

How the recent migrant Polish community are accessing healthcare services, with a focus on primary and urgent care services

Executive summary

This report covers the experiences of the Polish migrant community in Reading in using healthcare services, and ideas for raising awareness of NHS GP and urgent care services amongst this community. More than 40 people from across the Polish community gave their feedback to Healthwatch Reading, via a survey, one-to-one interviews, and a focus group.

Key findings

- 79% of survey respondents reported that they registered with a GP when they first arrived in the UK;
- 47% of all respondents had used the Reading Walk-in Health Centre in Broad Street Mall, at least once since moving to Reading;
- 15% of respondents chose to register with the walk-in centre as their GP practice;
- 41% of respondents reported they or a member of their immediate family had attended the emergency department (ED) at the Royal Berkshire Hospital at least once within the past year;
- 64% of respondents reported that they had travelled back to Poland to access healthcare services there, since moving to the UK; and
- Knowledge of the 111 service was reported as very low, by the focus group.

Key recommendations

This project has identified the need for the local NHS to provide more written information in Polish about primary care services - provided by GPs - and also about urgent care services, which are provided by the emergency department at Royal Berkshire Hospital, the GP out-of-hours services (Westcall) and the walk-in centre (for non-registered patients).

Healthwatch Reading recommends that this information should be aimed at new arrivals to the UK and be written in a clear and simple style. The content of this information should include:

- A brief summary of how the NHS differs from the Polish healthcare system
- The role of GPs, particularly in giving preventative healthcare
- How to make best use of the services that GP practices offer
- The role of out-of-hours GP services and the 111 service.

Main outcome achieved

In response to this report, the Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) have developed a free smartphone app translated into Polish, allowing local Polish people to find out how to access NHS services. The app also offers advice on when to call NHS 111 and 999.

Introduction

Healthwatch Reading received feedback in 2013 that some members of the Polish community may be unclear about the services provided by NHS GPs and may be accessing the emergency department (ED) at Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH) inappropriately.

The board of Healthwatch Reading decided that a community engagement project to run during 2013-2014, would be useful to better understand how Reading's recent migrants from Poland were accessing healthcare, in particular NHS primary care and urgent care services.

The Polish community is the largest Eastern European community living in Reading. Polish translation services are the most frequently requested language translation service in Reading. The NHS integrated system of healthcare and the key role of the GP is a different model to the healthcare system in Poland.

Background

There is evidence that some migrant communities may not be accessing NHS primary care services due to a lack of awareness about the services provided by a GP practice or confusion about eligibility to register. This may result in inappropriate access to ED services, in addition to health inequalities in the longer term amongst migrant communities.

A project in south west London on ED service use found that “people from migrant communities were least likely to be registered with a GP and more likely to use the ED even during normal working hours. People did not know about primary care or out-of hours services and were living with progressively deteriorating conditions until they reached crisis point.”¹

Another report, *Understanding the health needs of migrants in the south east region*, also found that migrants “frequently use ED services”, possibly “because they are not registered with a GP and/or do not understand their entitlement to care within the NHS”.² Problems reported by migrants included:

- confusion over entitlement to NHS services;
- problems registering with primary care services;
- language and interpretation problems; and
- cultural barriers.

¹ <http://m.hsj.co.uk/5052217.article>

² <http://www.migranthealthse.co.uk/report>

The Polish migrant community in the UK and use of NHS services

There are two distinct Polish populations in the UK. The first is made up of post-war migrants who have been in the UK for a long time and are very established, and elderly. The second group comprise economic migrants, most of whom have come over during the last 10 years (Poland became a full member of the EU in 2004). This second group are mostly young, single men and women between 25 and 40, or young families with parents between 25 and 40 and children mostly in the toddler ages.

Across the UK, new private clinics offering primary care and consultant care services are being set up primarily for Polish speaking communities, staffed by Polish healthcare staff.

The Polish migrant community in Reading and use of NHS services

Based on Census data, Reading has a significant community of recent migrant workers from Poland, with smaller numbers from other Eastern European Countries. Feedback from Reading Borough Council and local NHS trusts demonstrated that in the past 12 months, Polish was the most frequently requested language for translation services.

Local media coverage in 2012³ suggested that there may be a lack of awareness amongst the local Polish community about accessing NHS services in Reading.

However, feedback from Reading's clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and the RBH did not highlight an issue with inappropriate ED attendances within the local Polish community. However, this feedback may not have reflected the full picture. The ED department at the RBH collects ethnicity data, but does not specifically identify which patients are Polish. This makes it difficult to monitor trends in ED attendance from the local Polish migrant community.

Healthwatch Reading also heard about a private clinic in Reading aimed at the Polish community in the Berkshire area (Medicare Clinic on the Oxford Road). The clinic is staffed by Polish speaking health professionals, offering a range of private services including GPs, paediatricians, gynaecologists, dentists, psychologists and laboratory services for blood tests. The clinic works in partnership with a nearby pharmacy to dispense private prescriptions. Feedback from one of the Polish speaking dispensers, was that the local Polish community access the clinic, in addition to accessing NHS services and healthcare in Poland. She reported that one of the most common reasons for going to the clinic was to obtain a private prescription for antibiotics.

³ <http://www.getreading.co.uk/news/local-news/poles-hard-to-get-help-4223492>

Project Aims

1. To understand how recent migrants from Poland are accessing health care services, with a focus on primary care and urgent care services in Reading.
2. To determine levels of knowledge and awareness about NHS healthcare services amongst the community of recent migrants from Poland.
3. To understand some of the barriers to accessing NHS services within this community.
4. To contribute to the work of the Healthwatch Reading board to better understand the pressures on local urgent care services and how to reduce inappropriate emergency department (ED) attendances.

Methodology

The project began with desk-based research on the experiences of health services by Polish migrant community, to:

- find research of similar projects and national migrant health research findings;
- discuss project scope with stakeholders and migrant health workers in the local community; and
- obtain data on the recent Eastern European migrant community in Reading.

A range of engagement tools were then used including a survey, structured interview questions and a focus group, during October and November 2013.

The project team included a Healthwatch Reading board member, who as a Polish speaker conducted the surveys and interviews.

Healthwatch Reading wanted to talk to a range of people from the local Polish community and sought feedback from the following community groups:

- CIRDIC (Churches in Reading Drop-in Centre) - service users from Poland
- our Integration Polish Community Group - members of the group's management committee
- The Polish Saturday school - parents of children attending the school.
- The Polish Catholic church - parents of children attending the mother & toddler group.

The sample size for the survey and one-to-one interviews was 34. The focus group comprised nine members of the community. Most participants in the engagement project had been living in the UK for between three and eight years.

Key Findings

Registering with a GP

When first arriving in the UK, 21% of respondents reported that they did not register with a GP, because they:

- did not think they needed to as they were healthy (6%)
- lacked understanding about the role of the GP (6%),
- were unaware of GPs (6%)
- did not know GP services were free (3%).

“Lack of information about local GPs.”

“I did not know they existed.”

The majority of respondents had been resident in the UK for at least three years but 12% had remained unregistered with a GP. The reasons they gave for not being registered were mostly around a lack of understanding about the need to register with a GP.

“I am young and healthy, I don’t need to register.”

“I am generally healthy. If there is a bigger problem, I will go to the hospital or be taken to the hospital.”

“I prefer to use emergency department services rather than register with a GP, as I am seen on the day.”

In 2013, CIRDIC began receiving an NHS outreach nursing service on a weekly basis. Healthwatch Reading was told that the aims of this service are to enable clients at the centre to better access primary and mental healthcare.

Use of the walk-in centre

The walk-in centre in Broad Street Mall is well used by this community. Nearly half (47%) of all respondents had used it at least once, and 15% of respondents chose to register with the centre as their GP practice.

Nearly one-third (32%) of respondents who were registered at other GP practices reported using the walk-in centre at least once during the past year. This group of patients reported that the main reason for using the walk-in centre was difficulty getting an appointment with their usual GP practice.

One person recalled using the walk-in centre when the family first arrived in the UK, before they were aware of the role of the GP.

Healthwatch Reading received consistent feedback about the importance of maintaining, and possibly increasing the services offered by the walk-in centre.

Out-of-hours GP service (Westcall) and 111 service

None of the respondents to the surveys or interviews mentioned using the GP out-of-hours service (Westcall) or the 111 service that launched in Reading just before the engagement work. Healthwatch Reading explored this issue within the focus group. The group confirmed that there is a lack of awareness of Westcall within the recent migrant Polish community. Knowledge of the 111 service was also reported as very low.

Use of A&E services

Most respondents (76%) reported that they or a member of their immediate family had attended the ED at the RBH since moving to Reading. More than a third (41%) reported they or a member of their immediate family had attended the ED at the RBH at least once within the past year.

The most common reasons given by respondents for attending ED were:

- directly related to accidents, or
- acute health problems related to abuse of alcohol (reported by CIRDIC clients only)

“Severe hangover.”

“Had a fit after drinking alcohol.”

Some respondents told Healthwatch Reading that they had attended the ED as they were unable to access GP services in the evenings or at weekends. This was a particular issue for families with young children.

Private Polish clinic - Medicare Clinic

More than one in 10 (12%) of the respondents reported that they had accessed the private Polish Medicare clinic in Reading. The services they used at the clinic were paediatrics and dental care. Healthwatch Reading was informed that it was often cheaper to travel back to Poland than to access the Medicare Clinic.

Travelling back to Poland to use healthcare services

Respondents told Healthwatch Reading that there is a different model of healthcare in Poland. The key difference is that private consultations and investigations e.g. blood tests or scans, are relatively affordable, in comparison to private healthcare in the UK. This means that Polish migrants who want to see a specialist quickly or to have investigations done more promptly than on the NHS, will travel back to Poland.

A significant number (64%) of survey respondents reported that they had travelled back to Poland to access healthcare services there. The majority had used Polish healthcare services at least once per year, since moving to the UK. Healthwatch Reading received some feedback from the focus group that the survey results may be an underestimate and that a higher proportion of the Polish community, particularly those on higher incomes, were accessing healthcare services in Poland.

The most commonly reported Polish service that the community accessed was dentistry, with 41% of respondents saying they had attended a Polish dentist at least once since moving to the UK. There were clear and consistent reasons given. The community told Healthwatch Reading about cheaper dental care and what they perceived as better quality care.

“Cheaper and better quality dental care.”

“Dentist - better prices and quality of service.”

The other healthcare services that were accessed in Poland were paediatrics, gynaecology, alcohol detoxification & rehabilitation programmes, blood tests, allergy clinics and physiotherapy. Respondents reported fairly consistent reasons for using these Polish healthcare service: more autonomy, cheaper prices for private care than the UK and the perception of better care.

“Easier to see a consultant.”

“Better access to the consultant.”

“Cheaper private care.”

“Higher standard of care.”

“Medical staff does not seem to be qualified or knowledgeable enough compared to one back in Poland.”

Some members of the community told Healthwatch Reading about the availability of low costs flights to Poland. This was reported by some respondents as a factor in choosing to travel to Poland for healthcare. Other respondents described how they combined trips back to Poland to visit family, with appointments to receive healthcare in Poland.

Language barriers to accessing GP services

A well-documented barrier to migrant communities accessing NHS services is the language barrier, both written and spoken. Some members of the Polish community in Reading highlighted a lack of Polish translators in GP practices. Several members of the community told Healthwatch Reading that they had taken family or friends who spoke better English to appointments or to register with a GP, to help them access NHS services.

“Option of translator for the peoples who don’t speak English.”

“I went to register with a person who could speak good English.”

The lack of written information in Polish was highlighted as much more of a barrier to Polish migrants accessing NHS services in Reading. Healthwatch Reading asked the community whether they had ever been given any

information written in Polish about GP services in Reading. Only 6% of respondents reported that they had been given any translated information about GP services.

“More info in Polish. Most Poles who come here do not speak English.”

“Translate all the info into Polish as many Poles do not speak the language.”

“More leaflets with Polish.”

“More information in local newspapers, GP surgeries, local schools.”

Respondents did report receiving translated information in Polish, from wards and departments at RBH, particularly maternity services.

In response to feedback from the Polish community, Healthwatch Reading contacted GP Practices in Battle ward (the ward that has the highest number of Polish migrants living within it, according to the census and feedback from the community). Only two GP practices currently provide information leaflets in Polish about their services and how to register with the practice.

Respondents to the survey and participants in the focus group made a number of suggestions about how the local NHS could improve recent migrant’s knowledge of NHS services, including more translated information about NHS services, especially GP services, GP out-of-hours services and the 111 service.

We also heard from members of the community about the importance of Polish migrants learning to speak and read English, to enable them to fully access NHS services.

A lack of confidence in GP services

“The paracetamol service.”

Some of the community used this phrase when talking to Healthwatch Reading about GP services. Respondents used this phrase to describe their experiences of using GP practices, particularly when they were expecting to be given a prescription for antibiotics or to be referred straight away for an investigation or appointment with a specialist, but the GP did not do this.

“There is only one cure: paracetamol. Lack of referral to a specialist”.

Healthwatch Reading explored the perception of the “paracetamol service” with the Our Integration Group, parents at the Polish school and the Mother & Toddler group. Respondents told us that the perception of the paracetamol service is a “myth” that is perpetuated within the recent

migrant community and leads to a lack of trust or confidence in GPs. There was a need for recent migrants to be better informed about the role of GPs in the NHS. In contrast to the views about GP services, some of the community reported their satisfaction and confidence in the quality of NHS services that they received when they or their child needed urgent care or hospital care.

Recommendations

Provide more written information in Polish about NHS services

This project continually identified the need for the local NHS to provide more written information in Polish about primary care and urgent care services in the NHS. This information should be aimed at new arrivals to the UK and be written in a clear and simple style. The content of this information should include:

- a brief summary of how the NHS differs from the Polish healthcare system
- the role of GPs, particularly in giving preventative healthcare
- how to make best use of the services that GP practices offer
- the role of out-of-hours GP services and the 111 service, and
- entitlements to NHS services.

This translated information needs to be well distributed within the Polish migrant community in Reading.

Suggestions made by respondents about where this information needs to be distributed to, were:

- all GP surgeries in Reading
- Polish shops (particularly along the Oxford Rd and in the town centre)
- local schools (Catholic schools and schools in and around Battle ward)
- the newsletter distributed by the Polish Community Group - Our Integration
- local Polish newspapers
- the Polish Saturday school
- the Polish Catholic Church, and
- local NHS websites

Outreach nurses at CIRDIC

Healthwatch Reading recommends that the outreach nurses at CIRDIC identify CIRDIC clients who are not registered with GP services but are accessing ED services regularly, to support them in registering with a GP.

Conclusion

This project has delivered the proposed aims of the project. Recommendations for service development have been made, focusing on improving the written information in Polish about primary and urgent care NHS services in Reading. During the course of the project Healthwatch Reading shared findings with providers and commissioners and have now distributed Polish translated flyers about the 111 service.

Responses received to the report's recommendations

Maureen McCartney, operations director at North and West Reading CCG, issued a response on behalf of both North and West reading CCG and South Reading CCG:

“This is an excellent report which gives the CCGs a very useful insight into the experiences of the local Polish migrant community in using healthcare services and their ideas for raising awareness of NHS GP and urgent care services amongst this community. We welcome the report and its recommendations and would like to thank Healthwatch and all the stakeholders who contributed to its production.

“A number of the recommendations relate to primary care services and in particular GP services, which are commissioned by NHS England. These will require a response from the NHS England Thames Valley Area Team.

“The services that the CCGs commission include urgent care services and the Out of Hours GP service and we are keen to ensure that patients are directed to the most appropriate service for their needs. We are also committed to engaging as widely as possible with the various language groups represented in the population of Reading and recognise the need to provide improved and tailored communications for the recent migrant Polish Community in order to allow them to access NHS healthcare services in the most appropriate way.

“Our response to the specific recommendations in the report is as follows:

“Need for the local NHS to provide more written information in Polish about NHS Services - The project has highlighted that there is a lack of awareness of the out-of-hours GP Service (Westcall) and the NHS 111 Service and identified a need for the local NHS to provide more written information in Polish about these services.

“We are very keen to do this and are currently exploring the idea of developing a Polish-language mobile app which will provide information about NHS services and help direct people to the most appropriate service. We believe this app is the most appropriate way to respond to the information needs of this community for the following reasons:

- The Polish population is a relatively youthful, working-age one, with relatively high levels of mobile use*
- An app can be updated at very little cost, and remains available to download as people arrive in the area*

“The app will include information and advice on the following services:

- Self-care*
- Pharmacy Services*
- GP Services*
- NHS111*

- *The Reading Walk in Centre*
- *A&E*
- *Dentists*

“It will also provide the address, telephone number and opening hours of these facilities and we will liaise with NHS England in relation to the information regarding GP and Pharmacy services which will be included in the app.

“We also plan to produce a poster which explains the NHS 111 service and our Communications and Engagement Team will present a detailed proposal and costing for both the app and poster to the May meeting of the North and West Reading Patient Engagement Forum where Healthwatch is represented. We will also discuss this with South Reading CCG.

“Dr Andy Ciecierski, a Polish speaking GP Board member of North and West Reading CCG and the lead GP for Urgent Care services for the 4 Berkshire West CCGs, has offered to attend one of one of the Community Groups, e.g., Nasza Integracja Polish Community Group to talk about the differences between the Polish and English health care systems. It would be really helpful if you could let me know if this would be the most appropriate Group for Dr Ciecierski to visit and if so who we should contact to arrange the visit.

“Out Reach Nurses at CIRDIC - The report recommended that the outreach nurses at CIRDIC identify CIRDIC clients who are not registered with GP services but are accessing ED services regularly, to support them in registering with a local GP.

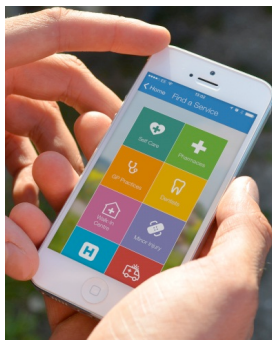
“The outreach nurses are employed by Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and I am pleased to confirm that these nurses already provide this service. BHFT have also confirmed that they are in the process of recruiting a support worker who will accompany CIRDIC clients to register with a GP practice if need be.

“The report also refers to the private Polish Medicare Clinic. The CCG has no jurisdiction over private healthcare providers but we would like to draw your attention to the fact that this Clinic was the subject of a recent CQC inspection, the full report of which is available at www.cqc.org.uk/node/597865. This raised a number of areas of concern where enforcement action was required. .

“I hope that this response will assure Healthwatch that the CCGs are taking appropriate action to respond to the recommendations in the report and we look forward to having Healthwatch input to the development of the app and the poster. I also look forward to hearing from you regarding the most appropriate Group for Dr Ciecierski to visit.”

Media release from NHS Central Southern Commissioning Support Unit, on behalf of North and West Reading, South Reading, Newbury and District and Wokingham CCGs. - 25th July 2014

CCGs launch free *My Local NHS* smartphone app in English and Polish



“The Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) have developed a free smartphone app, allowing local people to find out how to access NHS services.

Based on the user’s current location, the app uses a map to show the nearest pharmacy, dentist or GP, plus Minor Injury Units, Walk-In Centre and the A&E Department across West Berkshire, Reading, and Wokingham. Where possible, other details will include the range of treatments available and opening hours.

It also offers advice on when to call NHS 111 and 999, as well as notes and reminder sections to record doctor/dentist appointments or symptoms to mention to the GP.

A Polish language version has also been developed following a Healthwatch Reading report: “How the recent migrant Polish Community are accessing healthcare services, with a focus on primary and urgent care services”, which highlighted the need for the local NHS to provide more written information in Polish about NHS services.

Both apps include links to websites offering health advice, such as NHS Choices, while the Polish version has information on the NHS and the benefits of registering with a GP.

Dr Andy Ciecierski, Reading GP and Project Board Chair for NHS 111 Berkshire, said: “Whether you are new to the area or have lived here for a while, it’s not always obvious who you should turn to for help. This innovative app will avoid unnecessary delay or stress by helping you quickly find the right NHS service.”

Launch dates

*The English language version of the free app, called **My Local NHS**, is now available from the App Store (iPhone) and Google Play (Android), while the Polish language version, called **My NHS (Reading region)** will be available for download from 28th July.*

Acknowledgments

Healthwatch Reading would like to thank all the stakeholders, migrant health workers and community leaders who contributed to the project. We would particularly like to thank all the members of the Polish community who took the time to complete the survey or who talked to us about their views and experiences of accessing healthcare services.

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Appendix 1: Profile of community members who participated in the project

Gender

Female: 19 respondents
 Male: 13 respondents
 Not given: 2 respondents

Age of respondents

Age group	Number of Respondents
20-25	3
26-30	7
31-35	8
36-40	7
41-45	1
46-50	3
51+	3
Not given	2

Age of respondents' children

Ages of children	Number of children
0 -5	20
6- 10	11
11 - 15	2
16 - 18	2

Length of time respondents have lived in Reading

Number of years living in Reading	Number of Respondents
Less than a year	2
1 - 3 years	3
4 - 6 years	9
7 - 9 years	7
10 years or more	4
Not given	6

The community group/organisation which respondents attended

Community group	Number of Respondents
CIRDIC (Churches in Reading Drop In Centre) Service user	9
Polish Saturday School	21
Polish Church Mother & Toddler Group	4

Appendix 2: Survey & Interview Data

1. Thinking about when you first arrived in the UK, did you and your family register with a GP?

Yes: 27 No: 7

2. Are you and your family registered with a G.P in Reading?

Yes: 30 No: 4

3. Have you or a member of your family attended the NHS Walk-in clinic in Broad St Mall in the past year?

Yes:16 No:18

If yes, how many times have you attended the walk-in centre in the past year? (not including respondents registered with the walk-in centre as their GP)

Once: 8

Twice: 2

Three times: 1

4. Have you or a member of your family ever attended the A&E department at the Royal Berkshire Hospital?

Yes:26 No:8

If yes, how many times have you or your immediate family attended A&E at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in the past year?

Once: 10

Twice: 4

Five times: 1

“Many times” 2

5. Have you ever used any of the services provided by the private Polish Medicare Clinic on Oxford Rd?

Yes:4 No:30

If yes, how many times have you attended the Polish Medicare Clinic?

Once: 1

Twice: 2

“Many times” 1

6. Since living in the UK, have you or your family ever travelled back to Poland, to receive healthcare services there (including dental care)?

Yes:22 No:12

If yes, how many times have you travelled back to Poland to receive healthcare there, since moving to the UK?

Four times or more: 6

Twice: 4

“Few times”: 3

“Once a year”: 3

“When I go on holiday”: 1