

UPCUUCS

Project report summary July 2008

What's the project about?

'Unscheduled health care' means all the care which people get without making an appointment in advance. For example, it might be popping in to see the doctor in the emergency surgery, or calling a 999 ambulance, or phoning NHS Direct.

It's important that people get access to the right service first time, so they get the help they need. It's also important that the services meant for serious problems – like A&E – aren't kept busy with minor problems.

Researchers from Swansea University were asked by the Welsh Assembly Government to find out more about the decisions people make when they use unscheduled health care.

What did we do?



We sent questionnaires to 4000 adults across Wales, selected at random (41% of people filled them in).



We telephoned 40 people who had used unscheduled care and asked them more about their experience.



We did four focus groups with different types of people, to find out what they knew about unscheduled care services and what they thought they were for.

Understanding how the Public Chooses to Use Unscheduled Care Services

What did we find out?

The questionnaire told us...

- 44% of people who filled in our questionnaire had used unscheduled care in the last three months.
- Just over 40% of contacts were made within 24 hours of the problem developing.
- Four out of five people would go to the same service again as their first contact.
- For half of the people who had used unscheduled care, the first service they contacted was their own GP during emergency surgery.
- Over 90% of people were in touch with more than one service to sort out their problem.
- Two-thirds of the people using unscheduled care were women.
- People from less affluent areas were more likely to use unscheduled care than people from areas which were better off.
- People were more likely to be regular users of unscheduled care if they had a long term condition (like diabetes or a heart problem).
- Although most people are aware of NHS Direct and the GP Out of Hours service, many people – especially older people – don't know how to contact them.

The interviews and focus groups told us....

- Not everyone has a complete picture of all the unscheduled care services available.
- People are generally anxious to use the right service, and not to waste NHS resources.
- Getting reassurance can be as important as getting treatment.
- Which service people choose is based largely on their previous experience; people don't think they are influenced by TV or papers.
- In a particular situation, different people have lots of different ideas about what is the right thing to do.
- People take great pride in being able to look after simple problems themselves – but once they've contacted a health service, they don't like being told just to take care of the problem themselves.
- Emotion plays a big part in decision-making about unscheduled care.

What's going to happen next?

We've given our full report to the Welsh Assembly Government, who are currently taking a look at how unscheduled health care is provided. We hope that it will help them to understand more about what is needed to make the system work well.

A big thank you to everyone who helped with our project, especially the people who talked to us or filled in questionnaires.

If you want to find out more....

You can get the full project report from our website (www.awardresearch.org.uk), or you can get in touch with Dr Alison Porter at AWARD, Swansea University SA2 8PP

01792 513422

a.m.porter@swansea.ac.uk

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All Wales Alliance for Research and Development in Health and Social Care

