

Because we all care – GP referrals

A report into patient experiences

Engagement period 21 September – 19 December 2022
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Contents

About Healthwatch	2
Executive Summary	3
Recommendations	7
Context.....	8
What we did.....	9
The people we heard from	10
Were you referred?	12
Differences in referral rates when looking at different groups	12
Experiences of people who were referred.	13
Waiting times to get an appointment with a GP Practice. ...	13
Number of GP appointments before a referral was made..	13
Those who had more than one appointment.	15
Choice, information and advice upon referral.....	24
After referral.....	27
Satisfaction with the process	31
Overall Satisfaction	33
Experiences of people who were not referred	35
Commissioner Response.....	39
Appendix A.....	40
Demographics of respondents.....	40
Appendix B	45
Waits for a GP appointment.....	45

About Healthwatch

Healthwatch Shropshire is your local health and social care champions.

If you use GPs and hospitals, dentists, pharmacies, care homes or other support services in your area, we want to hear about your experiences. We are independent and have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to local feedback and improve standards of care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice. Last year, the Healthwatch network helped nearly a million people like you to have your say and get the support you need.



We work to make your voice count when it comes to shaping and improving services. We use a variety of methods to find out what people like about services, and what could be improved and we share these views with those with the power to make change happen. Our reports go to:

- the organisations who provide services
- the commissioners who pay for services (e.g. Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Board, Shropshire Council)
- service regulators (the Care Quality Commission, NHS England)
- our national body Healthwatch England to let them know how local services are working in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin

We are not experts in health and social care and surveys are just one of the methods we use to put a spotlight on services and ask people to share their views with us.

We are very grateful to all those who took the time to fill out our survey and partners who helped to share it with patients. If you have an experience to share about the issues raised in the report please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Executive Summary

Context

Healthwatch England, the organisation that represents local Healthwatch at a national level, has been hearing about patients struggling to access General Practice and the affect this had on their health when they needed a referral to more specialist care and treatment. We wanted to understand how the residents of Shropshire were being affected. We used a Healthwatch England designed survey to gather information.

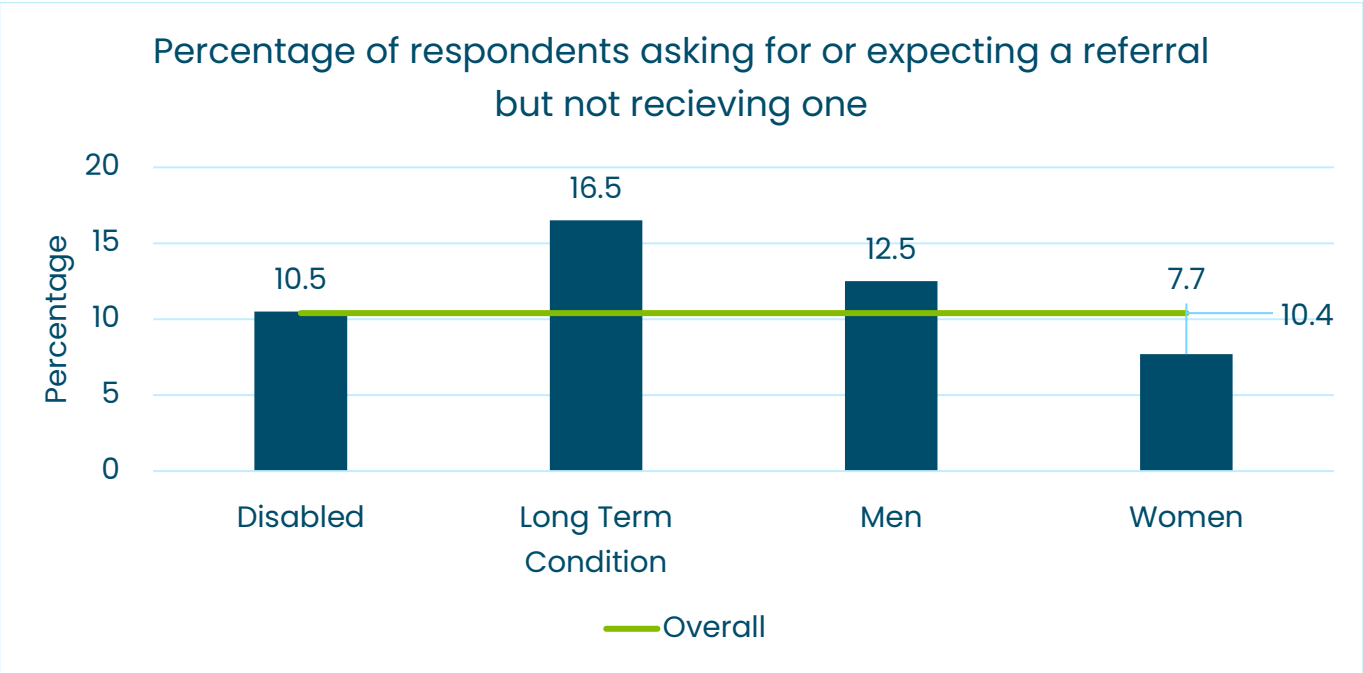
Who we heard from

This report is based on the experiences of 279 people who responded to the survey.

Referral Rates

Overall, 89.6% of people who filled out the survey had received a referral, 10.4% had expected or requested a referral but didn't get it.

The proportions of those who had expected or requested a referral but didn't get one varied when looking at different groups:



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- For those with a disability it was slightly higher at 10.5%
- For those with a long-term condition it was significantly higher at 16.5%
- For men it was higher at 12.5%. For women it was lower at 7.7%

For those who were referred

Number of appointments

We asked about the number of GP appointments before referral:

- 49% told us that they were referred as a result of their first appointment
- 80% were referred after three appointments

We asked the people who had more than one appointment before being referred why they felt they were not referred at a previous appointment.

- The most commonly stated reason was that the GP wished to try other treatment options (40% of those who answered).
- 'I was only given a telephone appointment', was cited by 25% of people.
- Communication issues were raised by 12.5% of people
- 12.5% of people were not given a reason for the lack of a referral at a previous appointment.

Waiting Times

Overall, 35% of people waited less than a month to be told they were being referred after their first GP appointment about their symptoms or condition.

However, this varied significantly between services. For example, 73% of people being referred to cancer services waited less than a month whereas only 17% were referred to mental health services in less than a month.

Alternative courses of action

We asked the people who had more than one appointment before being referred what else they did while trying to get a referral:

- 38% did not do anything else to get medical help however some others did. The most frequently used approach was to search online, 22% did this.

- 13% of people did not pursue their treatment through the NHS but paid for private treatment.

Consequences of the delay in getting referred

The top three consequences were:

- Symptoms got worse, 52%
- Patients' mental health and wellbeing was negatively impacted, 39%.
- Patients suffered on-going pain, 36%

Choice, information and advice upon referral

- Very few people were given any choice around their referral or their ability to make choices:
 - 0.5% given a choice of consultants
 - 2% given a choice of locations
 - 1% given a choice of appointment times
 - 1% given information about their rights and choices
- 38% were given information on why they were being referred
- 28% were given advice on how to manage their condition.
- 27% told us they had not received any information, advice or been offered a choice
- Only 12% of patients were given information of how long they could expect to wait until they would be seen by the service into which they were being referred.
- Only 2 (1%) of patients were made aware of the NHS system for provision of information about planned care referrals, www.myplannedcare.nhs.uk.

Waiting for referral confirmation

- Just over half, 52%, of people heard within a month, 82% within 2 months.
- For 11% of people, the wait was longer which can have a significant impact not only on patient's health but also their emotional well-being

Satisfaction with the process

- 59% of respondents were satisfied with their GP referral process, 24% were dissatisfied.
- This varied from 85% satisfaction rate for those referred for cancer services to 36% for those referred to mental health services.
- For those referred to non-surgical services it was 55% and for surgical services it was 72%

For those who were not referred.

31% had been told by a health professional somewhere other than the GP practice to ask their GP practice for a referral, this included by a psychologist, physiotherapist and a dietician. They all asked their GP for a referral but didn't receive one.

The top three most commonly cited reason for not being referred were:

- 26% felt that their GP didn't consider all of their symptoms.
- 22% felt that they were not taken seriously
- 22% felt that having a telephone appointment was a factor.

Consequences of not getting referred.

The top three most commonly cited consequences of not being referred were:

- 63% felt that their condition/ symptoms got worse
- 54% felt that it negatively impacted on their physical fitness
- 42% felt that it negatively impacted on their mental health and wellbeing.

We asked all those who did something else when they didn't get a referral if they got the medical care they needed as a result:

- 23% told us that they had got the medical care they needed, all paid for private treatment.
- 64% tried to get medical help for their symptoms / condition through another NHS appointment. None of these reported that they got the medical care they needed.

Recommendations

- All patients are made aware of the likely wait time to be seen once the referral has been made and are offered choice in line with the NHS constitution¹.
- Once referred patients are given information and advice to help them manage their conditions / symptoms along with their mental health and wellbeing while waiting for a referral appointment.
- Patients are updated regularly on the progress being made with their referral.
- Clinicians confirm with patients that the patient is happy with the appointment method, in person or remote, and the patient is satisfied that they have been given the opportunity to fully discuss all of their concerns and symptoms.

¹ [NHS Constitution for England – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Context

During 2021 and 2022 the pressures on GP services has been widely reported in local and national media, in particular access to appointments. In 2022 The Kings Fund² summarised the issues³:

‘General practice [in England] delivered 27.5 million appointments in May 2022, with 18 million of these face to face and 12 million on the same day they were booked. However, demand for appointments is outstripping supply, resulting in frustration for patients, unsustainable workload for staff, and inevitably, unmet need.

The issues around access to appointments in general practice are not new but have intensified in recent months. Over time, demand for appointments has increased, while a combination of an increasingly complex caseload, rising thresholds for referral to other parts of the system and an increasing administrative burden have all contributed to growing pressures. This has been exacerbated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic which has increased GP workloads, while the elective [planned hospital treatment] backlog means that general practice is being required to manage more complex needs while unable to unlock access to other services.

Recent analysis suggests that in 2021/22 there was a shortage of around 4,200 GPs in permanent roles, despite the increased numbers of GPs in training.

These pressures are affecting patients’ experience of general practice, with surveys showing a significant decline in patient and public satisfaction with GP services. The most recent GP Patient Survey found that only 56 per cent of respondents reported a good experience of making an appointment, 9 percentage points worse than the 2020 results. Significantly, more than one in four patients said they had avoided making a GP appointment in the past 12 months because they found it too difficult.

² The King’s Fund is an independent charitable organisation working to improve health and care in England

³ [Health and social care in England: tackling the myths | The King’s Fund \(kingsfund.org.uk\)](https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/health-and-social-care-in-england-tackling-the-myths)

Many of the challenges patients face accessing their GP stem from chronic staff shortages. General practice has been facing significant workforce pressures for a number of years. Recent analysis suggests that in 2021/22 there was a shortage of around 4,200 GPs in permanent roles, despite the increased numbers of GPs in training. While the deployment of additional roles brings some further capacity, it is clear that the government's 2019 manifesto pledge to deliver 6,000 more GPs by 2024/25 will not be met. On top of this, fewer GPs are choosing to undertake full-time clinical work in general practice, while large numbers are retiring and leaving the profession – with burnout playing a role in these decisions.'

Healthwatch England, the organisation that represents local Healthwatch at a national level, has been hearing about patients struggling to access General Practice and the affect this had on their health when they needed a referral to more specialist care and treatment. We wanted to understand how the residents of Shropshire were being affected and used a Healthwatch England survey to gather information.

Note: This report looks at the patient experience of being referred or seeking a referral from GP practices into specialist services. We would like to make it clear that we are not in a position to judge, and have not asked patients to judge, the clinical need for the referral.

What we did

We promoted our call to hear about experiences across the NHS and social care services and more widely through media, social media and community contacts, such as patient support groups, local councils and community centres.



The poster features the Healthwatch Shropshire logo at the top right. A white speech bubble on the left contains the text: 'Been referred by your GP for tests or support, but still waiting?' and 'Fill out our survey to share your experience of accessing support through your GP'. To the right of the speech bubble is a red speech bubble with the hashtag '#BecauseWeAllCare'. Below the text, there is an illustration of two people, a man in a purple shirt and a woman in a white shirt with a red ribbon symbol. At the bottom left, there is a QR code and the text: 'Visit: www.healthwatchshropshire.co.uk Or ring us on 01743 237884'.

The people we heard from

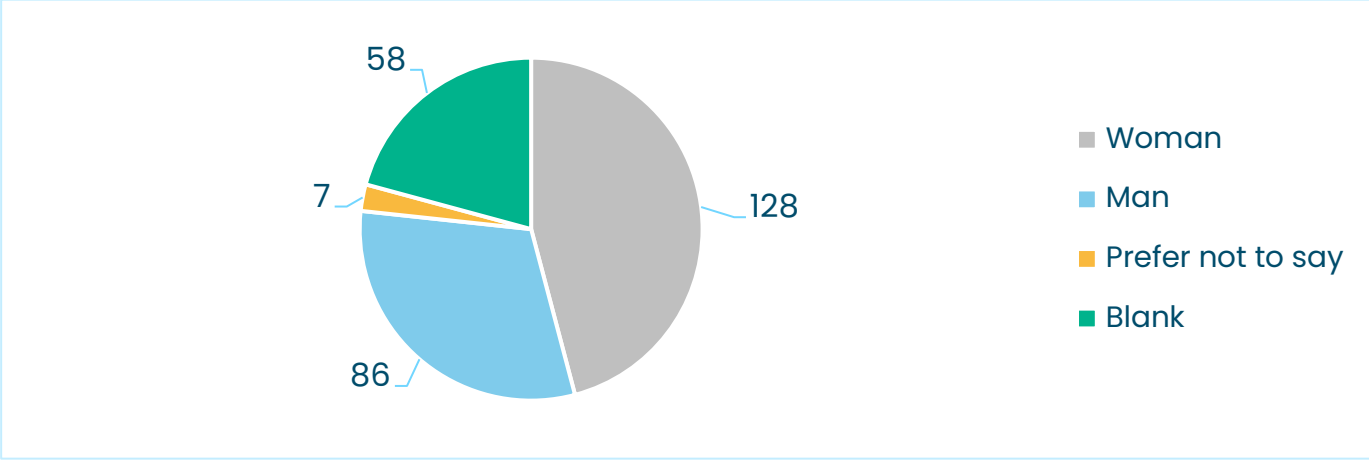
The survey asked for people who, in the last 12 months, have been referred to a specialist for tests, diagnosis or treatment by their GP practice, or expected or requested a referral but didn't get one, to tell us their experience and help the NHS understand what is working and what could be better.

We heard from 369 people:

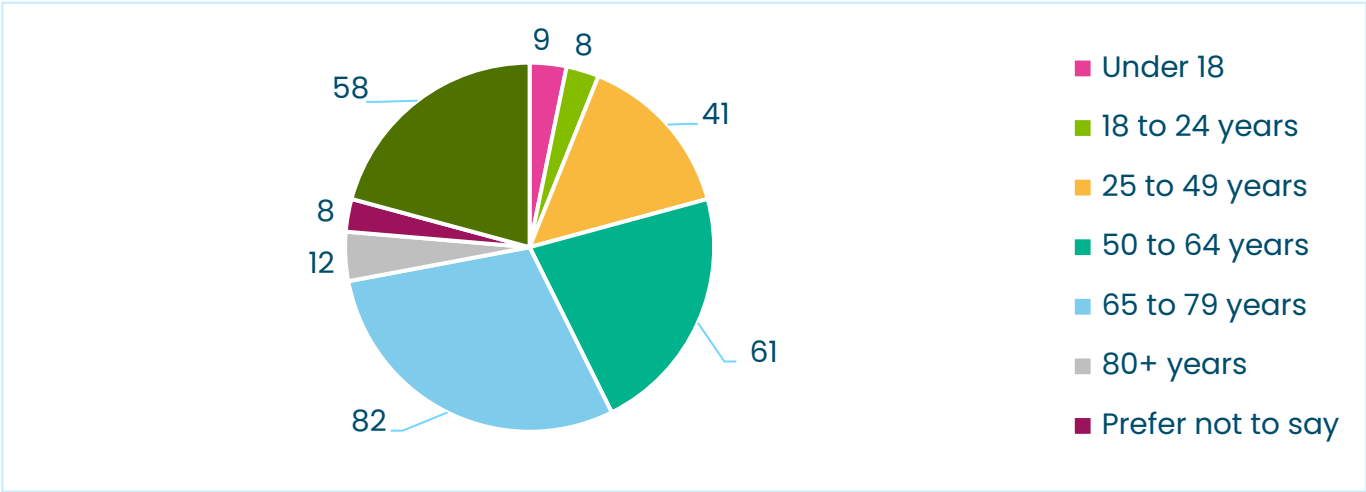
- 279 people told us about their experience, 250 that they had been referred and 29 that they had requested or expected a referral but not received one.
- 13 people told us that they had been referred but did not provide any information about their experience
- 16 people told us they had an appointment with their GP practice, but didn't need, expect or get a referral
- 19 people told us they hadn't had an appointment with their GP practice in the last 12 months because they didn't need one
- 16 people told us they haven't had an appointment with their GP practice in the last 12 months because they can't get an appointment
- 26 described their experience as not fitting any of the above categories.

This report will examine the experiences of the 279 people who were either referred or expected or requested a referral but were not given one.

Gender of those included in the report:

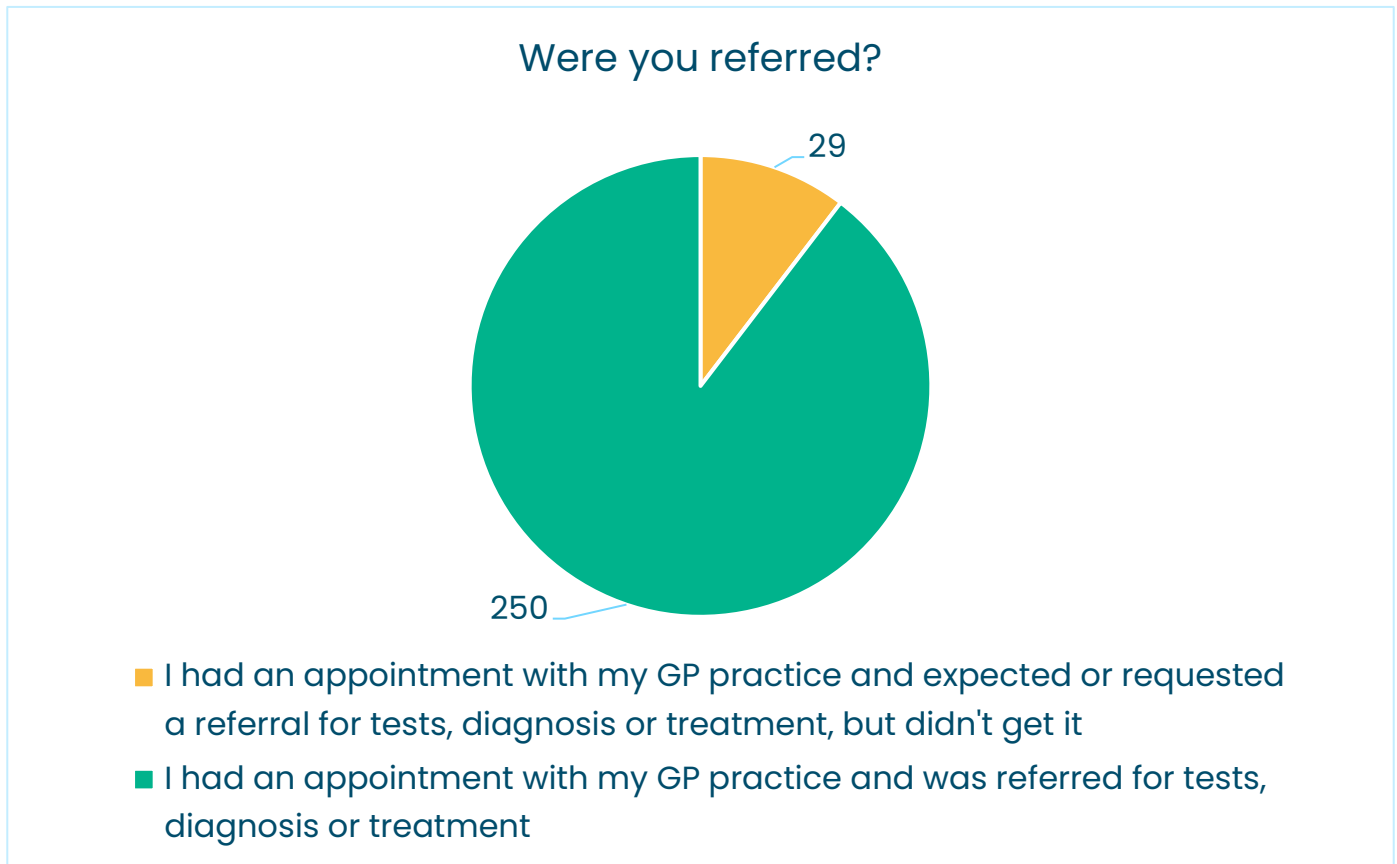


Age of those included in the report:



A full demographic breakdown of respondents is available in Appendix A

Were you referred?



Differences in referral rates when looking at different groups

Overall, 89.6% of people who filled out the survey had received a referral, 10.4% hadn't.

We looked at the answers from different groups to see if there was any variation in the rates of not being given a referral when they expected or requested one.

Disability

For those with a disability it was slightly higher than 10.4% at 10.5%

Long Term Condition

For those with a long-term condition it was significantly higher at 16.5%

Note: the referral may have been sought for symptoms / condition linked to the long-term condition or it may have been for a separate condition.

Gender

For men it was higher at 12.5%. For women it was lower at 7.7%

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Experiences of people who were referred

Waiting times to get an appointment with a GP Practice

This survey did not look at the initial waiting times to get an appointment at a GP practice. Figures for this are published online⁴ by the NHS and showed for a period during this survey, October 2022, that patients seen within a week of requesting an appointment varied across Shropshire practices from 55% to 97%.

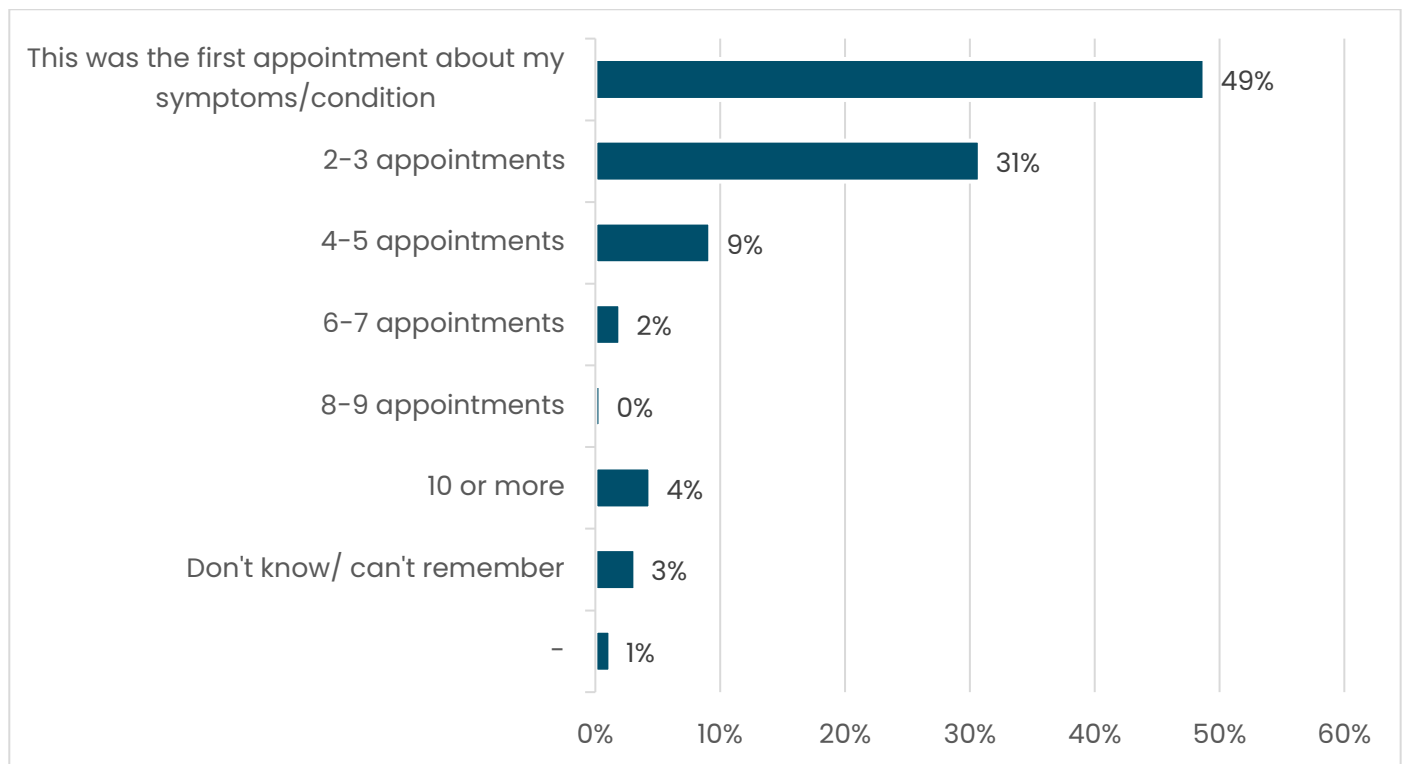
Number of GP appointments before a referral was made

We asked people to tell us how many appointments they had with their GP about the condition or symptoms for which they were referred. This was to try and understand if patients felt that there were other barriers to getting referred, what support they sought during this period and what they saw as the consequences of multiple appointments. It should be noted that this survey was not trying to establish if the number of appointments was clinically appropriate.

[Appointments in General Practice – NHS Digital](#)

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How many appointments did you have with your GP practice about these symptoms or condition? (Please do not count any discussions with admin or reception staff).



Just under half of the people who answered this, 122 (49%), told us that they were referred as a result of their first appointment. 80% were referred after 3 or less appointments.



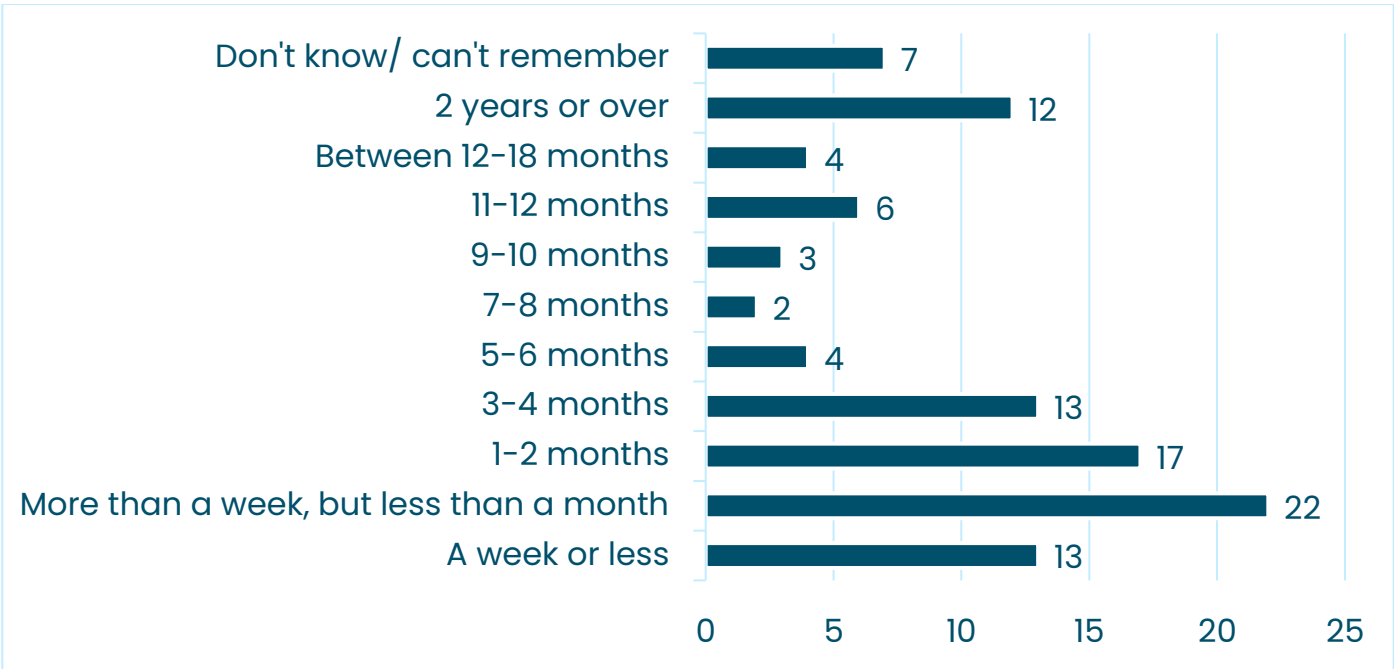
“This part of the process was quicker than expected - it's getting the diagnostic results that takes forever.”



Those who had more than one appointment

How long was it between your first GP practice appointment about your symptoms or condition and being told you were going to be referred?

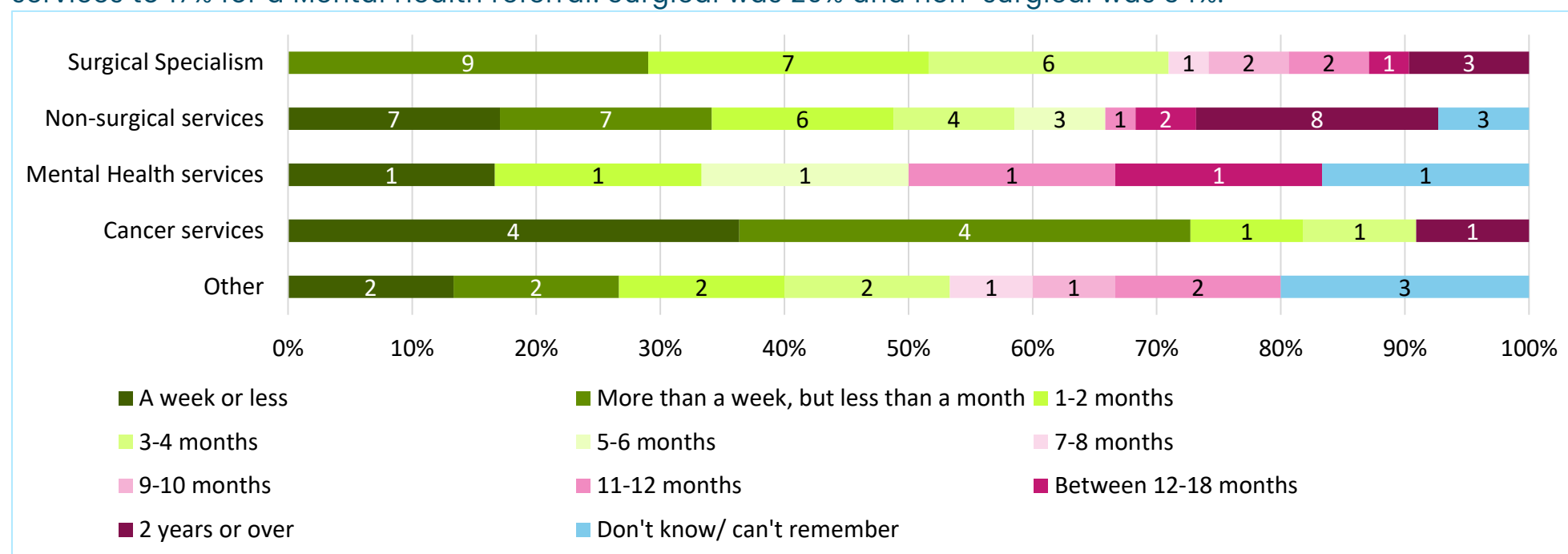
For those who had multiple appointments we asked about the length of time seeking a referral took, 103 people answered:



Breakdown of waiting times for those who had more than one appointment

How long was it between your first GP practice appointment about your symptoms or condition and being told you were going to be referred?

104 people answered this question, those receiving a referral in less than a month varied from 73% for cancer services to 17% for a Mental Health referral. Surgical was 29% and non-surgical was 34%.



More information about maximum waiting times from referral to treatment, including the cancer referral '2 week rule', can be found here [Guide to NHS waiting times in England - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

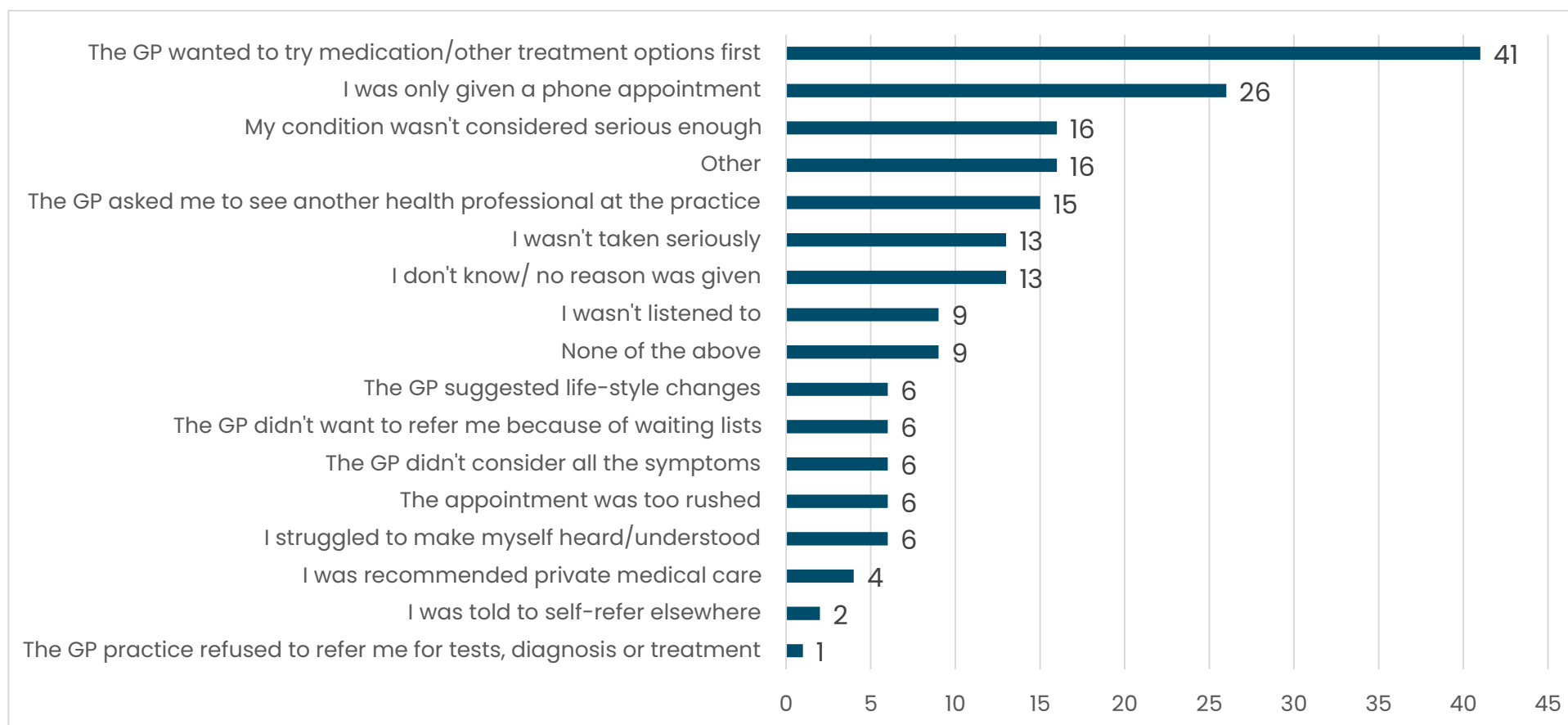


"I wrote earlier about the timeline for the process. [1 – 2 months between referral to confirmation that the referral was accepted] In many ways it may not be seen as a long wait?! But when you are told you have cancer in your nose you want it to be sorted fairly promptly even though this is, it seems, only classed as routine and generally not life threatening in majority of cases. I have chosen to go privately to get my nose cancer dealt with as soon as possible. The matter is now ongoing as I await the biopsy results."



Why were you not referred for your symptoms or condition at previous GP practice appointments? (Tick all that apply)

We asked the 128 people who had more than one appointment before being referred why they felt they were not referred at a previous appointment. 103 people answered.



The most commonly stated reason was that the GP wished to try other treatment options, 41 people (40% of those who answered).

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Communication:

- 13 people (12.5% of those who answered the question) felt they weren't taken seriously.
- 13 people (12.5%) were not given a reason for the lack of a referral at a previous appointment.
- 9 people (9%) felt they weren't listened to
- 6 people (6%) felt that they struggled to make themselves understood

Appointment organisation:

- The most commonly cited reason for not being referred at a previous appointment was the fact that it was a telephone appointment, raised by 26 people (25% of those who answered the question).
- 6 people (6%) felt their appointment was too rushed.



“Once you get to see the doctor the care is fantastic. Phone consultations are not always helpful. A video chat might be better. It's hard to get across your concerns over the phone.”



While trying to get a referral from your GP practice for your symptoms or condition, did you do anything else to get medical help for your symptoms or condition? (Tick all that apply)

We asked the 128 people who had more than one appointment before being referred what else they did while trying to get a referral. 102 people answered.



Just over a third of people, 38 (37%) did not do anything else to get medical help however some others did.

The most frequently used approach was to search online, 22 people (22%) did this.

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For those who tried to get help through the NHS the most common approach was to rearrange to see the GP they originally saw. Others tried approaching different NHS services to get help.



To try to help manage the pressure on local health and care services Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin NHS has launched the 'Think which service?' campaign to help people choose the most appropriate service

Thirteen people (13%), did not pursue their treatment through the NHS but paid for private treatment.



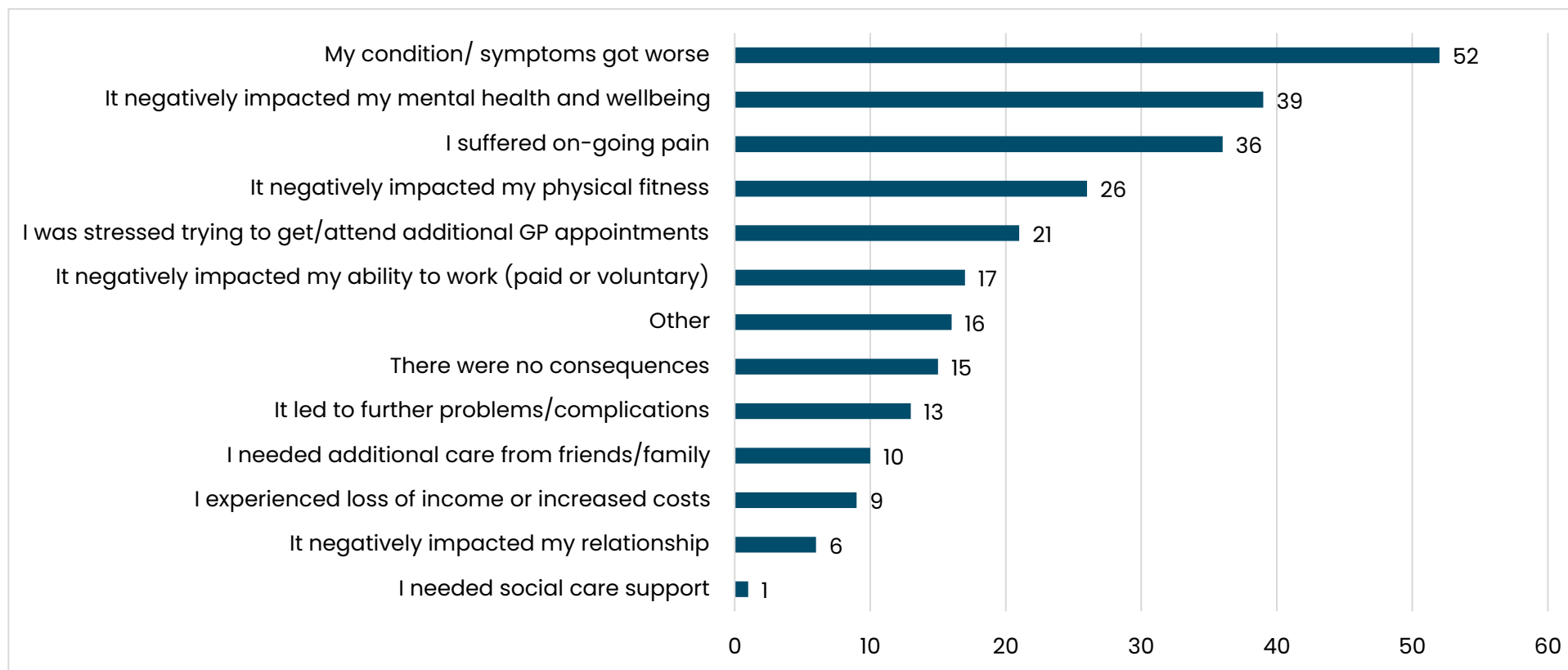
“The problems I experienced were not with getting referred by primary care, my GP seemed happy to refer me when I eventually managed to get a face-to-face appointment with him. The real problem was the time from referral to appointment - the appointment I was given was 18 months in advance of the date I received it and this was cancelled a few weeks later. I was in substantial pain and ended up paying to go privately. I was lucky in that I could afford to pay in this instance.”



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What were the consequences of the delay in getting referred for your symptoms or condition? (Tick all that apply)

We asked the 128 people who had more than one appointment before being referred to tell us about the consequences of the delay in getting a referral. 102 people answered.



The top three consequences were by the 102 respondents to this question:

- Symptoms got worse, 52 people (51%)

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- Patients' mental health and wellbeing was negatively impacted, 39 people (38%)
- Patients suffered on-going pain, 36 people (35%)



"I am still no further than a podiatry appointment. I am in daily pain and have no clue what is happening next. I cannot get through to my GP to make an appointment after weeks of being on hold and giving up."



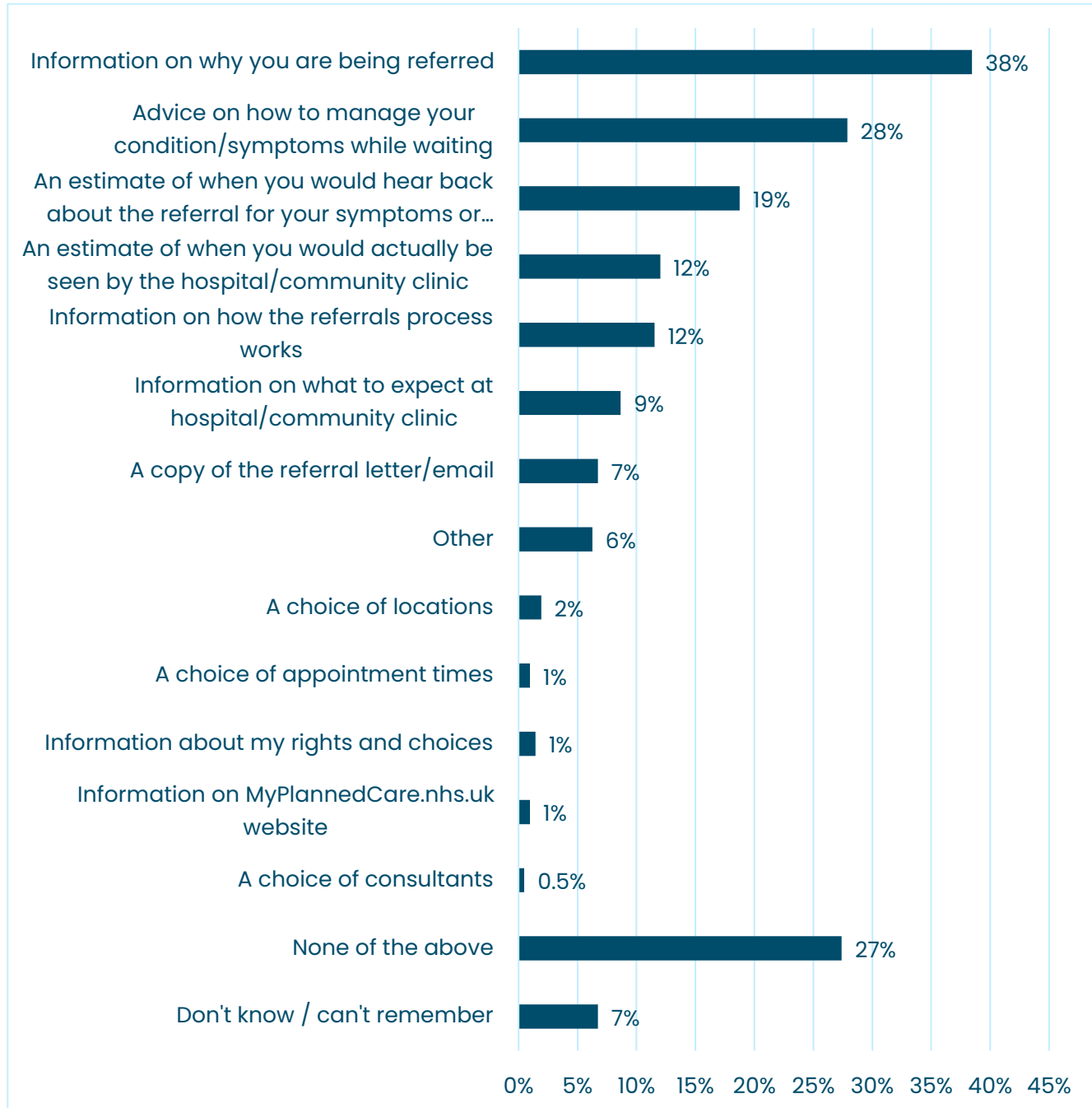
We asked the 128 people who had more than one appointment if they had previously been referred for the same symptoms or condition, 71 (55%) told us that they had, 62 people told us about their reasons for going back to the GP to discuss the issue again.

From those 62 responses the top three reasons for going back to the GP were:

- The symptoms/condition returned/worsened, 37 people (60%)
- I didn't hear anything further about the original referral, 13 people (21%)
- My referral appointment was cancelled, 7 people (11%)

Choice, information and advice upon referral.

When you were referred by your GP practice, were you given any of the following?
(Tick all that apply)



Of the 250 people who were referred 208 people answered this question.

Very few people were given any choice around their referral or given any information about rights and choices:

- 0.5% given a choice of consultants

- 2% given a choice of locations
- 1% given a choice of appointment times
- 1% given information about their rights and choices

Eighty people (38% of those who answered) were given information on why they were being referred with 58 people (28% of those who answered) being given advice on how to manage their condition.



"I am stuck in limbo between my GP and hospital. I have no one who can support me and the symptoms I am experiencing. No one seems to care. I having to manage my symptoms at home and cannot get seen by a neurologist. I haven't been listened to at all. I've been put on epilepsy medication in the meantime. The system is a mess!"



Fifty seven people (27%) told us they had not received any information, advice or choice. One of these people then looked up their referral letter on the Patient Access App.⁵



"I was given no advice at my GP's about what I could do to help myself and their attitude seemed to be that I just had to 'put up with it' (their words)."



Only 12% of patients were given information of how long they could expect to wait until they would be seen by the service they were being referred into.

⁵<https://www.patientaccess.com/>
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- “The process was confusing to say the least. GP did not give me any information on timeframe and I didn't feel reassured that referral even happened.”
- “I wasn't given any indication of how long the wait might be - I don't think the GP knew either.”

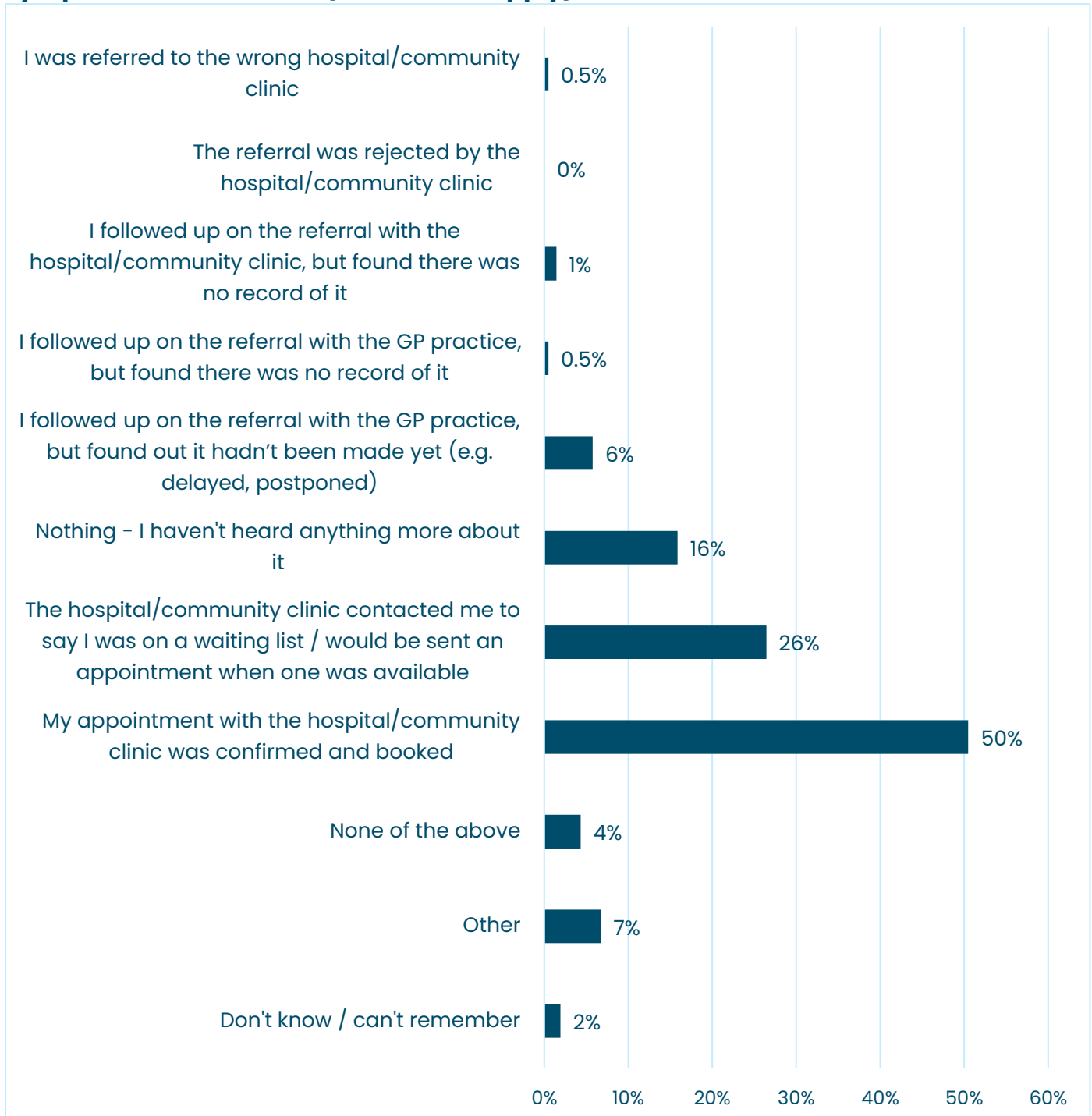
Patients were not made aware of the NHS system for provision of information about planned care referrals, www.myplannedcare.nhs.uk which ‘gives you advice and support while you wait and helps you to prepare for your hospital consultation, treatment, or surgery. This includes giving you information about waiting times at your hospital and other supporting and local services while you wait.’⁶

⁶ www.myplannedcare.nhs.uk

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After referral

What happened after your GP practice said you were being referred for your symptoms or condition? (Tick all that apply)



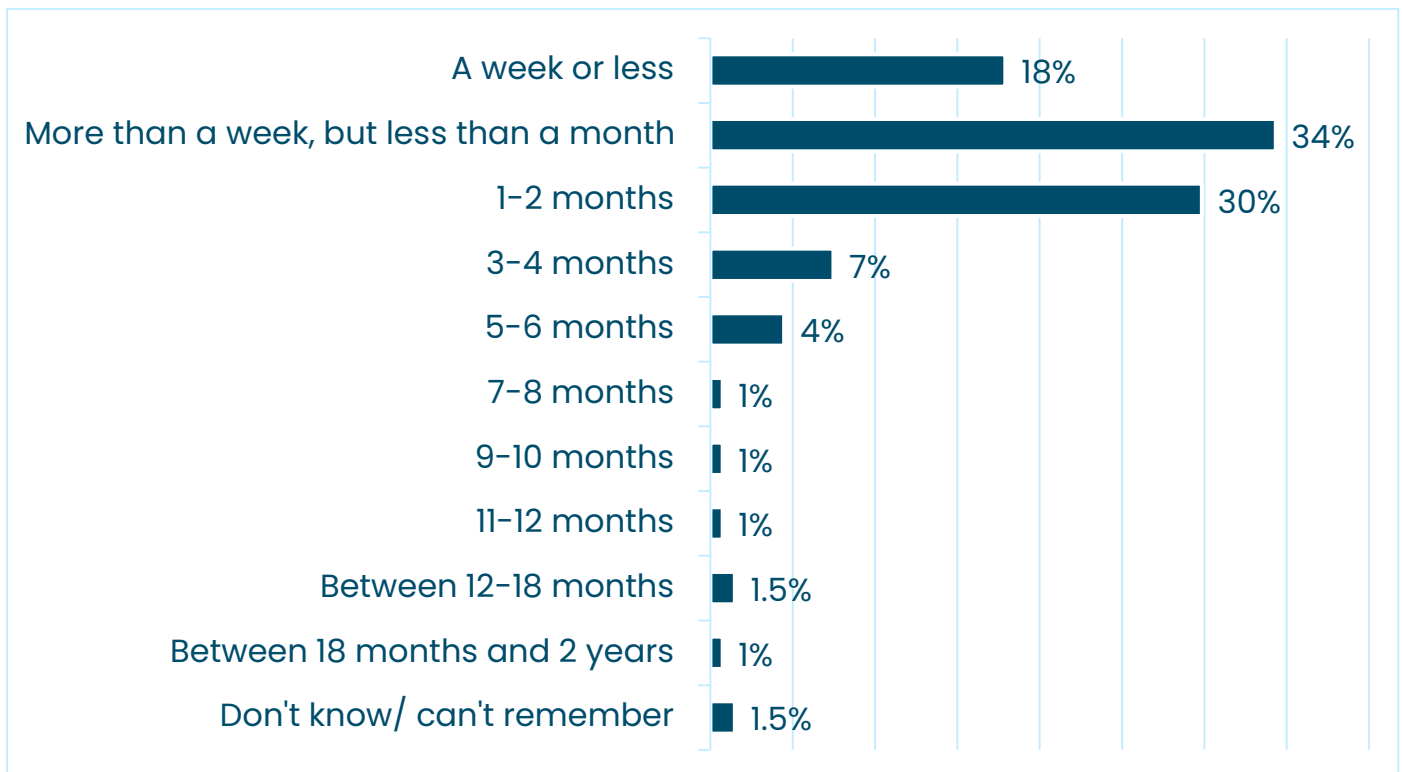
16% of people told us they had heard nothing more, this large number may include some people who would be contacted but had not been at the time of filling out the survey due to the waiting times to get a confirmation of the

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referral, as detailed in the next chart. Nearly a third of people who had been contacted by the hospital or clinic had to wait for 1 – 2 months.

How long did it take between being your GP practice saying that they were referring you, and getting confirmation from the hospital/community clinic that the referral was accepted? (Select one option)

134 people told us about how long it took to get confirmation of the referral.



Just over half, 52%, of people heard within a month, 82% within 2 months.

For some, 11% of people, the wait was longer which can have significant impacts not only on patient’s health but also their emotional well-being.



“I am still waiting to hear if I’ve got an appointment after waiting 9 months and going blind with glaucoma. Glaucoma damage is not reversible so quick intervention is so so important. The terror of going slowly blind and no one doing anything is unforgivable.”



Waiting times for routine treatment in hospitals and clinics after referral.

It is acknowledged that the referral process is only one part of the journey to treatment and at the time of writing the waiting times following referral for routine treatment have increased substantially over the last few years.

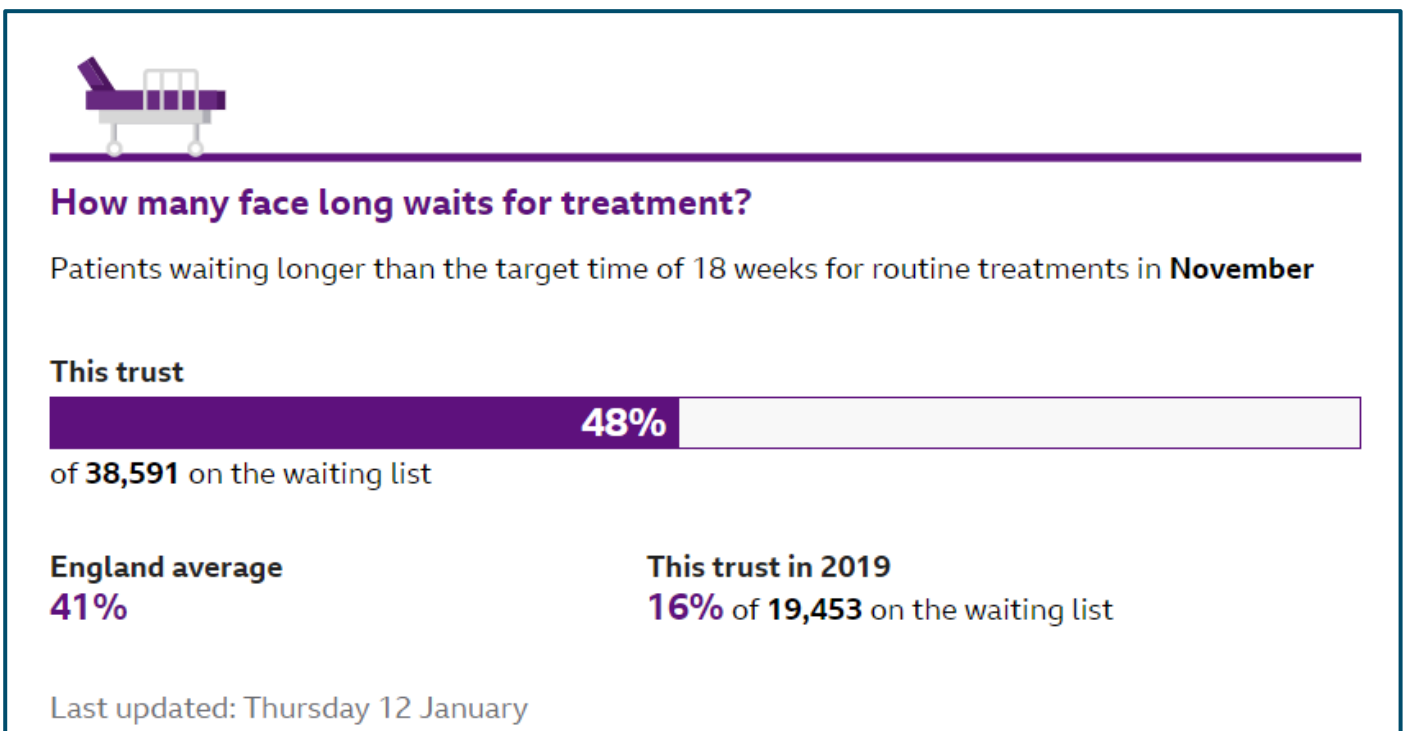


"The appointment I received in July 2022 was for September 2023. I didn't realise this until I arrived at my appointment a year early [September 2022]! I have asked my GP to expedite my appointment as I am struggling with further symptoms since the referral. I was told by the Nurse practitioner that it would be highly unlikely for me to get anything sooner."



This is shown by the waiting times at Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital Trust:

Source: [BBC NHS Tracker](#)



The survey was not looking at waiting times following confirmation of the referral by the hospitals or clinics, however 40 people explained how they were having to wait and how they were being affected.

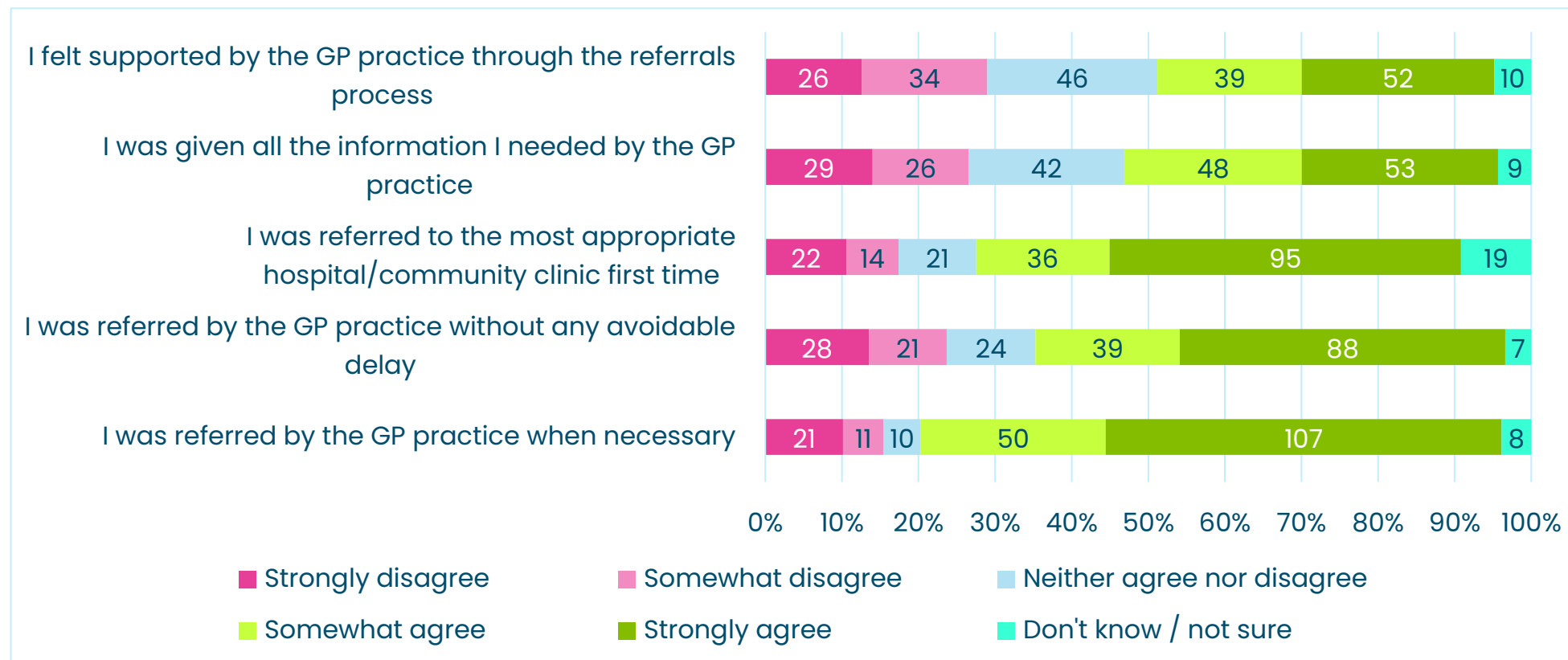
- “Have been told I’m on long wait lists of 2 years for autism and ADHD assessment. There are no updates from either service as to how long the wait will be and only unhelpful answering machine messages when I have called for an update so I’m not sure if I’ll ever get my appointments.”
- “I made the appointment with the GP (could only get a telephone appointment) and was quite insistent on getting a referral and successfully 'argued' my case for a referral - if I hadn't done that I wouldn't have got a referral. I waited 24 weeks for a telephone appointment with a GP specialist in the MSK team - who has sent a letter referring me to one of her colleagues as urgent. I had a copy of that letter which said if you haven't received an appointment in a month phone us - I did. She said waiting time was approx. 12 weeks. Waste of time having a telephone appointment with a GP Specialist.”
- “I was seen by my GP in November 2021 and, after local tests, was referred to Urology within a week. I received an appointment (on a letter dated 24 Dec 2021) for January 2023! When I queried this with the clinic I was told that that was as it was at the time but that they hoped to bring the appointment forward later in the year. Given that we are nearly at November [2022] I have little confidence that will happen and can only hope that it remains in place. I can only hope, also, that the condition is not indicative of something irretrievable.”

Many experiences talked about long waits for diagnostic tests and the subsequent delays in receiving results.

- “The scan was an important part of my neurology referral and the MRI scan delay has meant the neurologist was treating me for a condition based on the symptoms I presented with. As my medication did not work, I may not have what the neurologist was treating me for. The scan should have been done sooner!”
- “This part of the process was quicker than expected - it's getting the diagnostic results that takes forever.”

Satisfaction with the process

207 people told us about their satisfaction with the process.



Support

- 91 people (44%) agreed that they were supported by their GP, 60 people (30%) felt they were not.
 - “[At] every stage and everyone I saw from the GP to leaving hospital were compassionate, helpful, efficient and knowledgeable. I felt supported throughout, during for me, a disorienting day/ time. Thank you”

Information

- 102 people (49%) agreed that they were given all the information they needed by their GP, 55 people (27%) felt they were not.
 - “The process was confusing to say the least. GP did not give me any information on timeframe and I didn't feel reassured that referral even happened.”

Appropriate referral

- 131 people (63%) agreed that they were referred to the most appropriate service first time, 36 people (17%) felt they were not.
 - “It's a terrible system, it based around administrative needs and managing resources rather than the patient's care. GPs will not refer you unless you ask. My condition is very complex and I have ended up being shunted around different departments and at each stage of the process I've been discharged from one department only to have to go through the whole referral system from scratch with a new department. Four years after falling ill I'm now being referred to the original department I was referred to at the beginning. There needs to be a mechanism in the system that allows cross-department referrals and someone taking overall responsibility for a patient's care where it involves more than one department. Trying to get an appointment for Neurology in Shropshire is impossible.”

Delay in referral

- 127 people (61%) agreed that they were referred without any avoidable delay, 49 people (24%) felt they were not.
 - “I was extremely pleased with the whole process - it was less than 7 days from when I visited the GP to having the required treatment. The

hospital appointment department contacted me the day after GP appointment but I was not available, they then contacted me the next day and appointment was made within less than two days from GP visit. Overall this was very quick and commendable.”

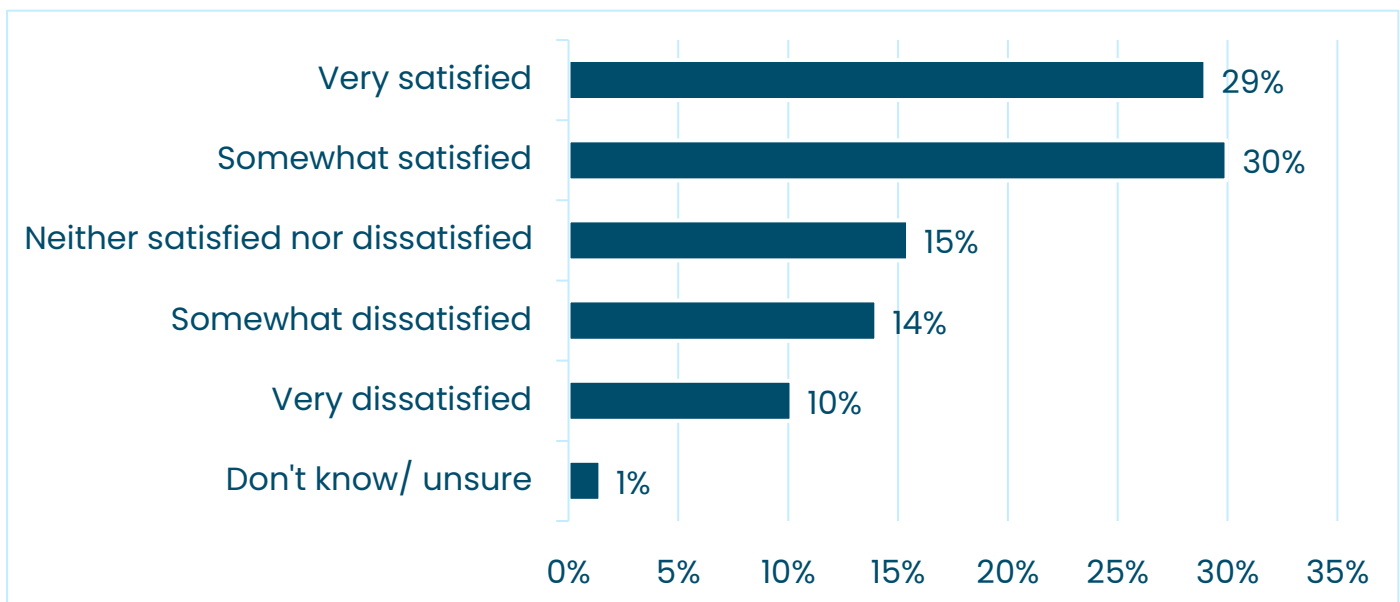
Necessity of referral

- 157 people (76%) agreed that they were referred when necessary by their GP, 32 people (15%) felt they were not.

🟢 “My GP has done all she can and I am waiting for my appointment.”

Overall Satisfaction

How satisfied were you with GP referrals process?



59% of people were satisfied with their GP referral process, 24% were dissatisfied.

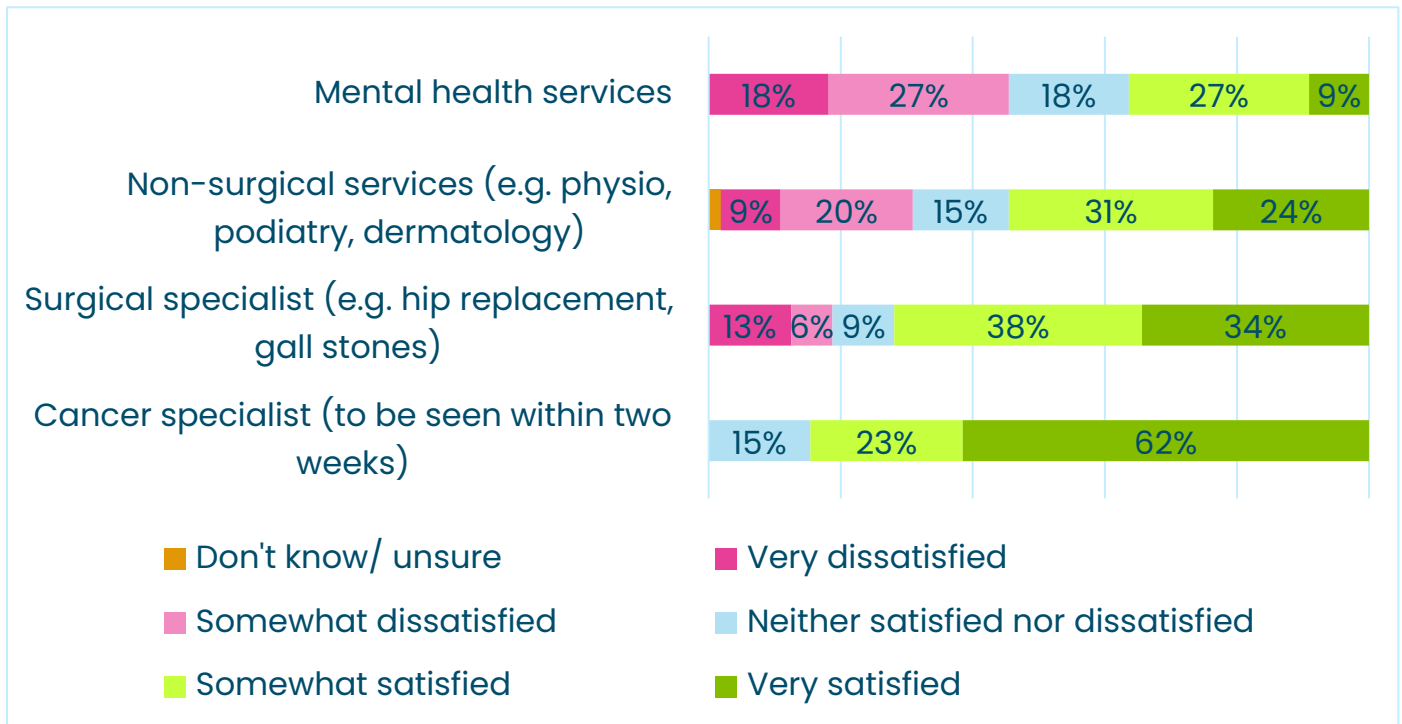


“The GP was very efficient and I was surprised to be contacted and offered an appointment for my daughter to see the fracture clinic so quickly (within a week).”



Satisfaction by type of referral

Satisfaction with the GP referral process varied between the types of referrals



people needed.



“I was extremely pleased with the whole process – it was less than 7 days from when I visited the GP to having the required treatment. The hospital appointment department contacted me the day after the GP appointment but I was not available, they then contacted me the next day and an appointment was made within less than two days from GP visit. Overall, this was very quick and commendable.” Patient referred to a cancer specialist.



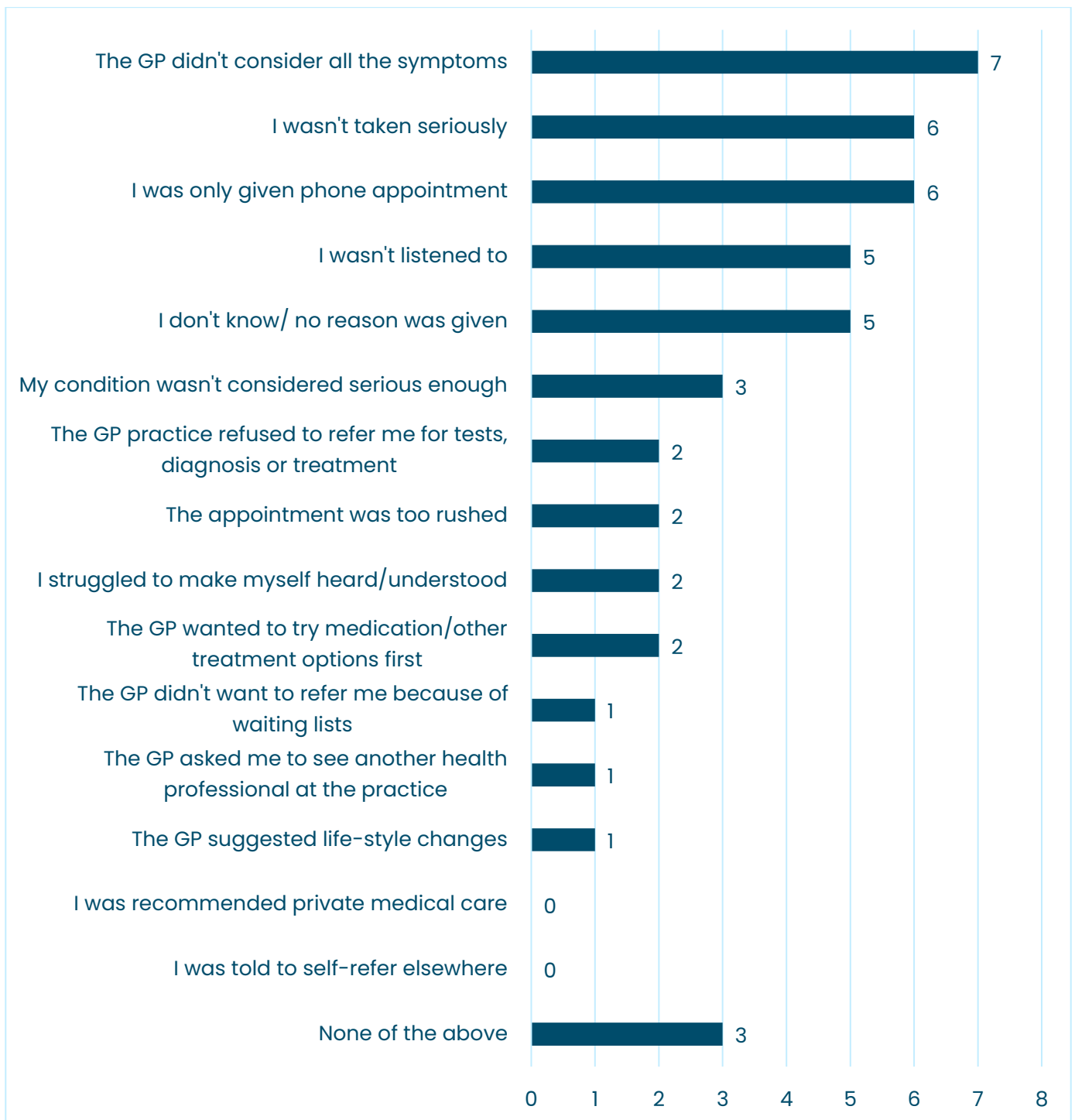
Experiences of people who were not referred

Twenty nine people told us that they had an appointment with their GP and expected or requested a referral for tests, diagnosis or treatment, but didn't get it, 18 people asked for a referral (62%) and 9 people didn't ask but expected a referral (31%).

Nine of these people (31%) had been told by a health professional somewhere other than the GP practice to ask their GP practice for a referral, this included by a psychologist, physiotherapist and a dietician. They all asked their GP for a referral but didn't receive one.

Why were you not referred for your symptoms or condition?

We asked people to tell us why they were not referred, 27 people answered and gave a number of reasons:



The top three reasons for not being referred were:

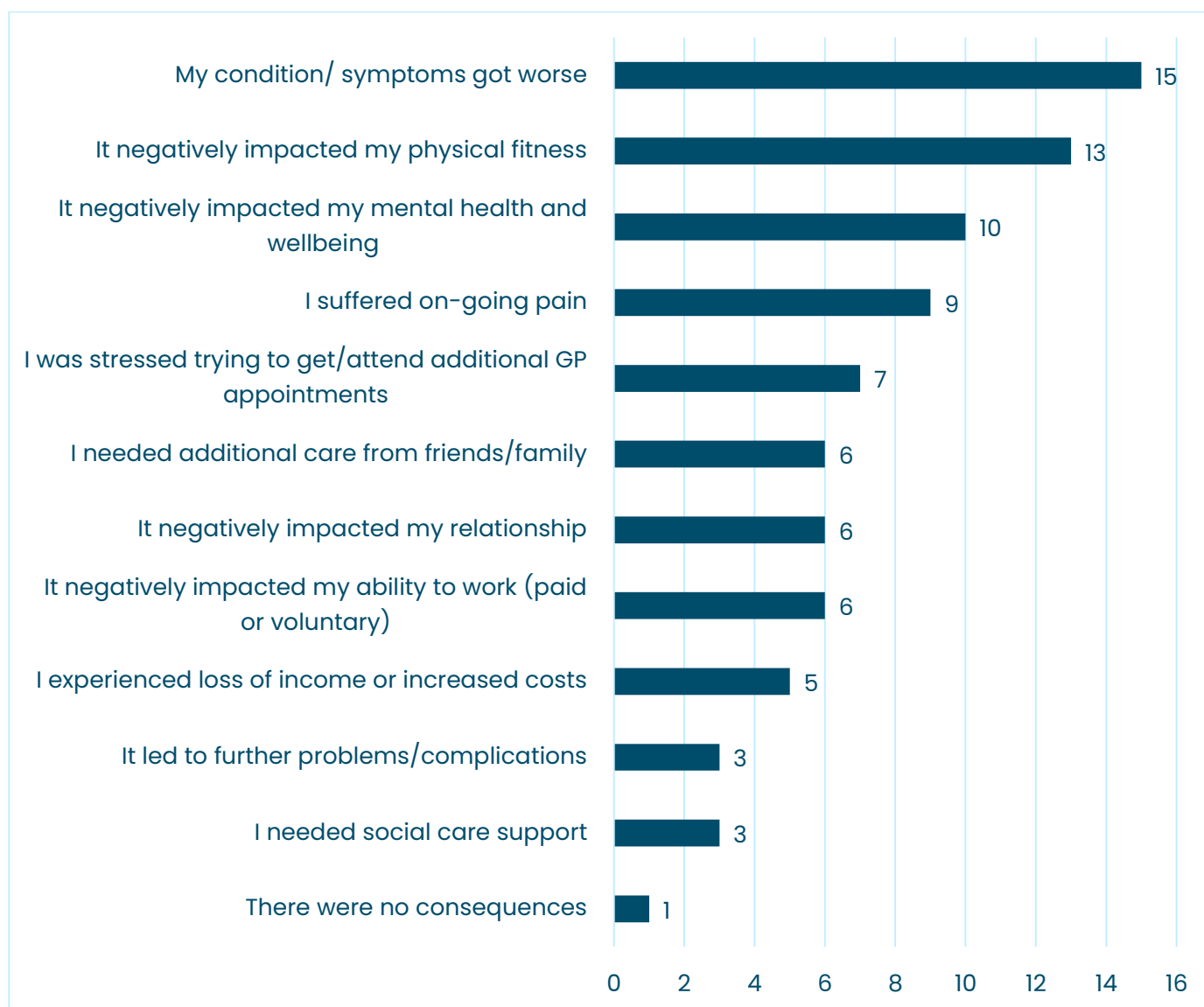
- 7 people (26% of those who answered) felt that their GP didn't consider all of their symptoms.
- 6 people (22% of those who answered) felt that they were not taken seriously

- 6 people (22% of those who answered) felt that having a telephone appointment was a factor.

Only 2 people (7%) felt they that they had not received the referral they were looking for because they had been unable to make themselves understood.

What were the consequences of not getting a referral for your symptoms or condition?

We asked people to tell us about the consequences of not being referred, 24 people answered and gave a number of reasons:



The top three consequences of not being referred were:

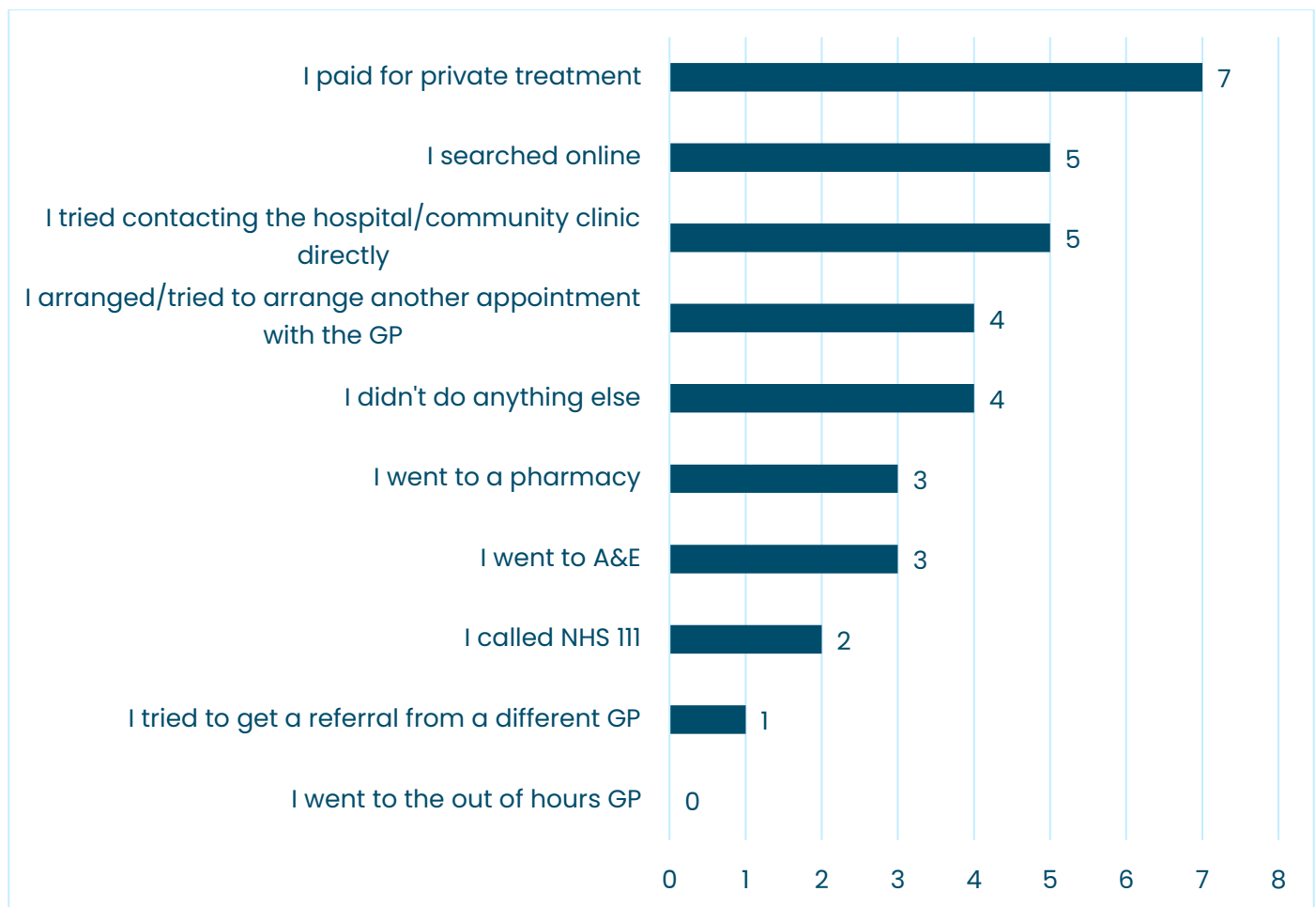
- 15 people (63% of those who answered) felt that their condition/ symptoms got worse

- 13 people (54% of those who answered) felt that it negatively impacted their physical fitness
- 10 people (42% of those who answered) felt that it negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing.

Only 1 person (4% of those who answered) felt that there had been no consequences.

While trying to get a referral from your GP practice for your symptoms or condition, did you do anything else to get medical help for your symptoms or condition?

22 people out of the 29 who told us they didn't get a referral told us they had done something else, 4 people didn't do anything else and 3 didn't answer.



We asked all those who did something else when they didn't get a referral if they got the medical care they needed as a result:

- 5 people (23% of those who answered) of the 22 people who told us they had done something else told us that they had got the medical care they needed, all 5 paid for private treatment.
- 14 people (64% of those who answered) tried to get medical help for their symptoms / condition through another NHS appointment. None of these reported that they got the medical care they needed.

Commissioner Response

Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin (STW) NHS

STW NHS accept the recommendations in the report, but there is a need to recognise the demand on GP services and the time available for an appointment- clinically it's not always necessary to refer immediately and we do need to understand what referral means as it is not always to a secondary care consultant. However, better information should be given to the patient The new recovery plan for primary care access published in May 2023 will look at many of the issues around access that have been raised in this report, including expanding the role of community pharmacy.

STW NHS would like to work with Healthwatch Shropshire to understand the detail behind the apparent delays in Mental Health referrals and also the cohort of patients that were expecting a referral from another professional which never came, as it would be helpful understand the barriers within these cases. STW NHS want to ensure people get access at the right time, in a timely way and any referrals or no referral are communicated appropriately. A range of actions will be developed with the new recovery plan to address the issues raised.

Appendix A

Demographics of respondents

Age	Number
Under 18	9
18 to 24 years	8
25 to 49 years	41
50 to 64 years	61
65 to 79 years	82
80+ years	12
Prefer not to say	8
Blank	58
Total	279

Gender	Number
Woman	128
Man	86
Prefer not to say	7
Blank	58
Total	279

Is your gender identity the same as your sex recorded at birth?	Number
Yes	211
No	0
Prefer not to say	9
Blank	59
Total	279

What is your sexual orientation?	Number
Asexual	7
Bisexual	2
Gay man	1
Heterosexual / Straight	182
Not known	7
Pansexual	1
Prefer not to say	18
Blank	61
Total	279

Ethnicity	Number
Asian / Asian British: Any other Asian / Asian British background	2
Asian / Asian British: Indian	1

White: Any other White background	16
White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh	181
White: Irish	4
Prefer not to say	13
Blank	62
Total	279

Do you have a disability?	Number
Yes	37
No	242
Total	279

Do you have a long-term condition?	Number
Yes	71
No	208
Total	279

Are you a carer?	Number
Yes	16
No	263
Total	279

I am neurodivergent (Autistic, ADHD/ADD, Dyslexic, Tourette's etc.)?	Number
Yes	7
No	272
Total	279

What is the highest level of education that you have completed?	Number
Postgraduate (2nd or further degree)	46
University (1st degree)	51
Post-secondary vocational/ technical	31
A-levels, high school or equivalent	26
Secondary (left school before/at 16)	26
None	4
Not known	5
Prefer not to say	29
Blank	61
Total	279

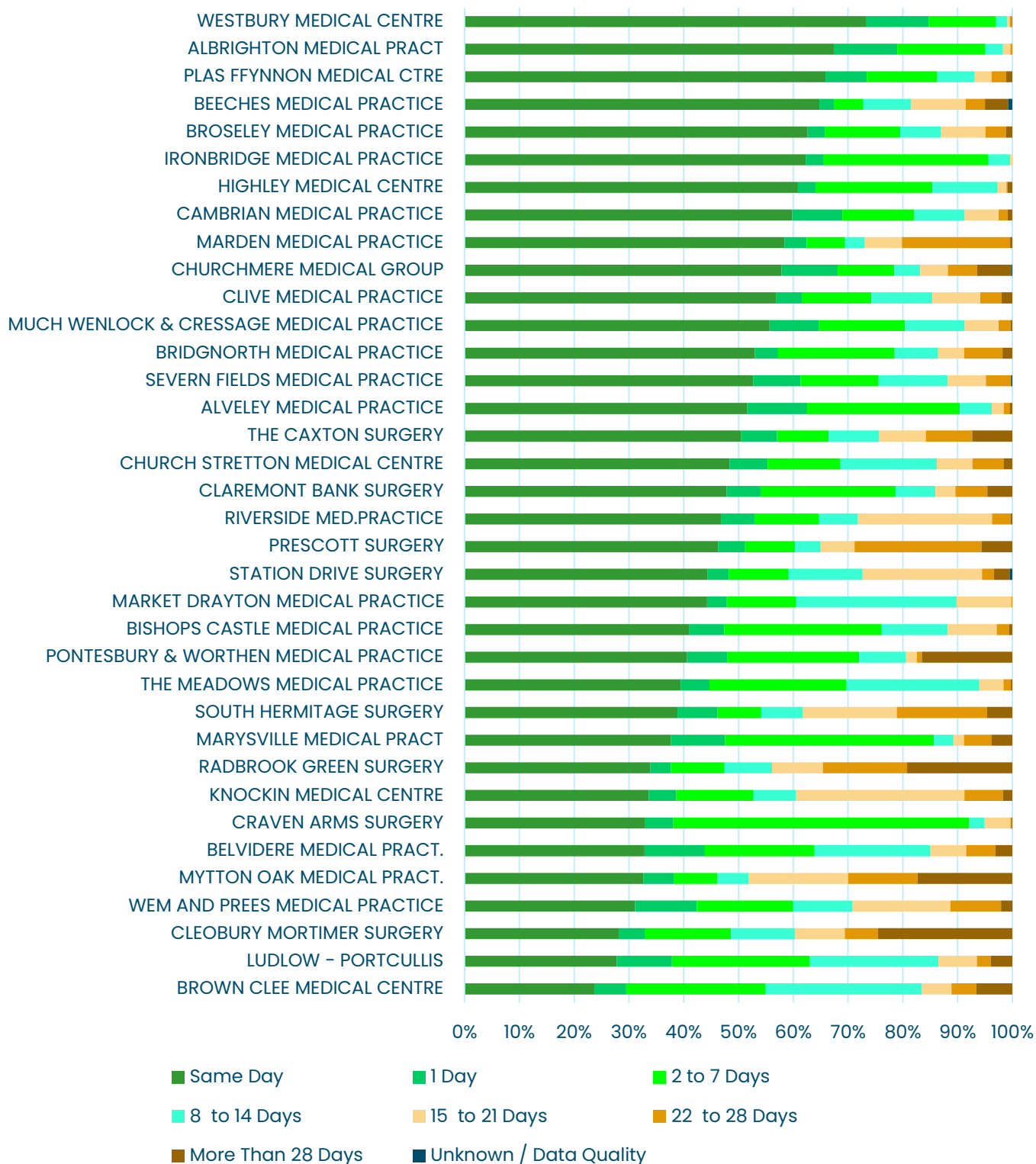
Financial status	Number
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Really struggling (I don't have enough money for living expenses and sometimes run out of money)	13
Just getting by (I have just enough money for living expenses and little else)	50
Quite comfortable (I have enough money for living expenses, and a little spare to save or spend on extras or leisure)	90
Very comfortable (I have more than enough money for living expenses, and a lot spare to save or spend on extras or leisure)	34
Not known	3
Prefer not to say	28
Blank	61
Total	279

Appendix B

Waits for a GP appointment

Waits for a GP appointment - October 2022 appointments



Because we all care, GP referrals



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