

## HEALTHWATCH LEICESTER CITY

### REPORT FOR THE LEICESTER CITY COUNCIL'S HEALTH & WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMISSION, 10th March 2016

In the autumn 2015, Healthwatch decided to undertake a number of visits to the Urgent Care Centre (UCC) at Leicester Royal Infirmary, to ascertain why it was that patients and the public were making the Centre their first place to go when feeling poorly or unwell, despite the widespread publicity about only using the Emergency Department at the hospital for emergencies.

The UCC was at that time run by George Elliot Hospital NHS Trust, Nuneaton. We decided to visit either side of the August Bank Holiday weekend, on the Thursday beforehand when many GP Practices close and hand over to the GP Out of Hours Service and on the Tuesday immediately after when it was anticipated that there would be heavy demand.

The report of our visit to the UCC is attached as Appendix 4 to this report.

Some of the headline findings were:

- Most people attending came from the City
- Most were registered with a GP
- Most were from the indigenous population
- Most had made a conscious decision to visit the UCC
- Many had been unable to obtain an appointment with their own GP Practice
- Some had obtained an appointment but for the following day but didn't want to wait
- A number came because they couldn't afford to take off time from work
- A few had been recommended to come by 111 and a handful by other health professionals
- The overwhelming majority of those attending spoke positively of the UCC

As a follow up to the visits to the UCC, we decided to carry out a similar exercise at the Merlyn Vaz Walk in Centre, Uppingham Road in the City run by SSAFA, which operates from 8am-8pm 7 days a week. We planned our visits to coincide with the Wednesday afternoon in the month when GP Practices close for Protected Learning Time, the Thursday afternoon for the same reasons as above and on a Saturday.

(When GP Practices close either for Protected Learning Time or on Thursday afternoons they hand over GP cover to the Out of Hours Service)

The report of our visits to the Merlyn Vaz Walk in Centre is attached as Appendix 5 to this report.

Some of the headline findings were:

- Most people attending were from the neighboring Post Code areas
- Many were familiar with the existence of the Walk in Centre and some had used it before
- The ethnic mix of those attending reflected the local community
- Most were registered with a City GP
- Many had been unable to obtain an appointment with their own GP Practice
- Very few people had heard of the four City GP Out of Hours Hubs which had only opened that week but a number would have used them as being nearer to where they lived
- On all visits, but especially on Saturday (when the Centre was very busy) there were many parents attending with children\*
- Almost everyone attending spoke very positively of their experience

\* In conversations with parents, many said they had come for reassurance which for the majority had been the outcome.

There have been a number of significant developments since our visits to the UCC in August of last year. A new Front Door triage at the LRI run by Lakeside (a Social Enterprise) and incorporating the UCC, has been put in place to assess ambulatory patients arriving at the hospital, respond directly to minor injuries and divert inappropriate attendances back to community facilities eg making appointments with their GP, encouragement to use Pharmacists.

This has gone a long way to easing some of the pressures upon the Emergency Department. However, we know that the real challenges there result from inadequate space (hence the building of the new Emergency Department) and the unprecedented recent increase in the number of very poorly patients, especially elderly people, needing hospital care.

Huge efforts - both national and local - have been made to promoting the message that Accident & Emergency Departments are ONLY for emergencies. Nevertheless, as yet, this has either fallen on deaf ears or not reached a significant number of the population.

Perhaps we can speculate why this might be?

- Most people do not give health a thought until they or someone close to them needs it
- Then, when they do, they want it NOW
- Many of the key audiences (locally) may not listen to BBC Radio Leicester or read the Mercury
- Literacy levels amongst huge swathes of the City population may exclude them from key messages
- There are clearly problems with SOME (not all) GP Practices in obtaining an appointment
- The widely held perception however is that this is or may be the case - especially if a patient hasn't needed to contact the Practice for some time
- Information in English may be a deterrent too but counter intuitively BME communities and new arrivals quickly learn how to use the system - if, in the case of ED, the wrong bits!
- Some of today's Parents are perhaps less confident in dealing with their children's health