

Awareness of Minor Injuries Units

Summary Report

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AWARENESS OF MINOR INJURIES UNITS - SUMMARY REPORT

Healthwatch Worcestershire gathers feedback about local health and care services and makes recommendations to those who run them about how they could be improved from a patient, service user and carer perspective.

WHY THIS WORK

Worcestershire has five Minor Injuries Units (MIUs) located in Bromsgrove, Evesham, Kidderminster, Malvern and Tenbury. They are part of the NHS urgent care and out of hours service offer. They offer advice and treatment for a variety of injuries including cuts, grazes, wounds, sprains, minor eye injuries, strains and minor burns.

We wanted to explore levels of awareness amongst the public of Minor Injuries Units. It follows on from our Report: “What patients told us about why they walk into A&E Departments in Worcestershire”, where we found that people were not necessarily aware of MIUs and what they do. It was undertaken as part of our summer engagement so is not intended as an “in-depth” study.

We carried out a Survey at various locations across the County.

635 people completed our survey - 426 were completed face to face with a further 219 completed online. We received 359 comments which have been themed.

The Survey was completed by more women than men, there was a spread of people from different age groups, although fewer people aged under 24 completed the Survey compared to other age groups. Most respondents were White British and had English as a first language. For more details please see the full Survey Report and Appendices, which are available on our website or on request.

MAIN FINDINGS

While most respondents had heard of Minor Injuries Units, more information about them is needed

Overall, about 8 in 10 people told us they had heard of Minor Injuries Units, mostly through word of mouth or prior knowledge. Only about 2 in 10 people found out about them through web based information sources or social media.

We found that people who had not heard of MIUs were more frequently male (one in three of the men who responded to our Survey had not heard of MIUs), in the younger age groups and do not own their own homes. People with a disability were also less aware of MIUs than other respondents.

People have heard of Minor Injuries Units, but they don't necessarily know which injuries they can treat or when they are open

7 out of 10 people who had heard of Minor Injuries Units told us they were not confident or only somewhat confident that they knew which injuries can be dealt with by MIUs. People are uncertain about which injuries they can see and treat and

also about what MIUs cannot do. They are also not clear about when MIUs are open and when X-Rays are available. The availability of answers to “Frequently Asked Questions” may also be useful to clarify the MIU offer. There is a risk that uncertainty about the service provided by the MIUs will act as a deterrent to people who may use the Units. Our findings suggest there is further scope to improve and target information to the public about MIUs.

Those that had not heard of Minor Injuries Units would like a leaflet through the door as the MAIN way to receive information

The MAIN way people would like to receive information about Minor Injuries Units was a leaflet through the door. It was the first option chosen by both men and women, by all age groups, by people with disabilities and carers and across all housing tenures. Web based options and social media were the next most frequently selected options.

Most people who had attended a Minor Injuries Unit in the last 12 months had a good experience

Of the 136 respondents who had used a Minor Injuries Unit in the last 12 months most, 7 in 10 (n94) rated their experience as very good or good. We also received positive comments from people about their experience of the service and of the staff who provide it.

People told us the MIU service offer could be improved

People told us about long waiting times, that MIUs were not always open when they were needed or that opening hours should be extended, and that X-Ray facilities were not always available. We also heard that a wider range of services were needed at the Minor Injuries Units, for example having a doctor on site or being able to prescribe for minor illnesses. We had a few comments about people being turned away from MIUs because they had not first contacted NHS 111. This may present a barrier to access and does not reflect how the service is advertised.

It is important that MIUs meet people’s needs, or they may be encouraged to vote with their feet and go directly to A&E instead.

Location - MIUs are important local services, but people living in Worcester and Redditch do not have direct access to a Minor Injuries Unit

We heard that MIUs are an important and valued local service. People living in Worcester and Redditch do not have direct access to a Minor Injuries Unit. People without a car and/or on lower incomes, or with a disability or impairment, may find it more difficult to use MIU alternatives to A&E, potentially exacerbating health inequalities. Distance and a lack of certainty about the MIU offer may provide dual deterrents to people from these localities travelling to a Minor Injury Unit.

MIUs as an alternative to A&E

32 people who were not aware of Minor Injuries Units had visited an A&E Department in the last twelve months with an injury that could have been treated at a MIU. This is 22% of the people who were not aware of MIUs. Whilst these actual numbers are small there could be potential to reduce the demand on A&E if people were made more aware of MIUs and were able to use them. Better information about MIUs and having these available locally may help to take pressure off busy A&E Departments.

Out of Hours - Most people are aware of the message about contacting NHS 111, but will telephone rather than going online. Some people find out of hours services confusing

The NHS preferred route for those needing out of hours care is for people to contact NHS111 Online first.

8 out of 10 people would first contact NHS 111 in an urgent, but not life threatening situation outside of GP opening hours. 5 out of 10 people would telephone NHS 111 and only 1 in 10 would first go to NHS 111 online.

We received some comments that people had a long wait for an answer to their NHS 111 call or for a call back from the service, or were unhappy with the quality of the response from NHS 111.

We heard of some confusion about out of hours pathways, and of occasions when people had been sent from one service to another.

There is a danger that if the Out of Hours pathway is unclear, or the response to patients through NHS 111 is not accurate or timely, or if patients are becoming confused or frustrated they may be deterred from using the preferred pathway on a future occasion.

Our A&E Report recommended a review of online information about MIUs - this has improved, but could still be more consistent

We know that not everyone can look for information online but when they do this needs to be clear, consistent and up to date. From a patient perspective, whilst online information about MIUs has improved, it could still be more consistent. The Integrated Care System website does not reference the Kidderminster or Tenbury MIUs. The H&W Health and Care Trust site does provide improved information, but opening time information needs to be kept up to date, and information about video consultations could be more prominent. The Acute Hospital's Trust site has also improved, but the explanation of what MIUs do is still not fully consistent with other sites, there is no information about X-Ray opening hours at the Kidderminster site and some of the information about opening hours in the Contact Us tab is inaccurate.

The NHS System is reviewing MIU provision in Worcestershire, including looking at X-Ray opening times and Urgent Treatment Centres

Following the publication of our A&E Report the NHS in Worcestershire told us:

“We are currently reviewing the MIU provision within Worcestershire, including the impact that diagnostics has on the utilisation of these services.... This includes an audit into the x-ray opening times at MIUs and associated impact on attendances to A&E, as well as considerations into Urgent Treatment Centres within Worcestershire.”

At the time of writing this Report, a 3 month trial is being conducted at Bromsgrove MIU to extend weekend opening hours and provide X-Ray facilities during the day over the weekend to assess the impact this has on A&E demand. We will be interested to know the outcome of this.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Minor Injuries Units are a valued local service and most people who use them have a positive experience.

However, there is still a lack of awareness about the service provided by MIUs. People need clarity about the MIU offer if they are to have trust and confidence that the service will meet their needs.

There was a preference from people who did not know about MIUs for paper information rather than online options. Where information is provided online, it needs to be accurate, consistent and up to date.

Long wait times, or MIUs being unavailable or unable to meet people's needs could act as a deterrent to people using the service in future. For people living in Worcester or Redditch a lack of awareness about the Units, difficulties with travel, transport costs and uncertainty that if they travel to a MIU their needs will be met may provide further barriers.

It is positive that most people would contact NHS 111 first in an urgent, but not life threatening situation when their GP surgery is closed. There is scope to further promote the NHS 111 Online First message. However, Out of Hours pathways need to be clear and work from a patient's perspective, as a frustrating experience may lead to people going directly to A&E instead.

Overall, the findings from this work very much echo those of our A&E Report.

If MIUs are to offer an alternative to A&E, as well as a valuable local service, they must be accessible to patients, clear about what they can offer and to who, and provide the services (e.g. X-Ray) that people need when they need it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Further promote information about Minor Injuries Units to the public. This information to include what injuries MIUs can see and treat and what they cannot do, when they are open and when X-Ray facilities are available.

- 2 Provide information in a range of formats, in accordance with the Accessible Information Standard, recognising that not everyone is willing or able to access online information and taking account of the preference expressed for a leaflet through people's door.
- 3 Consider targeting information at males, younger age groups and people who are not homeowners
- 4 Consider how information can be made available to people whose first language is not English
- 5 Consider developing "Frequently Asked Questions" about Minor Injuries Units to further clarify the MIU service offer
- 6 Consider a single source of online information about NHS services in Worcestershire, that brings together up to date and accurate information for patients about Urgent & Emergency Care services that they can access in the County
- 7 Further review existing online information about Minor Injuries Units, so it is up to date, consistent and accurate across all local NHS sites.
- 8 Communicate the outcomes of the review of MIU services, including the Bromsgrove MIU extended hours pilot and the potential implementation of Urgent Treatment Centres