

Registering with a GP

What identification is required to register with a practice in Wessex?

Background

In 2015, a number of individuals and groups raised concerns with Healthwatch Southampton that they were unable to register at GP practices due to not having the required photo ID and/or proof of address. People affected included homeless and former homeless people, young people, refugees and asylum seekers, people from Europe, women, older people – ultimately anyone without the required ID.

As this was a national issue, Healthwatch Southampton took the matter to NHS England and other organisations including the Equalities and Human Rights Commission. With this effort new national guidance was put in place which now says:

“...If a patient cannot produce any supportive documentation but states that they reside within the practice boundary then practices should accept the registration... [and that] a practice should not expect routinely expect a patient to present a photograph as this could be discriminatory.” - [Patient Registration Standard Operating Principles for Primary Medical Care \(General Practice\) 27.11.15](#)

This updated guidance was released to try to ensure that although GP practices are still able to request proof of identification and/or proof of address, they cannot deny registration to a patient who lacks any.

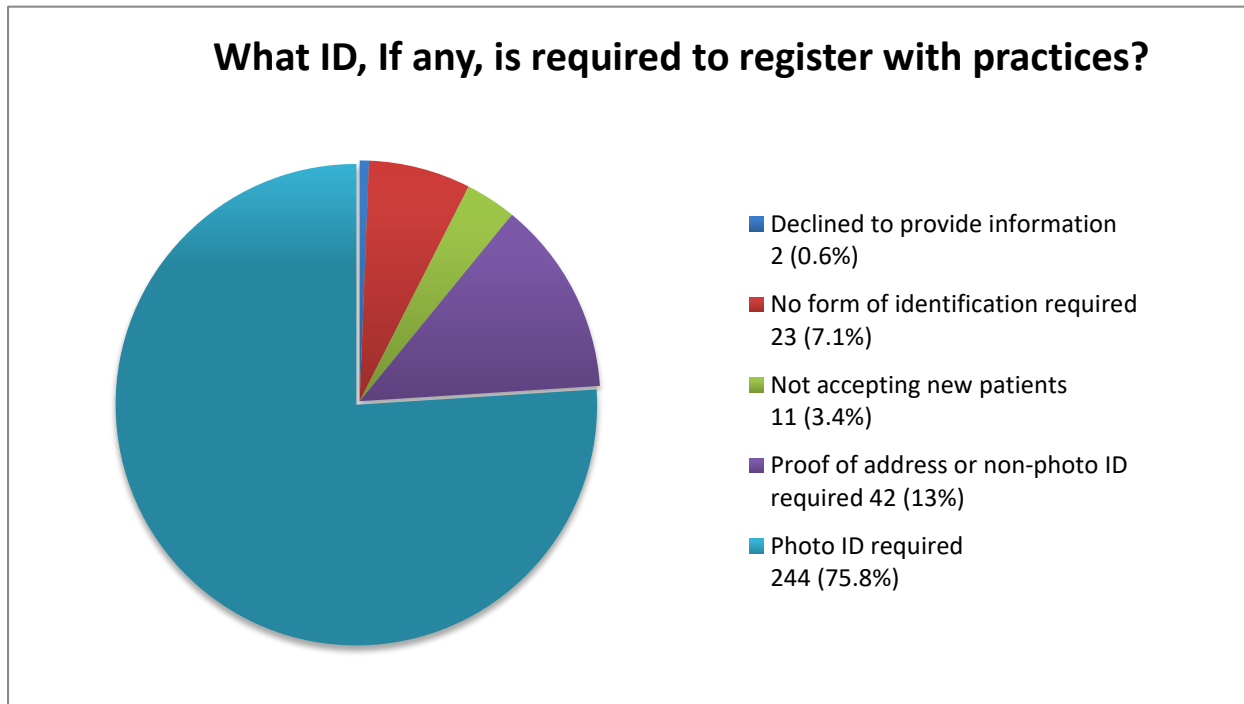
Following on from this work, the five Local Healthwatches within the Wessex region individually produced reports that detailed the process of registering with a GP and whether patients were still experiencing barriers to registering.

Methodology

Working in partnership, the five Local Healthwatches within Wessex Voices (Healthwatch Southampton, Healthwatch Portsmouth, Healthwatch Hampshire, Healthwatch Dorset and Healthwatch Isle of Wight) conducted a ‘mystery shopper’ exercise. They contacted all 322 GP practices (including branches) to ask what they required, if anything, from patients when registering. Their intention was to discover which practices had updated their registration policy to reflect the amended national guidance.

They first asked whether practices required any proof of identification or address. If a practice confirmed that proof was required, they would state that they didn’t have the required ID and ask whether they could still register with the practice. Due to a slight difference in how data was recorded, we were unable to include data from Healthwatch Dorset in the results of the second question.

Findings



Of the 322 practices surveyed in the Wessex region we found:

- 23 practices (7.1%) required no form of identification at all.
- 2 practices (0.6%) declined to provide us with any information.
- 11 practices (3.4%) were not accepting new patients.
- 42 practices (13%) asked for proof of address or non-photo ID.
- 244 practices (75.8%) asked for photo ID.

In total 286 practices (88.8%) required some sort of identification (either photo ID or proof of address) before a patient could register with them.

When prompted for photo ID and/or proof of address our mystery shoppers replied that they didn't have any and asked what they could do. Due to a slight difference in how data was recorded, we were unable to include any data provided from Healthwatch Dorset in the second question. The majority of the remaining 198 practices reiterated that some sort of identification or proof of address would be required before a patient could be registered.

- 147 practices said an alternative (eg: birth certificate or utility bill) would suffice.
- 46 practices maintained that you had to have photo ID.
- 5 practices said patients would need to discuss with the Practice Manger.

Initial question: What do you require, if anything, from patients when registering?

	HW Southampton	HW Portsmouth	HW Dorset	HW Hampshire	HW IOW	Total
No ID Required	5	4	7	6	1	22
Not accepting new patients	6	1	1	1	2	11
Declined to give information	0	0	1	1	0	2
Proof of address or non-photo ID required	7	2	23	6	4	42
Photo ID required	20	20	65	124	15	244
Total	38	27	97	138	22	322

Follow up question: I do not have the ID you've requested, can I still register?

	HW Southampton	HW Portsmouth	HW Dorset	HW Hampshire	HW IOW	Total
Alternative ID/proof of address required	24	22	N/A	87	14	147
Photo ID required	3	0	N/A	43	0	46
Discuss with Practice Manager	0	0	N/A	0	5	5
No ID required	0	0	N/A	0	0	0
Total	27	22	N/A	130	19	198

Recommendations

Although Healthwatch Southampton was successful in advocating for a change in national guidance, it is evident that the majority of practices in Wessex are either not aware of the amendment in policy or have not implemented it.

When telephoning, 88.8% of practices required some sort of proof of identification or address before a patient could be registered. Although practices are allowed to request proof of address and/or photo ID, all staff must be made aware that they should not refuse registration if a patient cannot or will not provide ID.

Wessex Voices recommends that all practice staff including doctors and front-of-house staff need to receive training to reflect the amended national guidance that came into effect in November 2015 which states that:

“...If a patient cannot produce any supportive documentation but states that they reside within the practice boundary then practices should accept the registration... [and that] a practice should not expect routinely expect a patient to present a photograph as this could be discriminatory.” - [Patient Registration Standard Operating Principles for Primary Medical Care \(General Practice\) 27.11.15](#)

We are concerned that by asking for identification some patients may be incorrectly assuming that it is compulsory to provide identification when it is not. This could result in vulnerable individuals being excluded from receiving the care that they are entitled to.

For this reason, we would recommend practices either adopt a policy of not asking for any identification at all or ensure all staff are adequately trained to explain to newly registering patients that identification is preferred but not essential. We would also recommend updating practice websites and print to reflect that although proof of identification and address may be preferred, it is not essential to registering.

Following on from this report Wessex Voices met with Wessex Local Medical Committees (LMCs) and provided them with a draft of this report. Wessex LMCs is the only local statutory representative body for GPs and their Practices operating across the counties of Dorset, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Somerset, and Wiltshire.

Wessex LMCs recommended that practices could contact them for help on reviewing and updating their policies by emailing office@wessexlmcs.org.uk