

NHS England Patient Registration Confirmation Exercise

(Relating to Primary Care Services - GP Practices)

Snapshot Report October 2015



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Foreword:

Healthwatch gives people a powerful voice locally and nationally. At a local level, Healthwatch Swindon work to help local people get the best out of health and social care services. Whether it is improving them today or helping to shape them for tomorrow. Healthwatch is about voices being able to influence the delivery and design of local services.

Introduction:

Access to primary care services including GPs, dentists and opticians is the public's number one health concern, according to local Healthwatch organisations around the country. [Source: A Healthwatch England Report – Published March 2015 \(Local Healthwatch Investigate: Access to Primary Care\)](#).

Between July and August 2015, Healthwatch Swindon heard from local people who had been affected by different experiences relating to the NHS England patient registration confirmation exercise, which seemed to result in some patients being removed from their GP Practice patient list ([Appendix 2](#)).

During 2015, NHS England South (South Central) wrote to patients across Bath, Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire asking them to confirm the contact details held on the GP practice database is correct.

The criteria of patient groups written to were those known to have a higher chance of moving house which are;

- Students who have been registered with their GP more than four years
- People who have moved to England and have been registered with a GP for more than 24 months.
- People who have not responded to calls or recalls
- Men aged 25 to 55 years old because they tend to have less frequent contact with their GP and as a result their contact details may be out of date too

NHS England conducted this exercise using a template letter which can be seen in [Appendix 1](#) of this report.

This report documents and reviews the experiences and concerns people have raised with Healthwatch Swindon regarding the exercise undertaken by NHS England and identifies key considerations for future exercises.

How did Healthwatch Swindon become aware of the letter and exercise?

Healthwatch Swindon was first made aware of this NHS England exercise when the following article was published about The Whalebridge Practice on the Swindon Advertiser website;

http://www.swindonadvertiser.co.uk/news/13363783.Doctors_database_threat_to_patients/

We publicised the story in order to help raise awareness of the exercise and circulated it through our website and social media platforms (including Facebook and Twitter).

Healthwatch Swindon contacted The Whalebridge Practice and asked for a copy of the letter and information regarding it, as Healthwatch Swindon had not received any notification or information about this exercise in advance of it commencing.

A part of Healthwatch Swindon's role is to provide information and raise awareness of matters that affect local people in respect of health and social care. Therefore we circulated the information about the letter as widely as possible in order to see if anybody had been affected and raise awareness of the matter to local people, commissioners and providers of Learning Disability and other services. It was also circulated within Swindon Advice and Support Centre which resulted in Healthwatch Swindon being alerted to two situations where the letter had been received by two people outside of the target groups.

Feedback from other sources includes; we raised awareness of this matter at the Autism Partnership Board and the feedback received was that no-one present had any awareness of the letter. However, after the event an attendant with autism confirmed that they had subsequently received the letter and was thankful to have been made aware of it.

Healthwatch Swindon also received contact through Twitter regarding the letter being received by a patient, although they were not in the target group.

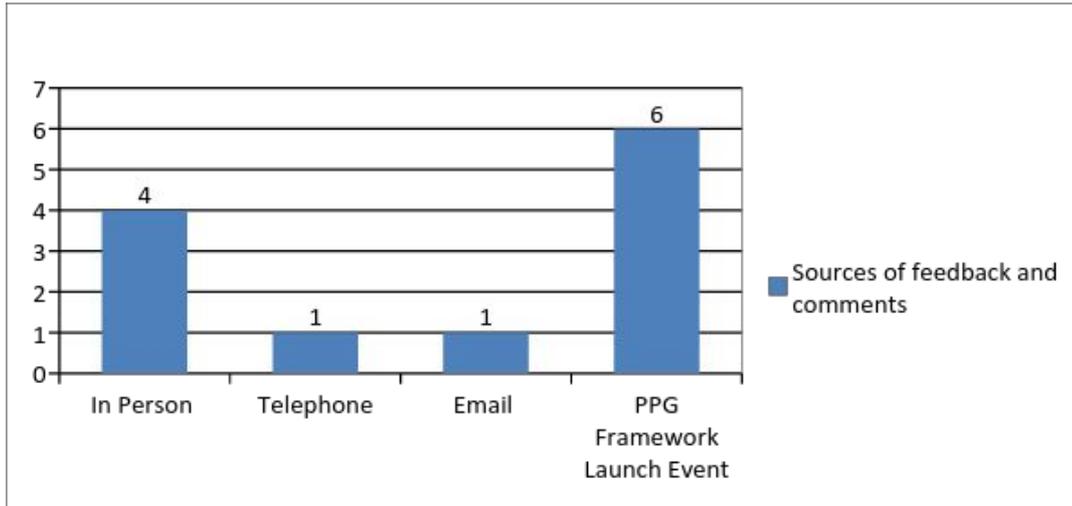
A patient came into the Healthwatch Swindon office to provide feedback about being removed from the list at Homeground Surgery. They found out that they had been removed from the GP list and was told that the reason was because they had not responded to a letter from NHS England. The patient confirmed that they had not received a letter.

Healthwatch Swindon received a message that alleges Homeground Surgery had 60 people who had been affected by the exercise.

We received a telephone call from a relative of a patient who had been removed from the list at Carfax Medical Centre. They contacted the surgery to change an appointment and were told that they were no longer on the list. They did not receive a letter about re-registering. The surgery said that the letter had been returned with a message to say that the property was unoccupied.

Sources of feedback and comments:

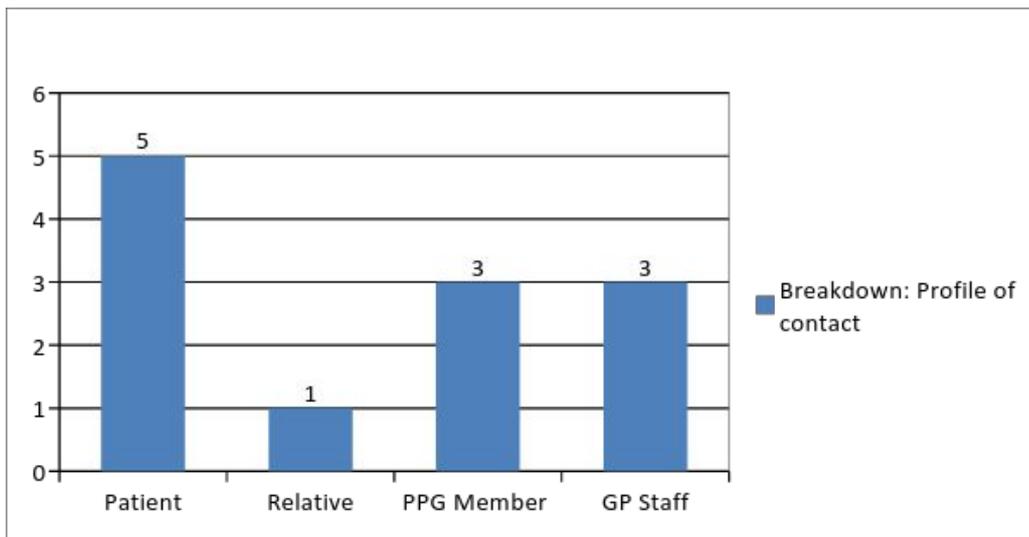
Healthwatch Swindon received feedback and comments regarding the NHS England exercise by the following sources:



Breakdown by profile of the people who contacted Healthwatch Swindon:

Healthwatch Swindon received feedback and comments from people ranging from patients and PPG members to GP practice staff.

Here is the breakdown by profile of the contacts received:



What feedback and comments did Healthwatch Swindon receive?

"Monday 22 June went to Homeground surgery saw Dr Godfrey.

Monday 29 June went to pharmacy for repeat prescription as he had done previously. Also put in order for his wife. Pharmacy brought up his details on screen. "Will be ready on Thursday". Went to collect on Thursday "not registered at surgery". Went to surgery (next door) Reception confirmed not on list "have you moved?"

Went to surgery Friday 3/7/15. Reception very helpful. Said he was the third person to have complained about this. Had he not received letter from NHS E? Had to re-fill registration form and got back on to surgery list OK. Then went to see triage nurse who sorted out the prescription.

Son in law also removed from same list. Is there a problem with the mail from NHS England. Concerned about how many other people may unknowingly be in same position"....**(Male, 65 to 79)**

"Following the concern raised by Healthwatch Swindon, PPG members and practice managers regarding the confusion and awareness of the NHS letter to remove ghost patients from GP surgery, I just wanted to highlight that I have spoken to the practice manager at my surgery (Elm Tree, Shrivenham) who confirmed they were aware of the letter being sent to the patients and the purpose. They have also put up a poster in the waiting room to promote and publicise to their patients. Just thought you should know as it seems different to what was being implied at the PPG Framework launch event"....**(Male, 50 to 64)**

"Made appt for 9 July at Carfax Medical Centre in mid June for wife. Contacted surgery to change to 10 July and told no longer on list (taken off on 30 June). Did not receive letter about re-registering. Surgery said that letter had been returned "flat unoccupied". Husband said he'd had different explanations from different people at surgery and that "practice manager was rude". He was told that his wife's appointment would be OK (not sure if for 9 or 10 July) provided she re registered which he could only do Monday to Friday"....**(Male & Female, Age unknown)**

"Received a GP registration letter. There was not a clear explanation as to why this was sent.

The return of reply 28 days is: A) Short notice. In the past I have been in Australia for longer than this. B) The instruction for the need to reply needs to be prominently displayed being in the middle of text as it is easily missed. I am the only person in my family to receive this letter"....**(Female, 50 to 64)**

"I received a GP registration letter. It was not very clear that I had to respond to it immediately. I sent a text reply and was annoyed that I have been charged 8 pence. The letter did not say I would be charged"....
(Female, 25 to 49)

"I am a patient at Taw Hill Medical Practice and have received two letters re GP list cleansing"....
(Female, 50 to 64)

Feedback received from a local GP Practice Manager:

Also, during this period Healthwatch Swindon was contacted by a local GP practice manager (whom wished to remain anonymous) who provided the following comments about their experience of the exercise:

“The practice was provided with a list of approx 100 patients from Exeter to review before they were removed from our clinical system, our understanding is these patients have been written to by Exeter and patients had not responded therefore suggesting they were no longer living at their registered address.

The timescale for this was short and before (practice office staff) had time to start reviewing the list some patient’s removal requests had already been received by the surgery. If Exeter asks to remove someone it is usually because they have registered elsewhere and therefore (practice office staff) just authorises the request and returns the medical record to Exeter.

This caused us a bit of a problem and a complaint by one patient who had been seen recently and was due to come back for a follow up appt when he tried to book the computer could not find him on the system and he had to re-register. Another appt was booked but due to their removal the appt was then cancelled and booked by another patient. It only came to light that they had been removed when they attended for vaccinations, they had to be re-registered and their appt rescheduled.

Once this problem came to light (practice office staff) was instructed to refer to the list first before automatically authorising the removal but they all claimed that they had not received any letters from Exeter regarding their address and both of these patients had been seen recently.

We have had approx 4 patients come in regarding the other letter which is being sent out presently asking staff to ensure they are not removed from the practice.

(practice office staff) is not removing anyone presently without checking but as I (practice manager) said in the (PPG) meeting Exeter requests the removal we just authorise it.”

Feedback/Comments received from attendees at framework launch engagement event:

Please see Appendix 2 which documents the feedback and comments that Healthwatch Swindon received from patients, GP staff and PPG members regarding the exercise by NHS England at framework launch engagement event.

What did Healthwatch Swindon do with the feedback and comments it received?

Healthwatch Swindon recognised early on that the concerns being raised about the letters and associated matters arising, was potentially not just a localised (Swindon specific) issue. It also had the potential to have an impact for patients further afield.

Healthwatch Swindon and NHS England representatives (who attended the PPG Framework Launch Event) agreed to escalate and raise awareness of the concerns raised to the relevant and appropriate area of NHS England.

Healthwatch Swindon asked NHS England....

To provide information that would help to give clarity and improve understanding about **'why'** patients were being written to and **'what'** procedures were in place to ensure patients were not being removed from the lists unnecessarily.

What did NHS England say?

Debra Elliott, Director of Commissioning at NHS England South (South Central), said:

“NHS England South (South Central) has written to patients across Bath, Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire asking them to confirm the contact details held on the GP practice database are correct. It is important patients respond to the letter because GP lists do get out of date over time. This may happen if people move home or change their telephone number and do not notify their GP. If we don't have an accurate record of a patient's name and address, then their GP or a hospital may not be able to contact them with important information. For example, we may need to contact patients with test results; invite them for breast or cervical screening to protect against cancer; offer vaccination against infectious diseases such as flu or measles, mumps and rubella; or give them an appointment as part of their plan to stay healthy if they have a long-term illness.

“Letters are being sent to some patients, but not all. In order to ensure we are as efficient as possible we have sent letters to patient groups we know have a higher chance of moving house. Those groups are students who have been registered with their GP more than four years and people who have moved to England and have been registered with a GP for more than 24 months. Together with people who have not responded to calls or recalls, we have written to them to check if their contact details are still correct. We have also written to men aged 25 to 55 years old because they tend to have less frequent contact with their GP and as a result their contact details may be out of date too.

“There are numerous failsafe measures to ensure that no patient is removed incorrectly. NHS England will contact a patient's GP to let them know if they did not reply to the letter or the reminder letter. GPs will then begin the process of making further checks. The process of removing a person from the list does not begin until reminder letters have been sent and the GP practice has confirmed that they have not seen that patient recently.” 10 July 2015

Immediate action taken:

Following discussions with NHS England, Healthwatch Swindon understands that further work is due to take place where NHS England will be contacting GP Practices to reiterate the exercise and process because no patients should be removed from any lists until March 2016.

NHS England informed Healthwatch Swindon that this work would be undertaken within a two week timeframe from when Healthwatch Swindon contacted them and raised this matter with them.

Appendix 1: Template of letter sent to patients by NHS England

NO CHANGES TO YOUR DETAILS - If all details are CORRECT and there are NO CHANGES then you can:

REGISTER BY INTERNET:  www.sbs.nhs.uk/primary-care-services/sw When prompted enter unique PIN	REGISTER BY FREEPHONE (24 Hrs)  0800 3265270 or 0330 3332651 (Freephone BT Landline) (Local call charges may apply) When prompted enter unique PIN	REGISTER BY TEXT (SMS) 86006 (24 Hrs)  Text unique PIN number to 86006 Charged at your providers standard rate, An SMS will be sent in response confirming successful registration.
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Unique PIN :



England

NHS England South (South Central)
 (Bath, Gloucestershire, Swindon & Wiltshire)
 Sanger House
 5220 Valiant Court
 Brockworth Business Park
 Gloucester
 GL3 4FE

<<Address is shown here>>

Dear Patient,

Important letter regarding your general practice registration

The NHS is carrying out work to make sure the details on your GP lists are accurate. We are writing to you to check that you are still registered at the same GP practice and live at the address, as detailed on the form below.

Why do GP lists need to be regularly updated?

If your GP does not have an accurate record of your name and address then your GP or hospital may not be able to contact you with important information about your health.

GP surgeries need to contact their patients to provide them with test results, invite them for bowel, breast or cervical screening to protect against cancer for example, or to be vaccinated against infectious diseases such as flu or measles, mumps and rubella. If you suffer from a long term illness then your practice may also need to give you an appointment date and time as part of your plan to stay healthy. Hospitals also rely on GP lists to ensure they can write to patients with appointments and results of tests or other information.

What do you need to do?

We need everyone who receives this letter to respond within 4 weeks of the date of the letter.

Full name and title:	<<Patient Full name>>
NHS no:	<<NHS Number>>
DOB:	<<Patient Date of Birth>>
Address:	<<Patient Address>>
GP Details:	<<GP that patient is registered with>>

If your address & GP details printed above are correct then you can confirm this to us quickly by using one of the methods below.

REGISTER BY TEXT:	Text your unique PIN number to 86006
REGISTER BY INTERNET:	Log onto the following web site www.sbs.nhs.uk/primary-care-services/sw type in your unique PIN and press submit.
REGISTER BY FREEPHONE:	If you have a BT landline, please call 0800 3265270 (Freephone) typing in your unique PIN when requested.
REGISTER BY PHONE:	If you have mobile, please call 0330 3332651 typing in your unique PIN when requested. (Local charges may apply - charges for calling this number is the same as calls made to standard UK landlines and maybe free if included in your mobile package as part of bundled or unlimited call packages)

Appendix 2: Feedback/Comments received from attendees at framework launch engagement event (The following comments and feedback came from patients, GP staff and PPG members):

In July 2015, Healthwatch Swindon, in partnership with NHS England and Swindon Clinical Commissioning Group held an event to launch a framework to “Improve the experiences of Patients and Carers through Patient Participation Groups (PPGs)”.

The framework was developed through a project funded by NHS England Regional Insight Team. The project was led by Healthwatch Swindon in partnership with Swindon Clinical Commissioning Group and with support from NHS England South (South Central).

Healthwatch Swindon recognised that this engagement event provided a good opportunity and platform to raise this matter and it resulted in various feedback being received.

The feedback Healthwatch Swindon received at this engagement event can be found here:

“It would have been helpful to have told Healthwatch about the ‘patient registration confirmation’ letter as they could have helped with answering questions/concerns raised by the public.”

This was in response to the notification that Healthwatch Swindon had not received a communication to assist with raising awareness of the planned NHS England exercise, and nor was an example copy of the patient letter sent to us as part of this process.

“If a patient is removed from the practice list and if the practice has made any changes with regards to new boundaries the patient may not be able to re-register, this puts the patient at a significant disadvantage.”

“There is an option at the end of the letter to have the original letter translated into your own language with a link to the website <http://www.sbs.nhs.uk/primary-care-services/sw>. The link doesn’t appear to be working? Feedback from the event last week was that one practice has had to do their own translation to support a community that speaks a language outside of the languages that NHSE would translate into.”

“Do we know what provision there is for people with serious mental health needs and if they receive this letter and do not process it and then get removed from their practice patient list there could be significant consequences for that person’s wellbeing? Is this covered by the practice receiving the ‘cleansing list’?”

“Only one practice manager at the event (out of 7) realised that they actually had the ‘cleansing list’ and could therefore follow up to ensure the above can be avoided as well as supporting other vulnerable people who may not reply to the letter.”

“What briefing did GP practices receive ahead of the letter going out?”

In Summary

Although NHS England had identified the target groups to write to as the focal point of the exercise, why have letters been received by people who do not fit into the target group criteria?

The concern of Healthwatch Swindon is that this could mean many people including some who may be vulnerable would potentially be removed from GP lists without a review. It could also have an impact and affect where those who are removed would potentially be left with restricted or no access to primary care services.

From a Healthwatch network perspective, it is positive that in May 2015 NHS England wrote to local Healthwatch regarding the exercise. However, it is worth considering the effect of a letter not being received by Healthwatch Swindon (once this had been identified to NHS England a copy of the letter was sent to Healthwatch Swindon). We also contacted other local Healthwatch who confirmed that they had received the letter.

From a Healthwatch Swindon perspective, there are key findings that need further consideration, being:

- Support practices and patients to have better awareness and understanding of any future exercises prior to them being undertaken.
- Awareness of Healthwatch Swindon role to support NHS England, practices and patients in raising awareness of any future exercises.
- Involving practice PPGs to support practices and patients by raising awareness of any future exercises.
- We noted with interest, when informed by a Practice Manager at the latest Healthwatch Swindon PPG (Patient Participation Group) forum, that across the South West of England a total of 155,000 people had been written to in relation to this exercise. Of those 122,000 (approx 79%) have been recorded as not responding to the letter. It has affected 10% of people in Swindon.

Healthwatch Swindon was told that NHS England has flagged the 122,000 people who have not responded to the relevant GP Practices who have the responsibility to review and follow these up.

NHS England has confirmed to Healthwatch Swindon that:

Prior to patients being removed there are numerous failsafe measures to ensure that there are no patients removed incorrectly. The process of removing a person from the list does not begin until the GP practice has confirmed that they have not seen that patient recently.

All practices have received numerous paper communications with regard to this exercise, and that NHS Shared Business Services have contacted all practices individually to explain the list validation exercise in more detail.

Ahead of this exercise practices were contacted by telephone and were made aware of the process that was going to take place. They were also asked to display information about the exercise in their respective waiting rooms and websites.

Healthwatch Swindon is aware that some local GP practices put information about the exercise on their respective websites after we had publicised and made them aware of the feedback we had received about the exercise.

It is encouraging to see NHS England's commitment to follow up with the GP Practices across the South West including Swindon. Also it is encouraging to see that 'non-responding' patients will be contacted again ahead of March 2016.

Healthwatch Swindon is developing a project to look at patient/carer access to & experience of GP Practices. This will include the experience of any patients & carers from across the diverse communities in Swindon.

As we finalise details, the information will be available through our website (www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk) & our monthly e-bulletin, which you can register for by emailing us at info@healthwatchswindon.org.uk.

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