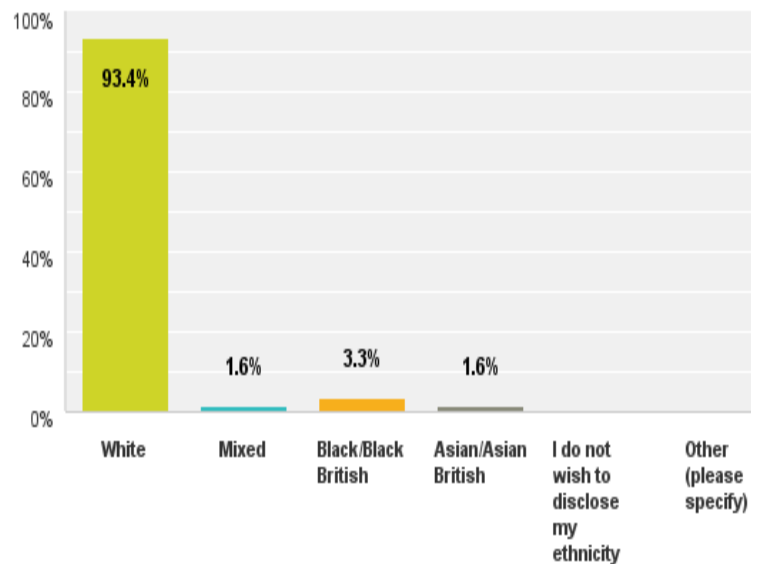
Q10 Age - Please choose which best describes you:



Q11 - do you provide car for someone who is elderly or living with a long-term health condition?

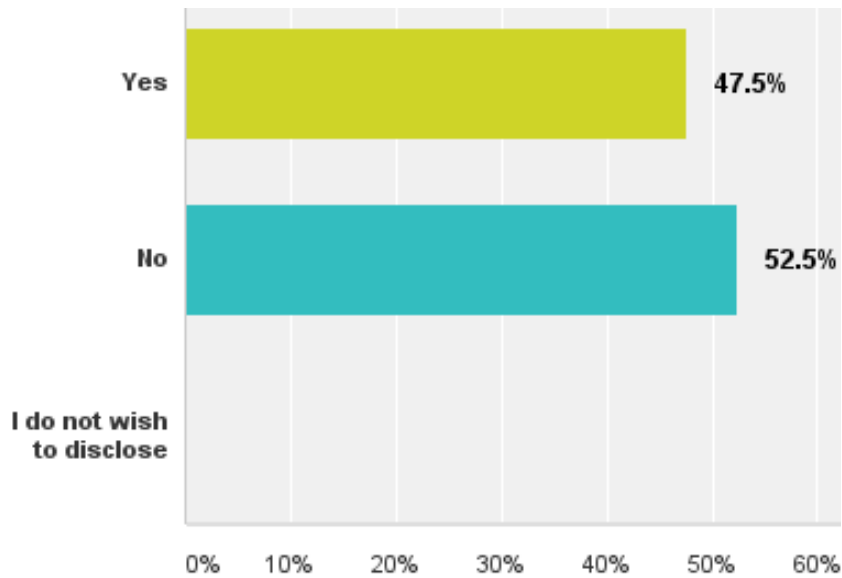


Q12 Ethnicity - please choose which best describes you:

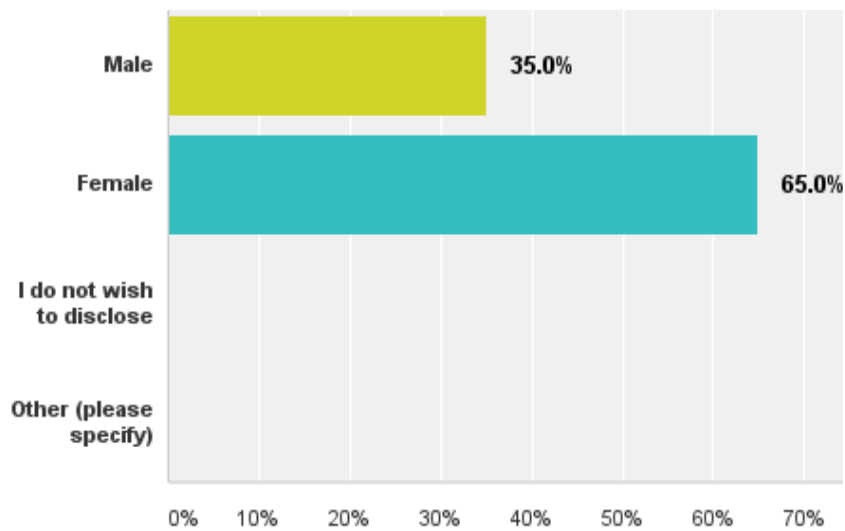




Q13 Disability - do you consider yourself to have a disability or long-term health condition?



Q14 Gender





CONCLUSION

Healthwatch Darlington gathered 60 responses to the back pain survey via online surveys, 3 focus groups and targeted face to face conversations at health care settings. During the focus groups and face to face interviews people gave us information which we then recorded directly onto the surveys to enable all of the information to be recorded. Many of the people we spoke to had suffered with back pain for some time and felt services were good, but had difficulty accessing them.

Targeted demographics:

We gathered 21 responses from Men

We gathered 12 responses from Carers

We gathered 18 responses from potential under 40's
(Difficult to confirm due to age ranges allocated)

We gathered 4 responses from BME residents

There were many good comments about the services but a much greater amount of suggestions for improvement.

Themes for improvement were as follows:



- Waiting times
- Pain management
- Difficulty to access preferred treatments
- The inadequacy of treatment time allocated by NHS services
- Information sharing
- Poor services
- No progress
- Additional damage caused by excess waiting times
- Lack of time to listen by professionals
- Whole person wellbeing
- More alternatives other than medication
- Poor aftercare
- Consistency of service

Healthwatch Darlington have enjoyed completing the back pain patient surveys on behalf of NECS and look forward to being involved in the 'Next Steps' to feedback to the public on what happens next. An emerging consensus seems to be that patients would greatly value some improvements to the services and Healthwatch Darlington will continue to monitor the progress of the Back Pain Programme.

healthwatch

Darlington



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