

# Patient Partner Evaluation

Patient's experiences and opinions of Patient Partner

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# Who we are and what we do

Healthwatch Norfolk is the independent voice for patients and service users in the county. We gather people's views of health and social care services in the county and make sure they are heard by the people in charge.

The people who fund and provide services have to listen to you, through us. So, whether you share a good or bad experience with us, your views can help make changes to how services are designed and delivered in Norfolk.

Our work covers all areas of health and social care. This includes GP surgeries, hospitals, dentists, care homes, pharmacies, opticians and more.

We also give out information about the health and care services available in Norfolk and direct people to someone who can help.

At Healthwatch Norfolk we have five main objectives:

1. Gather your views and experiences (good and bad)
2. Pay particular attention to underrepresented groups
3. Show how we contribute to making services better
4. Contribute to better signposting of services
5. Work with national organisations to help create better services

We make sure we have lots of ways to collect feedback from people who use Norfolk's health and social care services. This means that everyone has the same chance to be heard.

# Summary

Healthwatch Norfolk was asked by Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice to evaluate the practice's automated telephone system- Patient Partner. The aim was to develop a greater understanding of why uptake of the system is low and provide recommendations based on patient feedback. We did this by conducting a survey with members of the public. The questions were discussed and agreed with Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice. The survey could be completed online, via telephone, by post or in-person.

Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, so no sample size was set. In total, we gathered feedback from 365 individuals. Once the data was cleaned (duplicate responses and responses from those outside the age range were removed), there were 349 responses.

We also conducted an online survey with staff to understand whether staff think patients are aware of Patient Partner, what they think could be done to increase uptake and whether the system helps them in their role. We received a total of 15 responses.

From the questions we asked on the public survey we found that over half of patients have used Patient Partner (59%, 204), and when asked what they had used Patient Partner for, the most common answer was to book a same day appointment (45%, 92).

Awareness of Patient Partner could be improved. Whilst most patients were aware that the practice uses an automated telephone system (Patient Partner), many patients told us they only found out about Patient Partner when they phoned the practice and around a third of survey respondents told us they don't know why the practice uses the system (34%, 118).

Patients are also concerned that Patient Partner is replacing receptionists. Despite most staff saying they promote the system to patients; some

patients may not have received communication about the system as they were unaware of it before contacting the practice.

Patient Partner is also not benefitting patients or staff as much as it should be. Most respondents rated their overall experience of Patient Partner as 'bad' (60%, 121), with 16–25 year olds the most likely to say this (100%, 2). Many respondents commented that they had difficulties using the system, that it did not work, or they did not receive a response. Patients were also more dissatisfied with the time taken to receive a response from Patient Partner than other methods of contacting the practice (e.g. talking to a receptionist, going online etc). Most staff also told us that Patient Partner does not help them in their role.

Only a minority of patients told us their experience of Patient Partner was good and that they received a quicker response than other methods. Therefore, patients may be more satisfied if calls went through a receptionist than Patient Partner.

There is also some resistance towards Patient Partner, with 32% (108) of patients not wanting to find out more about the system and many preferring to speak to a receptionist instead. Over half of respondents who have not used Patient Partner told us this was because they prefer to speak to a receptionist (54%, 60). A few people specifically mentioned that this is because they prefer speaking to a person when they feel unwell. Patient Partner is also not patients preferred choice, with many saying they would only use the system again as they believe it is their only choice. This may be because patients are unaware of the benefits of Patient Partner. Most staff (67%, 10) told us they think patients do not know what the benefits of Patient Partner are.

Three in ten respondents told us Patient Partner could be improved 'if it was easier to use' (29%, 56) and 18% (34) would like more guidance on how to use it. Similarly, of respondents who have not used Patient Partner, 27%

(31) said they would be more likely to use the system if they had more guidance on how to use it.

Overall, the findings of this report suggest that Patient Partner is not benefitting patients or staff as much as it should be.

From the findings of this piece of work, the following recommendation can be made:

1. Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice should explore other options which may be more beneficial to patients and help to ease pressure on receptionists and reduce the call queue.

If the practice decides to introduce a new system or alternative method for contacting the practice in the future, the following recommendations can be made, based on the findings of this work:

1. Consult with patients before introducing new systems.
2. Communicate to patients that the new system is an added option and reassure them that they can still speak to a receptionist.
3. Give patients more guidance on how to use future systems before they are introduced and ensure that systems are easy to use.

If the practice decides to keep Patient Partner, the following recommendations can be made, based on the findings of this work:

1. When patients first get through to Patient Partner, before asking for their date of birth add a short explanation of why the practice is using Patient Partner and how the system works.
2. Communicate to patients that Patient Partner is an added option and reassure them that they can still speak to a receptionist.

3. Give more guidance to patients on how to use Patient Partner and consult with patients to see whether this guidance is reaching them and if they understand it.
4. Set up reminders or computer prompts for staff to remind them to check and reply to Patient Partner throughout the day.
5. Ensure that patients receive confirmation that their message has been sent through Patient Partner.

Please note the recommendations at the end of the report are provided in a more detailed form.

# Why we looked at this

Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice commissioned Healthwatch Norfolk to evaluate the practice's automated telephone system- Patient Partner, by gathering feedback on patients' and staff awareness, opinion and experiences of the system. The aim of this research was to gain a greater understanding of why many patients are not using Patient Partner and provide recommendations based on patient feedback.

Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice is a four partner GP practice in rural Norfolk, with surgeries in the market towns of Aylsham and Reepham. The practice covers an area of around six miles and cares for approximately 9,102 patients split between the surgeries (Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice, 2023a).

The practice started using the automated telephone system- Patient Partner in May 2021 to try and reduce telephone congestion at peak times and give patients more choice in how they contact the practice, by enabling them to contact the practice 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The practice is one of only 150 practices in UK that use Patient Partner (Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice, 2023b). The practice promoted Patient Partner to patients by sending them a letter, adding information to their website and putting posters up in the surgeries. From June 2022 to June 2023 a total of 52002 calls went through the Patient Partner system, including 14046 'appointment transactions' (where patients have used the system to book, review or cancel an appointment) (Voice Connect, 2023). However, many patients are not using Patient Partner.

When a patient phones the practice, they are asked to press option 2 for Patient Partner, option 3 for dispensary (to leave a voicemail or to use Patient Partner) or option 4 to speak to a receptionist. Patient Partner lets patients book or cancel appointments, order repeat prescriptions or leave a message to request a call back from the team (Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice, 2023c).

When a patient selects the Patient Partner option, they can leave a message between 8-10am for a same day response. The recorded message can be up to 59 seconds long and automatically goes through to the triage team (this is where healthcare staff decide the order of treatment of patients). Patient Partner connects with the surgeries' clinical systems so the message will go onto the



patient's record. This means that the call bypasses the reception completely. This is useful for patients who do not want to tell a receptionist their reasons for wanting an appointment and means that they have less time waiting on the phone (Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice, 2023c). This can also help to ease pressure on the receptionists and helps to reduce the length of the call queue for both patients and staff. Patient Partner can also potentially help to increase patient safety as the patient's message goes straight onto their record, without any interpretation from receptionists.

Helping to reduce the length of the call queue and making it easier to contact the practice is seen as an important benefit of Patient Partner as data from an annual GP patient survey suggests that patients are finding it increasingly difficult to get through to their GP practice by phone. Only around half of patients in the UK (52.7%) said they found it easy to get through to their GP practice by phone, compared to 67.6% in 2021 (IPSOS, 2022a).

Despite there being national difficulties contacting GP practices by phone, the majority of Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice patients said they find it easy to get through to the practice by phone (70%) and most described their experience of making an appointment as 'good' (65%) (IPSOS, 2022b). Whilst it appears that most patients find it easy to get through to the practice when they phone, Patient Partner can still be beneficial to patients of the practice as it gives them more ways to contact the practice, can be more convenient and means they have less time waiting on the phone.

The practice understands that some patients may not be able to use Patient Partner or do not want to. This is why the practice also have an online system and patients can visit the practice in person. The practice have also added an 'option four' to their phone system. This gives the caller the option to speak directly to a receptionist rather than using Patient Partner as the practice recognised that some patients may struggle to use the new system or would prefer to speak to a receptionist. However, the practice has found that lots of patients are choosing 'option four' and there appears to be some resistance in using the system.

# How we did this

## Methodology

The project aimed to collect views and feedback to evaluate the Patient Partner automated telephone system and develop an understanding of what patients think of the system and identify the barriers to using the system. We designed a patient survey to gather feedback, which was created using SmartSurvey.

We wanted to know:

- If patients were aware of Patient Partner and why the practice uses it.
- If patients have used Patient Partner, what they used it for.
- If patients have used Patient Partner, what this was like.
- If patients have used Patient Partner, would they use it again.
- What are the barriers to using Patient Partner.
- Whether there is anything that would make patients more likely to use Patient Partner.

The target audience of this project are patients of Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice. The survey was designed so that anyone who was not a patient at Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice were thanked but unable to proceed with the survey.

Healthwatch Norfolk worked with Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice to create the survey, with a series of questions to meet the aims and objectives of the project. An online and print survey were used to reach as many people as possible. There was also an option to call Healthwatch Norfolk and complete the survey over the telephone. The Healthwatch Norfolk team also attended both the Reepham and Aylsham surgery sites to engage with patients to conduct the survey face-to-face. There were four visits in total, with each surgery being visited in the morning and the afternoon to ensure we gathered feedback from a wide range of respondents. We also visited the surgeries to ensure that those who may be digitally excluded had the opportunity to take part.

The survey ran from 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023 to 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023 and all responses (n=365) were collected during this time frame. Once the data was cleaned (e.g. duplicates were removed), there were 349 responses in total.

In addition to this, we also developed a short online survey for staff at Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice, which asked questions on whether staff think patients are aware of Patient Partner, what they think could be done to increase uptake and whether the system helps them in their role. The survey was emailed to the Practice Manager who then distributed it amongst staff at the practice. We received a total of 15 responses from staff.

## **Participant Involvement and Consent**

To encourage participation in the survey, we developed a range of promotional materials, with a goal of reaching as many individuals and groups as possible, including those seldom heard.

As this research was only for patients of Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice, we took a localised approach to communication. Healthwatch Norfolk promoted the survey through social media posts, awareness videos, local press and on the Healthwatch Norfolk website and in the Healthwatch Norfolk newsletter. The survey was also promoted on the Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice website and the practice sent a text message with a link to the survey to all patients who had signed up to text alerts (approximately 70% of patients at the practice are signed up to text alerts, which is around 6,370 patients).

We also developed posters to promote the survey, which were given to the practice to put in their waiting areas. The posters had a QR code for the survey as well as a phone number if people wanted to complete the survey via phone instead. We also contacted a range of local stakeholders (including libraries and local town councils) to promote engagement with the survey amongst their networks.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. To complete the survey, participants ticked a box on the survey to confirm that they understand what the survey is about, agree to take part and consent for their answers and feedback to be shared in this report. Participants could choose which questions they wanted to answer and could end the survey without completing all the questions.

Healthwatch Norfolk also emailed the Practice Manager at Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice asking them to distribute the staff survey amongst

staff at the practice (See Appendix 3). This additional data was used to gain insight into whether staff think respondents are aware of Patient Partner, what they think could be done to increase uptake and whether the system helps them in their role.

The sample size for both the public survey and staff survey was not set as the surveys were entirely voluntary and members of the public and staff chose whether to provide feedback.

## **Survey data analysis**

The survey included a range of question types, including open-ended, closed-ended, and multiple-choice questions. A range of analysis methods were used to reflect this. The results and comments are reported on in the 'What we found out' section.

Answers that were closed-ended or multiple choice were exported from SmartSurvey and analysed in Excel. Percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number. Answers where participants could write their own comments, were analysed using thematic analysis using NVivo. This allowed comments to be coded to establish themes, these are explored further in the 'What we found out' section of this report. To ensure originality, any comments used as direct quotes in this report have been left unchanged.

We also collected demographic data to gain a better understanding of the reach of the survey, to help make sure that we engage with people from different backgrounds and so that we can understand what needs different groups in our community have. A summary of this demographic data can be found in Appendix 2.

A copy of the survey questions can be found in Appendix 1.

The feedback we received helped us to gain an insight into and develop themes around patients' awareness, opinion and experiences of the Patient Partner system and identify the barriers to using the system.

## Limitations

As the patient population of Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice covers a range of demographics and serves around 9102 patients we cannot say that the sample size (n=349) of this survey is representative of the entire patient population, however the sample does provide a snapshot of people's experiences and opinions of the Patient Partner system during this timeframe. It should be noted that people who dislike the system, may be more likely to express their views.

Whilst the survey included open-ended questions, overall, there is a lack of depth to answers when compared to alternative methods such as focus groups or interviews, however this is something that could be addressed in future work.

The Healthwatch Norfolk team visited both the Reepham and Aylsham surgery sites, where participants could complete the survey in person. Paper copies of the survey and posters were also left at both surgeries. In total we received 53 paper copies, However, this resulted in all paper surveys only being completed by respondents who had visited the practice whilst the survey was live. Whilst we tried to reach people who are digitally excluded, we may not have reached those who are digitally excluded and have not visited the practice since the survey was live. Therefore, we cannot say that the sample is representative of this population.

Around half of respondents (45%, 151) told us they have a long term condition. This means they are likely to already be well linked into healthcare services and may have different needs and requirements when contacting their GP surgery. In England 43% of adults have at least one long term condition (NHS Digital, 2019) which is slightly lower than the percentage of people with a long term condition in our sample. Therefore, our sample may not be representative of the wider patient population who do not have long term conditions

Only a small number of respondents were aged 16 to 25 (1%, 3) or aged 86 and over (1%, 4). This is a limitation as people in these age ranges may have had different opinions or experiences of Patient Partner, so their views may not be fully captured in this research.

In total we received feedback from 15 members of staff. There are 47 members of staff at the practice, so we cannot say that the sample is representative of the

entire staff population, however this does provide a snapshot into staff's views of the system. It should also be noted that some of these staff may be secretarial or administrative, so Patient Partner may not help them in their role.

# What we found out

## Survey Results

Please note that none of the questions were compulsory so the number of responses will vary by question.

### Who we received responses from

The survey received 365 responses. Once the data was cleaned (responses from people who are not respondents at the practice and duplicates were removed), there were 349 responses, which make up the following analysis.

Most respondents told us they:

- Were female (61%, 193)
- Were White British/ English/ Northern Irish (92%, 285)

In the last six months, around half of respondents told us they contacted the surgery less than once a month (48%, 151). A similar number of respondents told us they have a long term condition (45%, 136) and around a third of participants were aged 66-75 (32%, 98). A breakdown of the age of respondents can be seen in Figure 1.

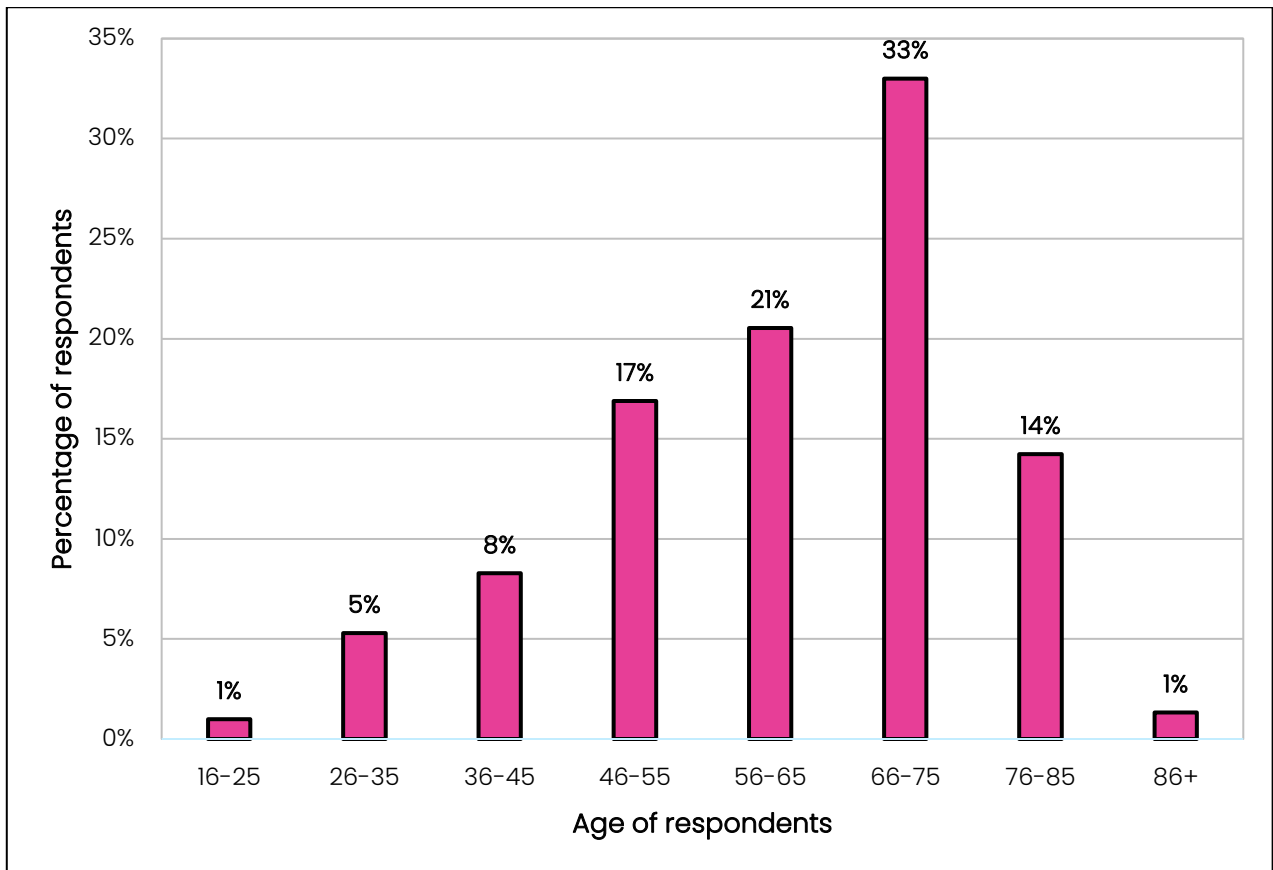


Figure 1. A graph to show age of respondents

## Awareness of Patient Partner automated telephone system

We asked participants whether they were aware that the practice uses an automated telephone system (called Patient Partner). Most respondents who answered our survey were aware of the system (78%, 272). However, some people were unaware of the system (16%, 56) and a minority were unsure (6%, 19). This is displayed in Figure 2.

There were variations of awareness across the age range. Respondents aged 16-25 (100%, 3) and 86 and over (100%, 4) were the most likely to be aware of Patient Partner. Whereas respondents aged 66-75 were the least aware of the system, with 21% (21) of respondents this age unaware of Patient Partner. Overall, men (81%, 88) were slightly more aware of Patient Partner than women (78%, 149).



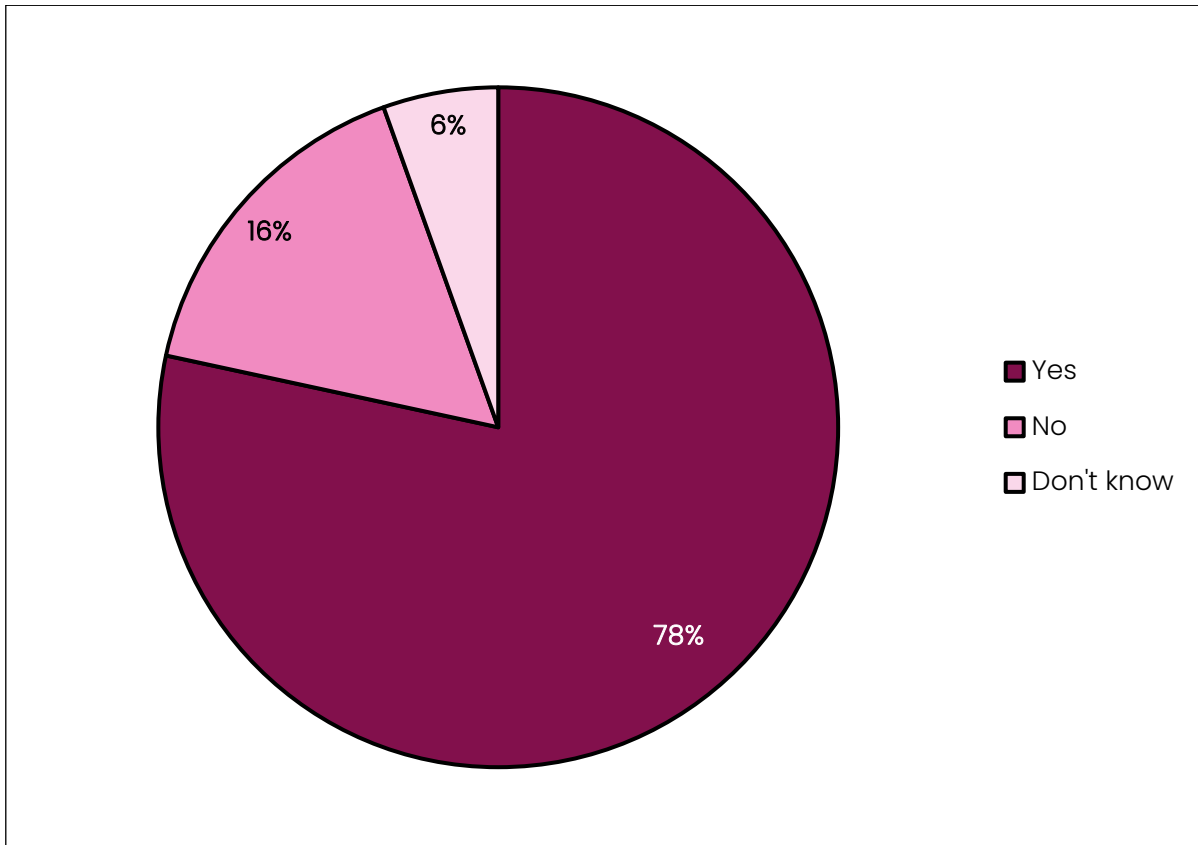


Figure 2. Responses to the question 'Are you aware that Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice use an automated telephone system (this is called Patient Partner)?'

Respondents who were aware of Patient Partner were then asked how they found out about it. There were a variety of answers, although comments mostly focused on people finding out about Patient Partner through phoning the practice, receiving a text message or being told by reception. Some respondents also told us they only became aware of the system by using it. Answers include:

- *"Have called the surgery and heard the options"*
- *"I phoned up and it was automated"*
- *"Text message from the surgery."*
- *"Text from surgery"*
- *"Didn't know it was called Patient Partner. This is just what happens when I ring up."*

A few participants commented that whilst they were aware of the system, they did not know it was called Patient Partner.

## Finding out more about Patient Partner

When asked what (if anything) they would like to find out about Patient Partner, the most common response was 'I don't want to find out more about Patient Partner' (32%, 108). This is shown in Figure 3.

Three in ten respondents told us they would like to find out 'Why the practice is using Patient Partner' (30%, 100) and 'how to use it' (28%, 92). This lack of awareness of why the practice is using Patient Partner and how to use it are common themes which run throughout the survey.

Some respondents also told us that they want to find out 'What Patient Partner can be used for' (18%, 59), 'Who my message will be shared with' (16%, 53) and 'how secure my data is' (14%, 47).

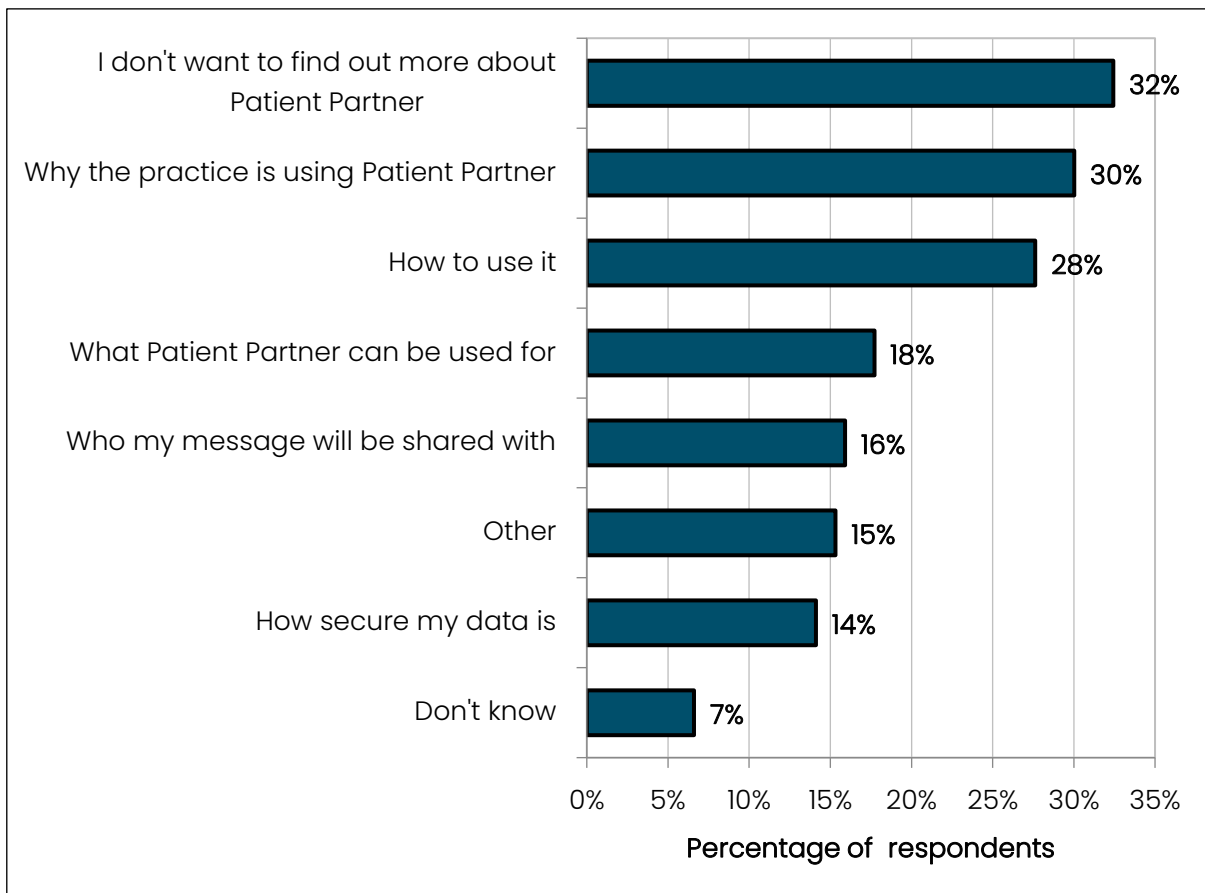


Figure 3. Responses to the question 'What (if anything) would you like to find out about Patient Partner?' Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Responses to the 'other' answer, include participants wanting to find out why the system doesn't work, comments on how it is difficult to use and how they prefer to speak to a person. A few respondents also told us they would like to find out

when the practice plans to get rid of the system, for example, one patient told us: *“When it is planned to get rid of this awful system”,* whilst another said *“Why does it take you round in a loop and eventually finish the call without actually getting you what you need?”.*

A few people were also confused between Patient Partner and Patches (an online consultation tool that the surgery uses). This is reflected in the comments below:

- *“Can't log into Patches.”*
- *“How is Patient Partner related to PACHS”*
- *“Is Patient Partner the same as PATCHS”*

Two respondents commented that they had not used Patient Partner yet so could not comment on what they would like to find out about it. For example, one patient told us: *“I haven't had to use it yet so it's hard to say anything about it at the moment.”*

## **Awareness of why the practice uses Patient Partner**

When participants were asked if they know why the practice uses Patient Partner, the most common response was 'Don't know' (34%, 118) (Figure 4). Three in ten respondents (29%, 101) told us they thought that Patient Partner is used to replace the receptionist. However, one of the aims of Patient Partner is to help ease pressure on receptionists rather than replace them.

Only a third of respondents were aware that Patient Partner is used to save clinical time (32%, 112), reduce waiting time on the phone (28%, 97), give patients more choice in how they contact the practice (18%, 63) and increase patient safety (4%, 14).

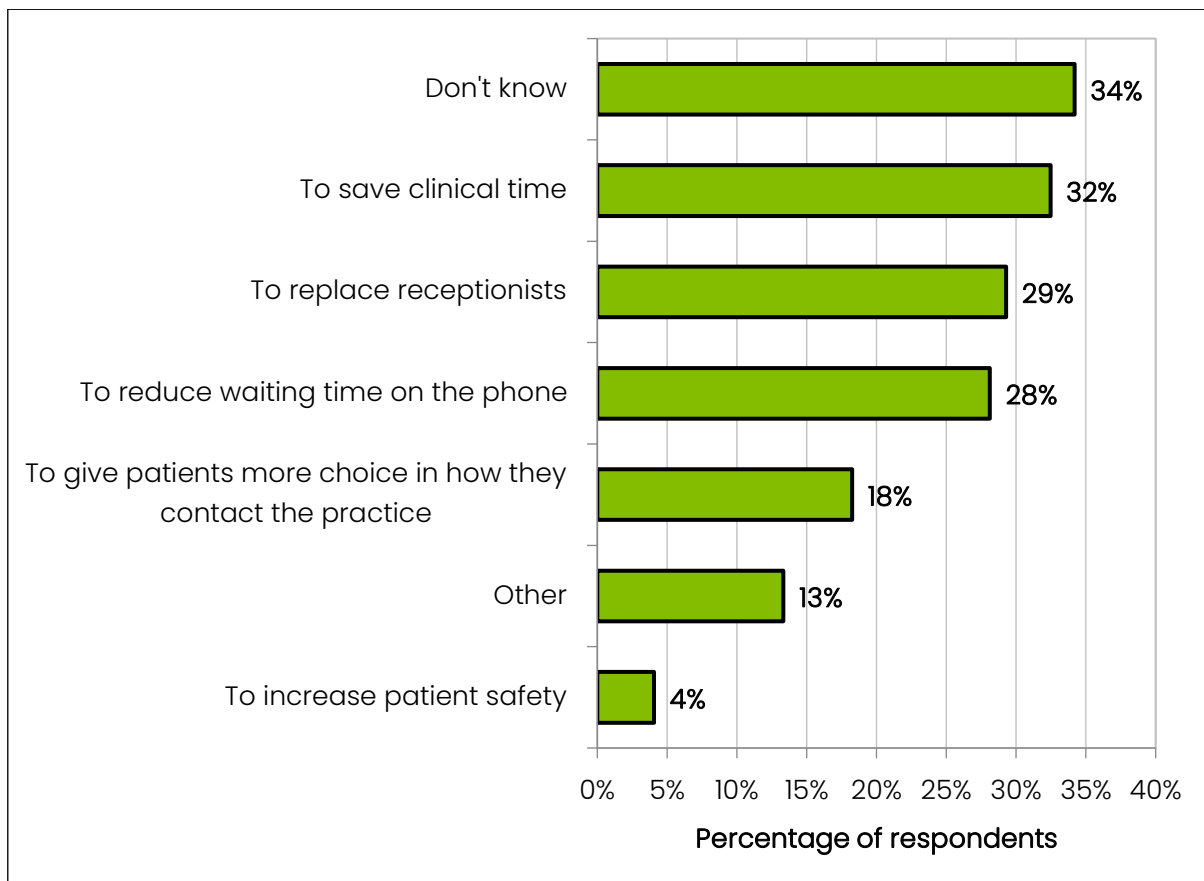


Figure 4. Responses to the question 'Do you know why the practice uses Patient Partner (automated telephone system)?'. Respondents could select more than one option.

Responses to the 'other' answer (13%, 46) include a variety of comments, with many focusing on the practice using the system to avoid talking to patients and saving money. This is illustrated in the comments below:

- *"I can only assume to deter patients from calling"*
- *"To save money"*
- *"To cut down on expenditure from income."*
- *"To avoid talking to patients"*

A few respondents also used the 'other' answer, to express their general dislike of Patient Partner. For example, one patient told us:

*"Don't know why they use it because a) it never works b) when you leave a message for (eg) the dispensary [sic] asking for a repeat, they never get the message. C) it doesn't save time at all"*

## Uptake of Patient Partner

Over half told us they have used Patient Partner (59%, 204), with only around a third of participants (35%, 123) saying they had not used the system. Some people were unsure whether or not they had used Patient Partner (6%, 22). This is shown in Figure 5.

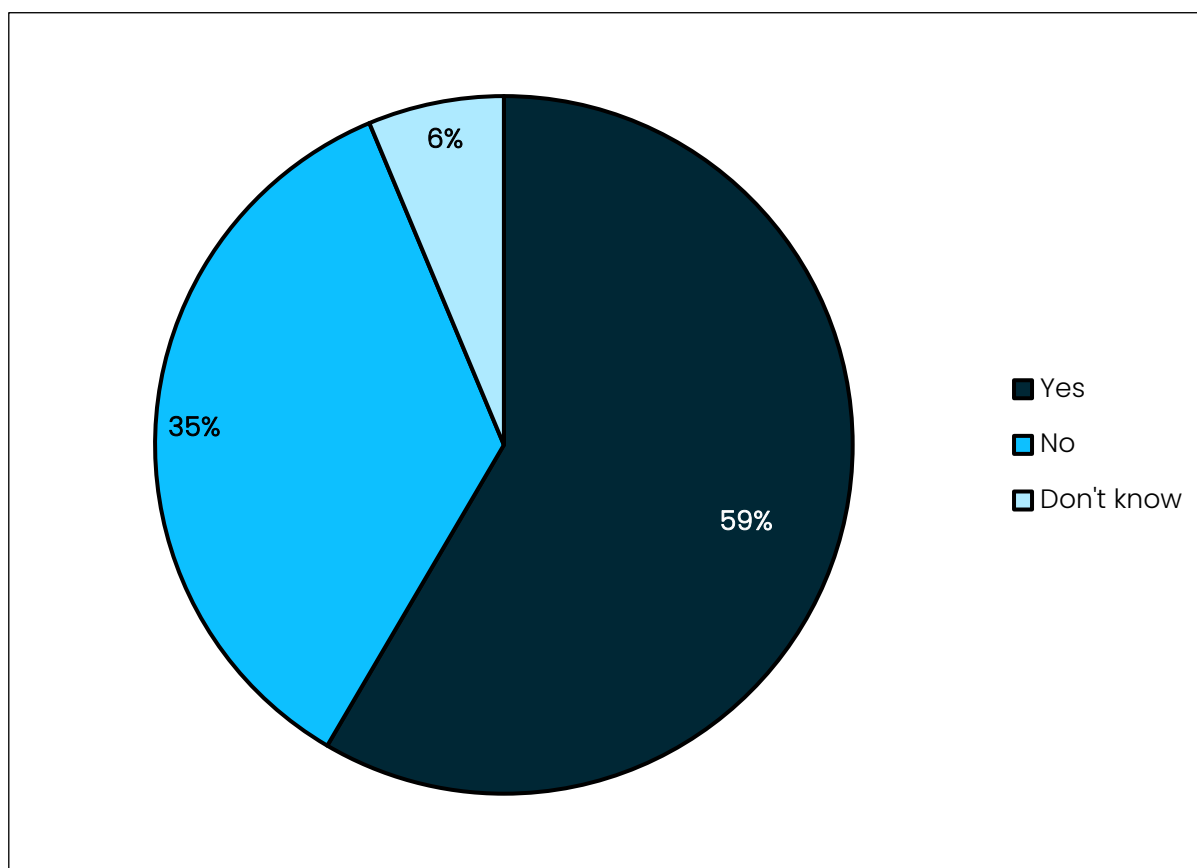


Figure 5. Responses to the question 'Have you ever used Patient Partner (automated telephone system)?'

Overall, participants aged 46-55 were the most likely to have used Patient Partner (75%, 38). Older patients were less likely to use the system, with just half of people aged 86 and over (50%, 2) saying they use Patient Partner. Women were more likely to have used Patient Partner than men. Around two thirds (63%, 122) of women told us they had used Patient Partner, compared to 53% (58) of men.

Respondents with a long term condition were the least likely to have used Patient Partner, with 38% (51) saying they have never used the system.

## Experiences of using Patient Partner

Participants who told us they had used Patient Partner, were then asked a series of questions about their experience.

As displayed in Figure 6, when respondents were asked what they use or have used Patient Partner for, the most common answer was to book a same day appointment (phoning the practice between 8am and 10am) (45%, 92). Around a third of respondents told us they used Patient Partner to book a routine appointment (35%, 71) and 27% (54) used it to order a repeat prescription. Only a minority of people (8%, 16) used the system to cancel an appointment.

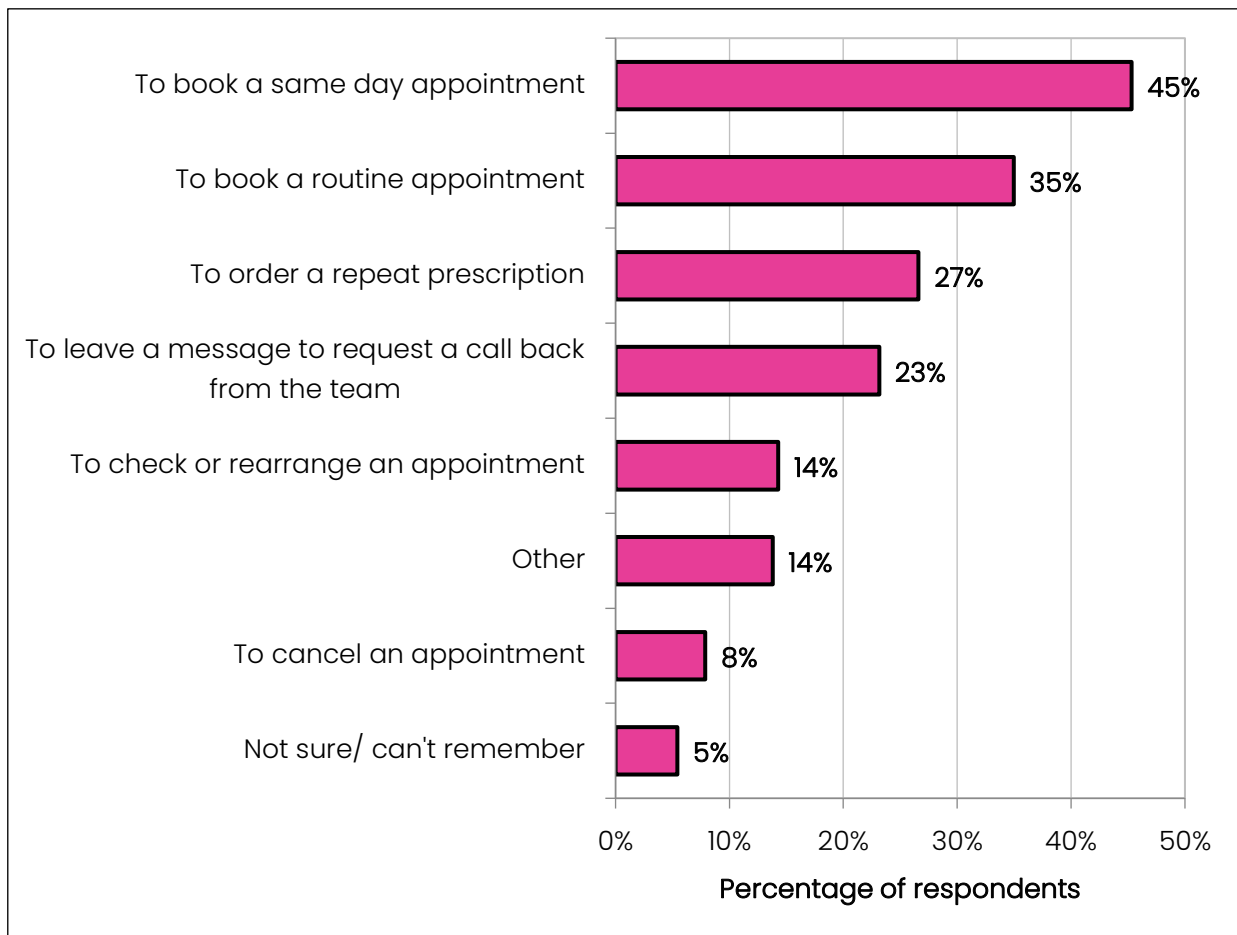


Figure 6. Responses to the question 'What did/ do you use Patient Partner (automated telephone system)?'. Respondents could select more than one option.

'Other' responses included answers such as using the system to speak to a receptionist and returning a call from the surgery. Comments include:

- *"I had a voicemail asking me to call the surgery back. I could not get through to anyone when I called back."*
- *"To speak to a receptionist"*
- *"To respond to a message left by staff"*

## Why people used Patient Partner

Participants were then asked why they used Patient Partner. Some people told us they used Patient Partner as they thought it would be easier or quicker to use. For example, one person told us they: *"Thought it would be easy but it wasn't"* whilst another said: *"I thought it would be more direct and save the receptionist time on the phone as well as resolving my query faster."*

However, many respondents told us they used Patient Partner as they thought it was their only option. This is a theme that runs throughout the survey with some respondents thinking they can no longer speak to a receptionist and that Patient Partner is their only choice when phoning the practice. This is illustrated in the comment below:



*"I just wanted to ask a question. Impossible to speak to a receptionist."*



Similarly, one participant told us they panicked and selected Patient Partner as they thought it was the only way to contact the practice. This is illustrated in the comment below:

*"Probably panicked and pressed button for patient partner thinking it was the only way to get through now. In hindsight should have listened better and would have then pressed to speak to the receptionist."*

Some participants told us they used Patient Partner as they could not get through or speak to a receptionist, with one patient commenting that they “cant get through to a receptionist ever!”. A few patients told us that they thought they had to use Patient Partner to contact the practice in the morning to get a same day appointment: “because you can not talk to a receptionist between 8-10”.

Some respondents also used this answer to comment that they have had bad experiences of using Patient Partner or found it difficult to use.

## Time taken to receive a response

Around two in five respondents told us they are usually dissatisfied with the time taken to receive a response from Patient Partner (43%, 86) (Figure 7). Around a third were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (32%, 65) and only a quarter of participants were satisfied (25%, 51) with the time taken to receive a response.

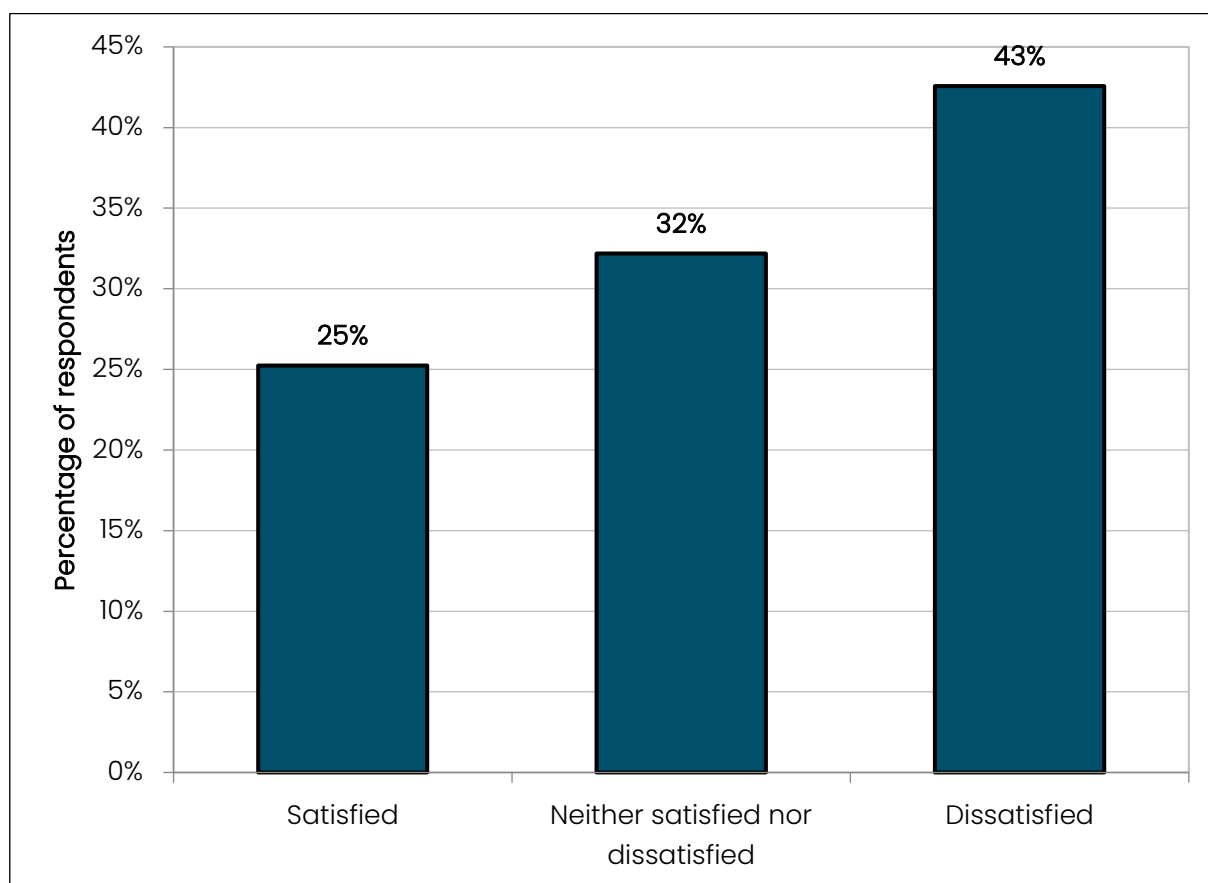


Figure 7. Responses to the question 'How satisfied are you usually with the time taken to receive a response?'



People with a disability were the least likely to be satisfied with the time taken to receive a response (17%, 4). There was little variation between male and female respondents, with women only slightly more likely (28%, 48) than men (26%, 27) to say they were satisfied with the time taken to receive a response from Patient Partner.

Respondents who used Patient Partner to order a repeat prescription were the most likely to be satisfied with the time taken to receive a response (41%, 22). The number of patients saying they are dissatisfied decreases with age from 100% (2) of 16-25 year olds down to just 18% (4) of respondents aged 76-85, before increasing amongst participants aged 86 and over (50%, 1).

## Overall experience of using Patient Partner

The majority of people rated their overall experience of using Patient Partner as 'bad' (60%, 121). Around a quarter rated it as 'neither good nor bad' (26%, 52) and only 14% (28) rated it as 'good'. This is displayed in Figure 8.

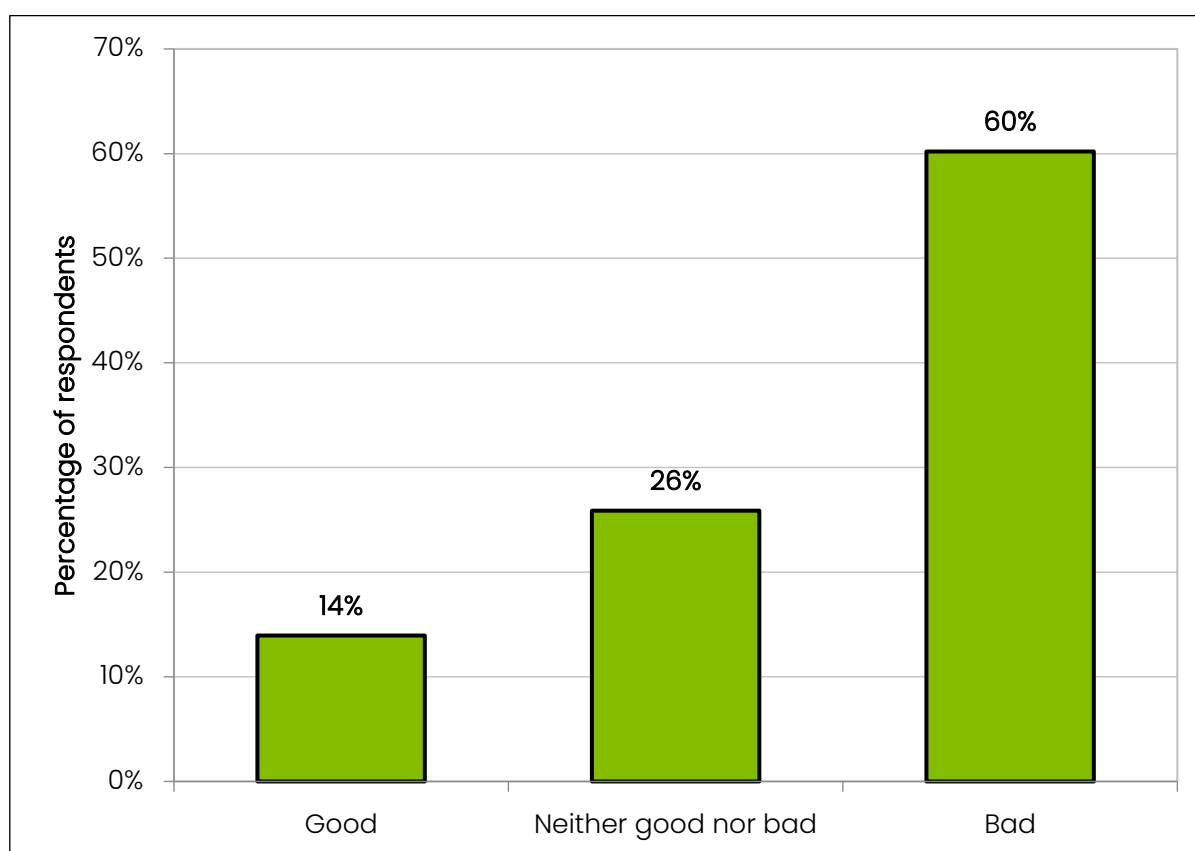


Figure 8. Responses to the question 'How would you rate your overall experience of Patient Partner (automated telephone system)?'

16-25 year olds were the most likely to describe their experience as bad (100%, 2), decreasing with age down to 23% (5) of 76-85 year olds, before increasing slightly amongst participants aged 86 and over (50%, 1).

People who used Patient Partner to check or rearrange an appointment were the most likely to rate their experience as bad (72%, 21), whereas people who used the system to order a repeat prescription (24%, 13) were most likely rate their experience as 'Good'.

As part of this question, respondents were asked to share further comments on why they had chosen their answer. Of respondents who rated their experience as 'bad' many mentioned having difficulties using the system, it not working properly and not receiving a response from the practice. Answers include:

- *"I've left messages in the past and not received a call back."*
- *"You have no way of knowing if and when your request has been looked at so I now just drive to the doctors so I can speak to a person"*
- *"The option you want is not a choice. Leave a message and not get a response."*

Similarly, one person told us:

*"It is a nightmare to go through the system, if you choose the 'wrong' option you have to go back through it again and there is no option to speak to someone"*

Some respondents who rated their experience as 'bad' commented that they could not speak to a person or that they prefer to speak to a receptionist. For example, one participant told us *"There was no way of speaking to a real person about the issues I wanted to discuss"*.

A few participants also told us that Patient Partner involved a long wait and that the option they wanted to select was not a choice on the system.

## What people like about Patient Partner

Only a minority of patients rated their experience of Patient Partner as 'good' (14%, 28). Of respondents who rated their experience of Patient Partner as 'good', a few mentioned that the system worked well for them and that it was efficient. For example, one patient told us: *"On the two occasions I used it I was called back in reasonable time and my issue was progressed"*, whilst another participant simply said: *"A breath of fresh air!"*

We asked respondents, what (if anything) they liked about Patient Partner. Only a minority of respondents gave positive feedback and mentioned how they like the speed of Patient Partner and the ease of use. One participant told us: *"When it works, it is very simple"*

A few patients mentioned that they liked 'Option 4', which suggests that there is some confusion over what Patient Partner is, as selecting 'Option 4' takes you to reception rather than the Patient Partner system. This suggests that some people may think they have used Patient Partner when they have not. This confusion is reflected in the comments below:

- *"Fairly speedy once option 4 is selected"*
- *"To be honest I'm not sure if what I used before was PP or not. I just pressed 4 in order to talk to someone."*
- *"The more of these questions I answer the more confused I am as to whether I did actually use it. I used the telephone service but didn't realise it was called PP"*

However, most people told us there was nothing they liked about the system. One patient mentioned the problems they have encountered with the system: *"Nothing. I wasted a lot of time trying to use it for a repeat prescription"*, whilst another told us they would prefer to speak to a receptionist instead: *"Nothing. I would have rather spoken to a receptionist"*.

## Improving Patient Partner

Respondents were asked what they think could improve Patient Partner (Figure 9). The most common answer to this question was the 'other' option, where answers included getting rid of Patient Partner, being able to speak a human and if the system worked. Some patients specifically asked for Patient Partner to be replaced with receptionists. This is illustrated in the comments below:

- *"Get rid of it. Employ a receptionist"*
- *"Actually work instead cutting me off."*
- *"Get rid of it and go back to you the receptionists"*
- *"Just let me speak to a human"*

Three in ten respondents told us that Patient Partner could be improved if it was easier to use (29%, 56) and 18% (34) of respondents would like more guidance on how to use it.

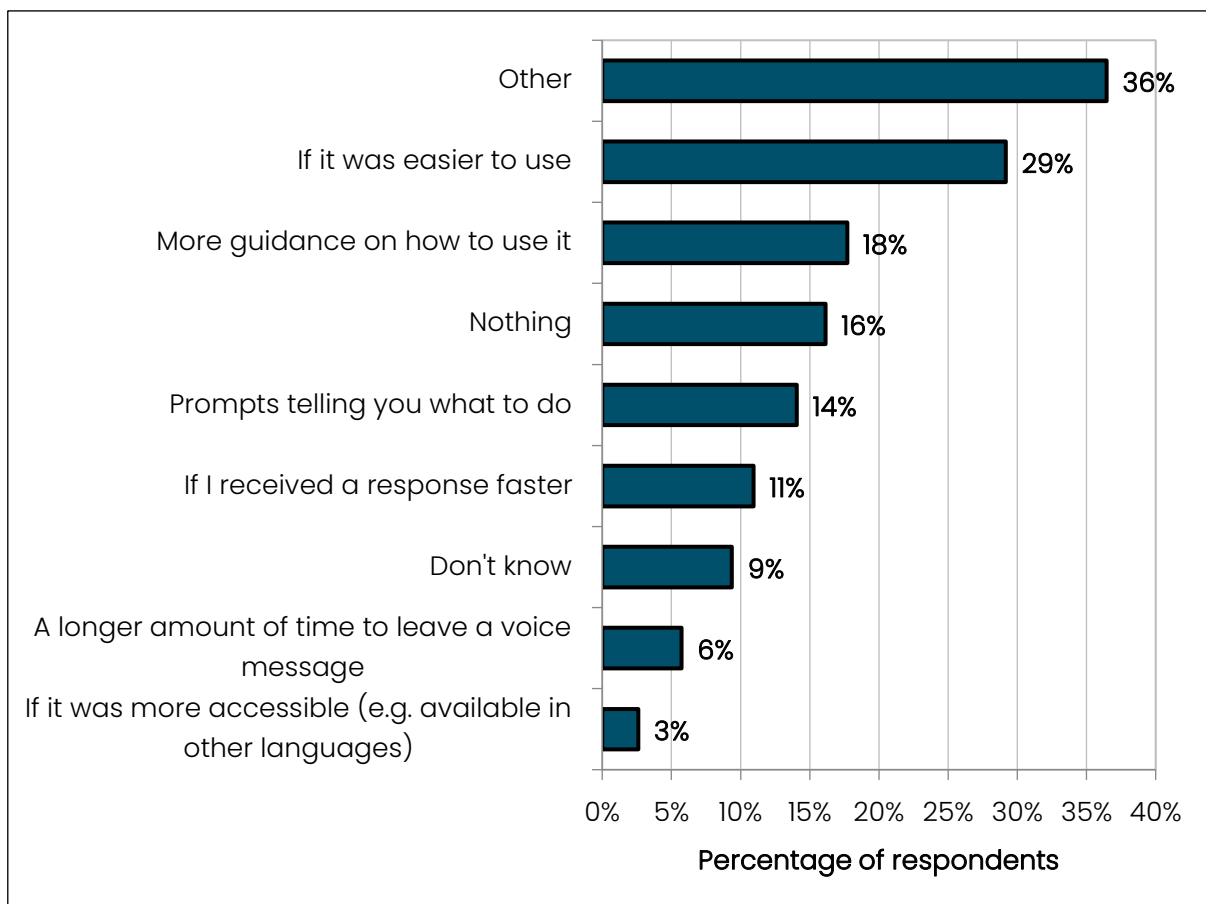


Figure 9. Responses to the question 'Is there anything you think could improve Patient Partner (automated telephone system)?'. Respondents could select more than one option.

## Would you use Patient Partner again?

Almost half of respondents told us they would use Patient Partner again (47%, 89), 37% (70) told us they would not use the system again and 16% (30) were unsure (Figure 10).

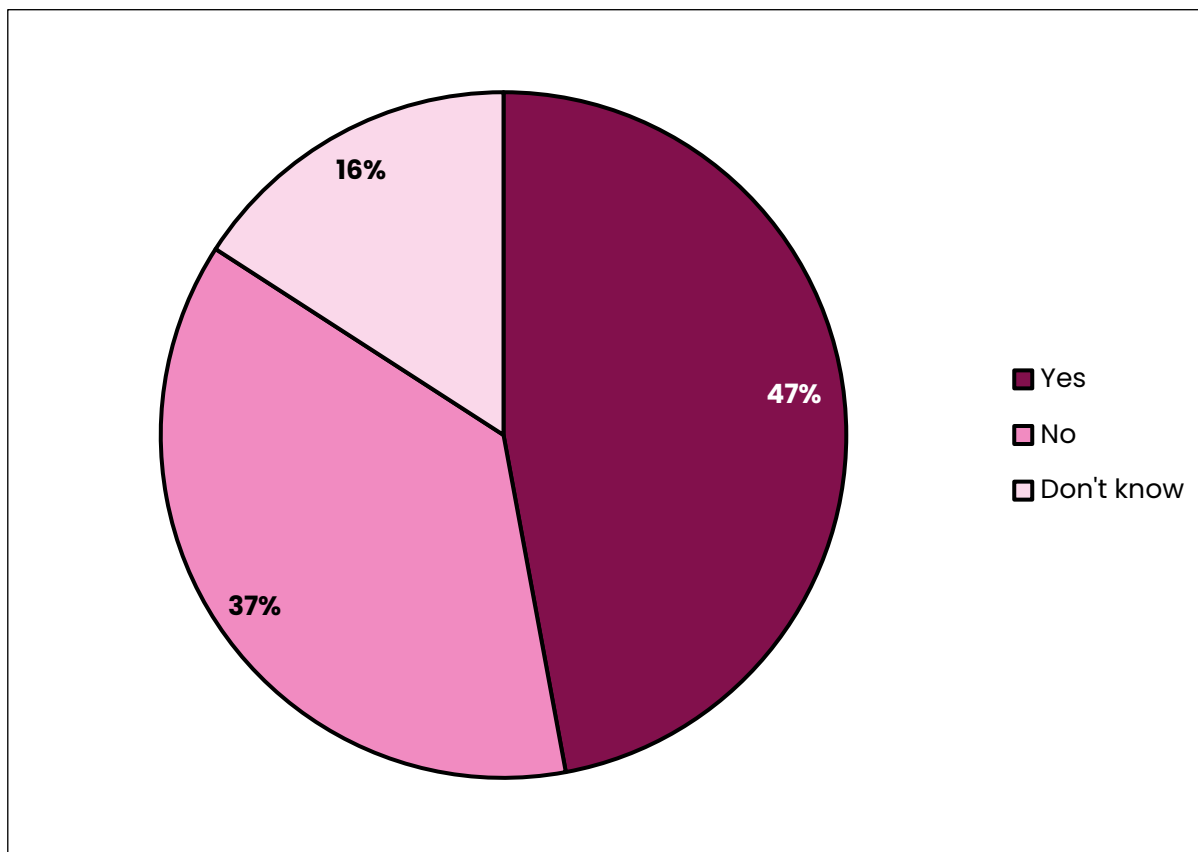


Figure 10. Responses to the question 'Would you use Patient Partner again?'

However, when respondents were asked to give further detail on why they had chosen their answer, many respondents who told us they would only use Patient Partner again because they have no choice, with many believing that the system is their only option. This is illustrated in the comments below:

- *"Only because I have no choice, I'm automatically connected to it when I call the surgery."*
- *"It's either that or online so I'm left with using the automated calling system"*
- *"Is there any other option? Don't seem to be able to speak to a receptionist. Whole thing very frustrating & I dread having to use it again."*

A few respondents told us they would use the system again because it works well for them and can be useful when it is busy. One respondent explained they would use Patient Partner again *“As it was a speedy service to use”* whilst another commented *“Superb service, I could detail my issues surgery got back to me so quickly, felt I wasn't wasting their valuable time”*.

Respondents who said they would not use Patient Partner again, gave reasons such as the system not working properly and it being difficult to use. This is reflected in the comments below:

- *“It failed me at every level and necessitated me having to travel 5 miles to the surgery despite being disabled.”*
- *“I could not get the dispensary. All I got was would I like to change an appointment or change my PIN number.”*
- *“Useless when your reason for contacting the practice does not fit their script!”*

Similarly, one patient highlighted that they do not want to have to use a complicated phone system when feeling unwell:



*Because it doesn't work. When you are poorly the last thing you need is a complicated phone system.*



Many respondents also mentioned that they would not use Patient Partner again as they prefer to talk to a receptionist. One patient specifically mentioned that they prefer to speak to a receptionist as they find it more reassuring when they are ill. For example:

*“Because of lack of certainty. If you're ill or need medication it's reassuring to speak to someone to know what's happening. Also, working full time it's better to be able to just book with a person for availability.”*

A few patients also commented that Patient Partner is impersonal. For example, one participant told us *“The system is impersonal & takes the care out of healthcare”*.

## Patient Partner compared to other methods

The majority of respondents told us the system was worse than other methods they have used to contact the practice (68%, 134). Around a quarter of respondents (24%, 48) told us it was about the same and only 8% (16) said it was better than other methods they have used. This is shown in Figure 11.

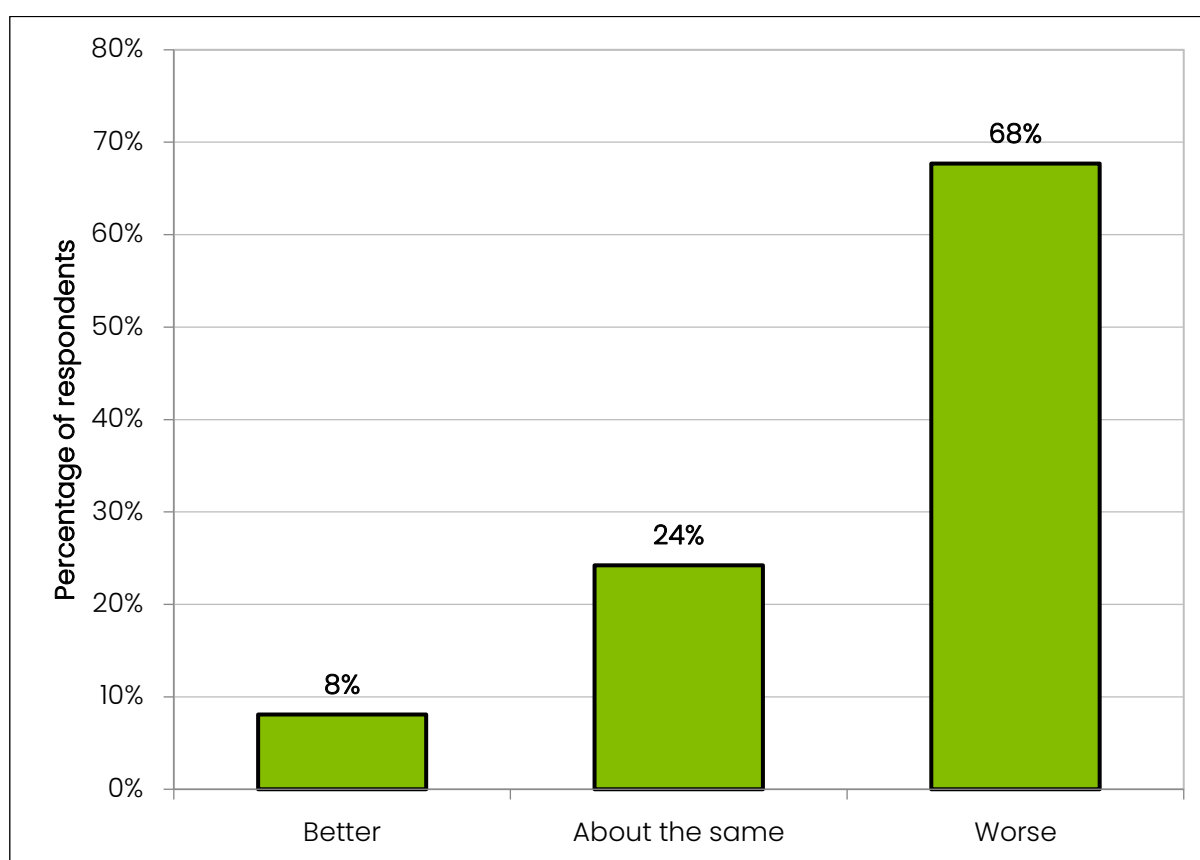


Figure 11. Responses to the question 'Compared to other methods you have used to contact the practice (e.g. online, in-person or on the phone), how would you rate Patient Partner?'

The number of participants saying Patient Partner is worse than other methods, varies across the age range, peaking amongst 82% (9) of 26–35 year olds.

When asked to give reasons for their answers, those who said Patient Partner was 'worse' commented that the system was difficult to use and that they cannot speak to a receptionist and that they prefer to speak to a person. One

respondent told us that even though contacting reception may take longer than Patient Partner, the end result is better. This is illustrated in the following comment:

*“The previous system of contacting reception, even though it may take longer, produced a more satisfactory result.”*

A few respondents also told us that the system didn't work, it takes too long (to listen to all the options or trying to use it) and that Patient Partner did not have the options they wanted. For example, one patient told us *“The instructions were far too lengthy to follow and make you want to give up”* whilst another said *“The options I wanted weren't available. Left me feeling frustrated”*.

## **Barriers to using Patient Partner**

Respondents who told us they have not used Patient Partner, were then asked a series of questions asking about any barriers to access.

We asked participants why they have not used Patient Partner. Over half of respondents told us they have not used Patient Partner as they prefer to speak to a receptionist (54%, 60). Respondents with a disability were the most likely to say this (47%, 7). This is illustrated in the comments below:

- *“When ill and in need of a clinician's help, it is important to me to have an instant response from a human voice rather than have to wait for an automated response to operate, if it works.”*
- *“Because speaking to a human is always more reassuring.”*
- *“It's very frustrating not being able to speak to a person when you are not feeling your best”*

Three in ten people (30%, 33) chose the 'other' option, where answers included not contacting the practice since Patient Partner has been used and not needing to use the system. For example, one respondent told us they *“Haven't tried to contact the practice recently”*. Some participants also used this space to say they prefer to speak to a receptionist.



Some participants mentioned that they do not have the time to use Patient Partner, as it takes too long to use. This is illustrated in the following comment: *“It takes far too long using recorded messages and keying in numbers – it is always far better to speak to an actual human being”*.

A quarter of participants (25%, 28) told us they were not aware of Patient Partner (Figure 12), with people who usually contact the practice online, the most likely to say this (23%, 9).

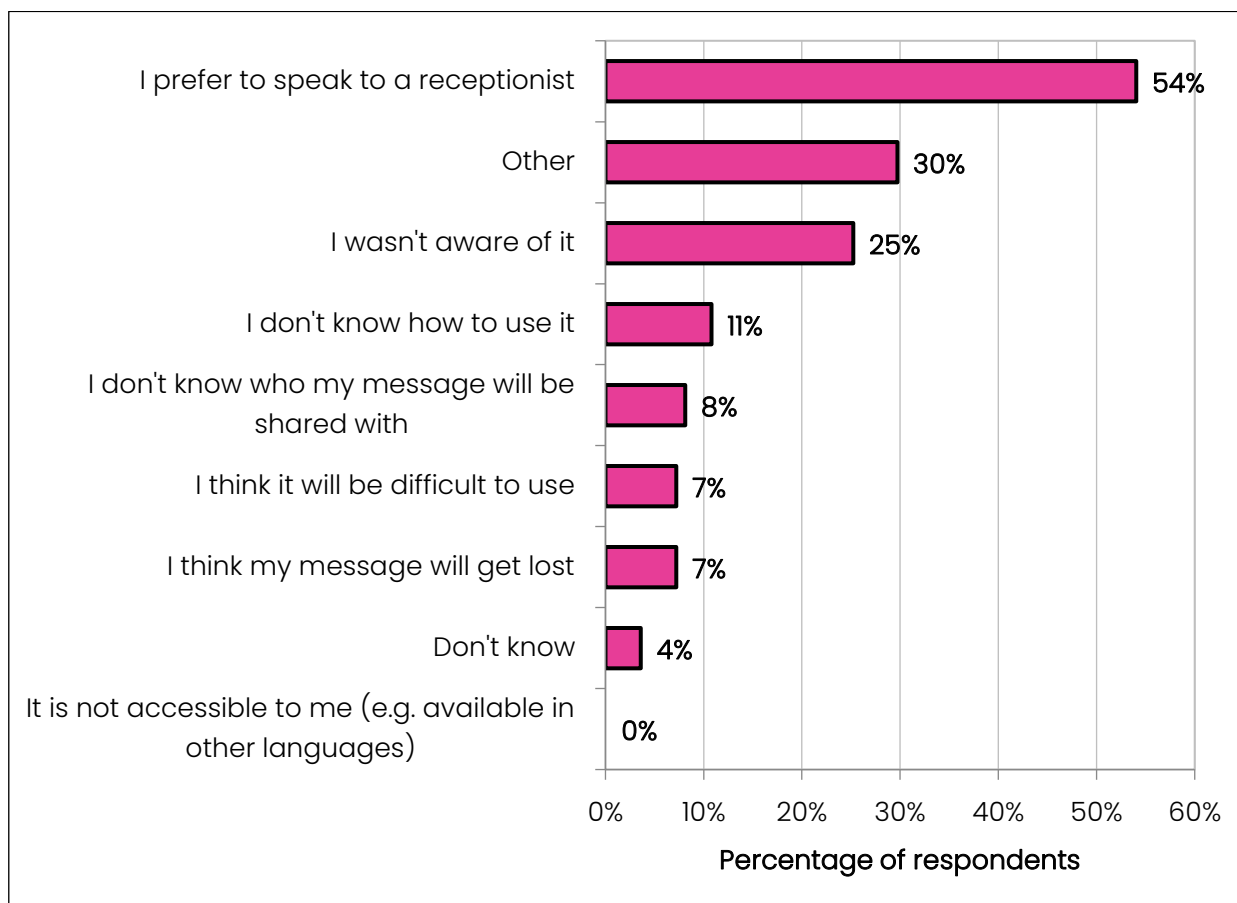


Figure 12. Responses to the question 'Why have you not used Patient Partner?'. Respondents could select more than one option.

## Is there anything that would make patients more likely to use Patient Partner?

When asked whether there is anything that would make them more likely to use Patient Partner, giving respondents a series of options to choose from. The most popular response was 'More guidance on how to use it' (27%, 31). Respondents who usually contact the practice online were the most likely to say this (27% 9) (Figure 13).

A quarter of respondents (24%, 28) chose 'other' in response, stating they would use Patient Partner if they needed to. For example, one person told us: "Yes when the need arises then I shall use it." A few people also used the 'other' option to comment that they prefer to speak to a person or use email instead.

People with a disability were the most likely to say that more guidance on how to use it would make them more likely to use Patient Partner (36%, 4), although they were also the most likely to say that would never use Patient Partner (27%, 3).

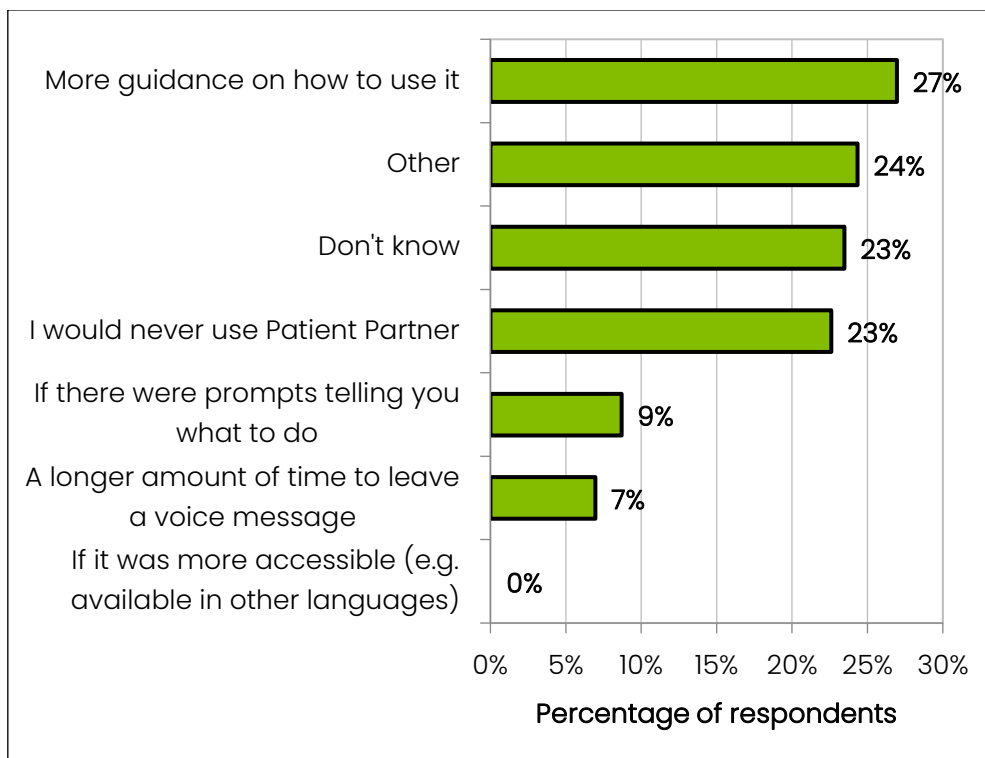


Figure 13. Responses to the question 'Is there anything that would make you more likely to use Patient Partner (automated telephone system)?'. Respondents could select more than one option.

## Methods used to contact the practice

We wanted to understand how patients usually contacted the practice and their experience of waiting to receive a response when they did contact the practice. Half of respondents mostly do this by phoning and speaking to a receptionist (50%, 61). Three in ten respondents mostly contact the practice online (29%, 36) and 12% (15) visit the practice in person. Answers to the 'other' option include phone, email and turning up to the practice in person (Figure 14).

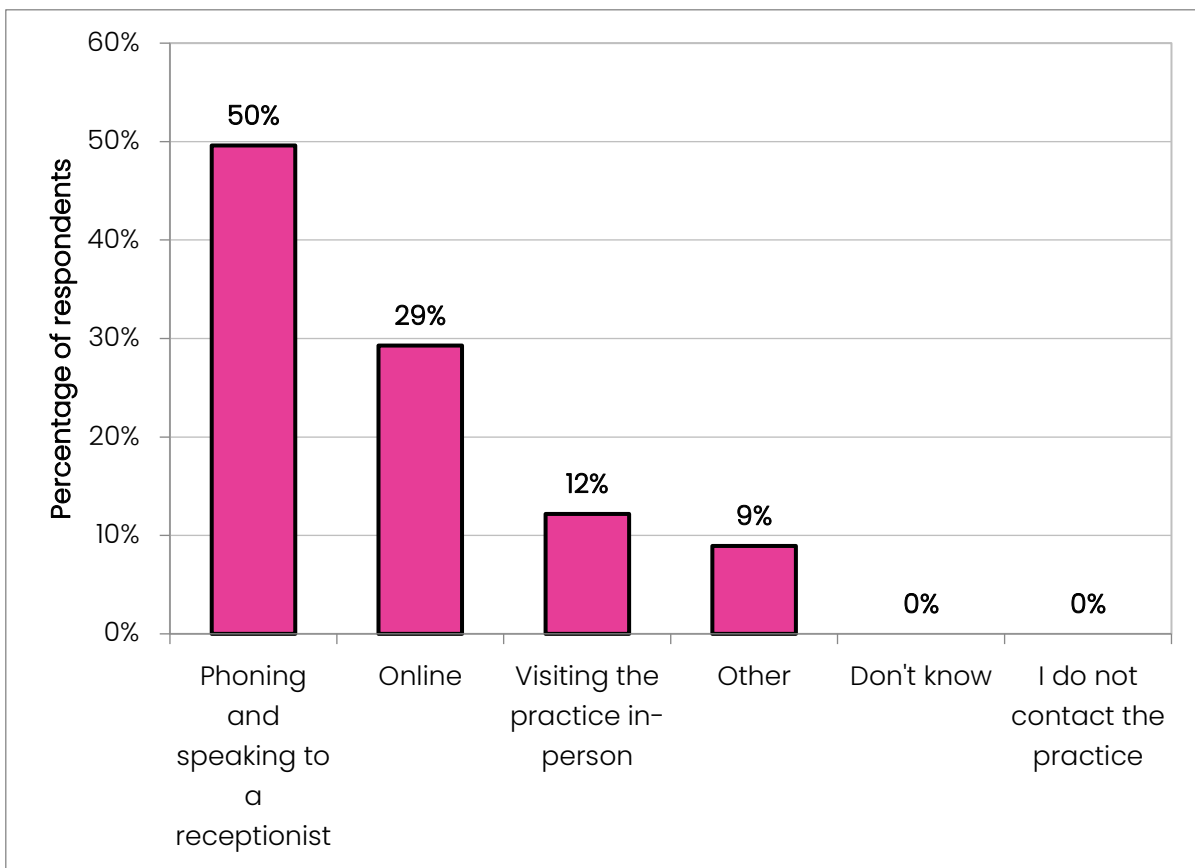


Figure 14. Responses to the question 'What method do you use most often to contact the practice?'

## Time taken to receive a response

As Figure 15 displays, less than half of respondents are usually satisfied with the time taken to receive a response from the practice (46%, 56) when using methods other than Patient Partner (e.g. online, speaking to a receptionist, visiting the practice in-person etc). Around one in three patients are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (34%, 41) with the time taken to receive a response and one in five are dissatisfied (20%, 24).

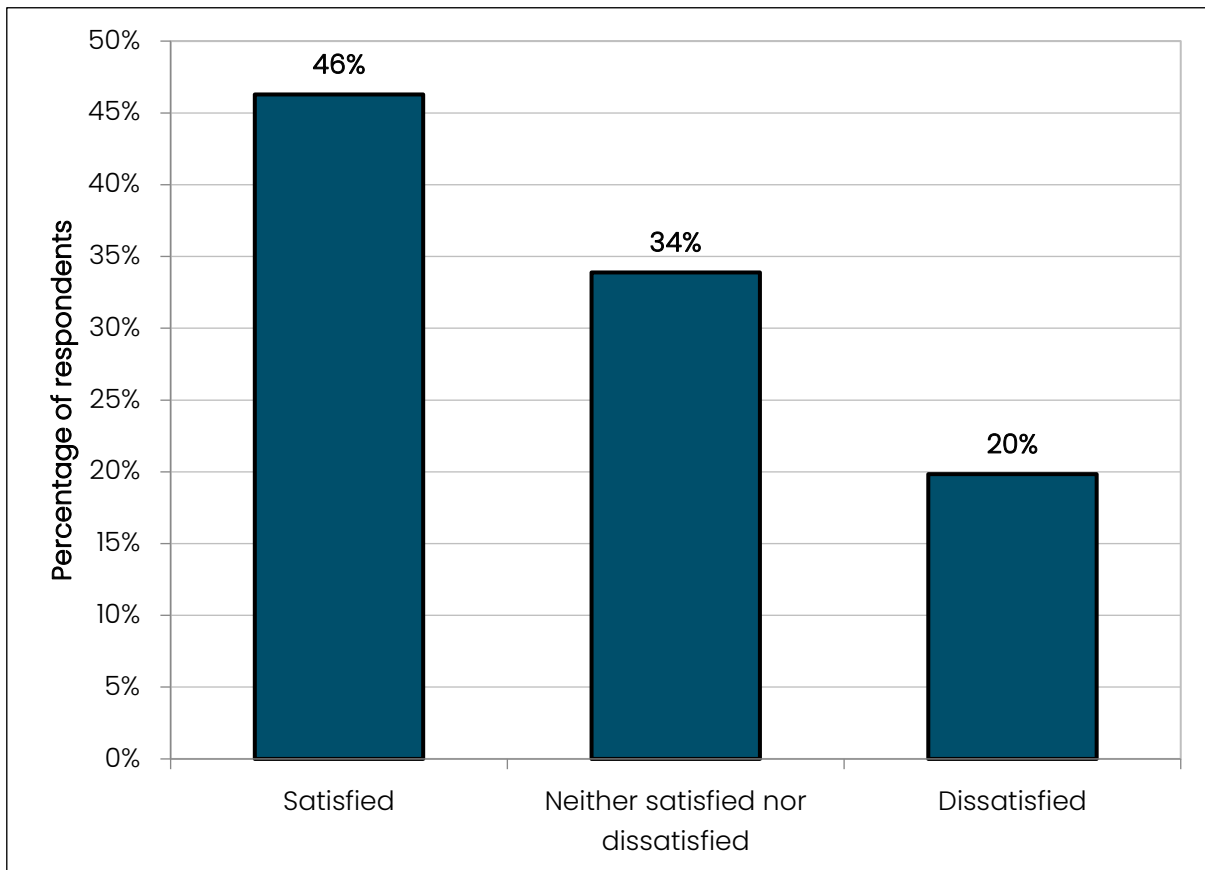


Figure 15. Responses to the question 'How satisfied are you usually with the time taken to receive a response?'

Respondents who usually contact the practice online, were most likely to say they were satisfied (68%, 24) compared to 43% (26) who phone and speak to a receptionist and 33% (5) who visit the practice in-person.

Overall, respondents who have used Patient Partner are the least likely to be satisfied with the time taken to receive a response, when compared to other methods. This is displayed in Figure 16.

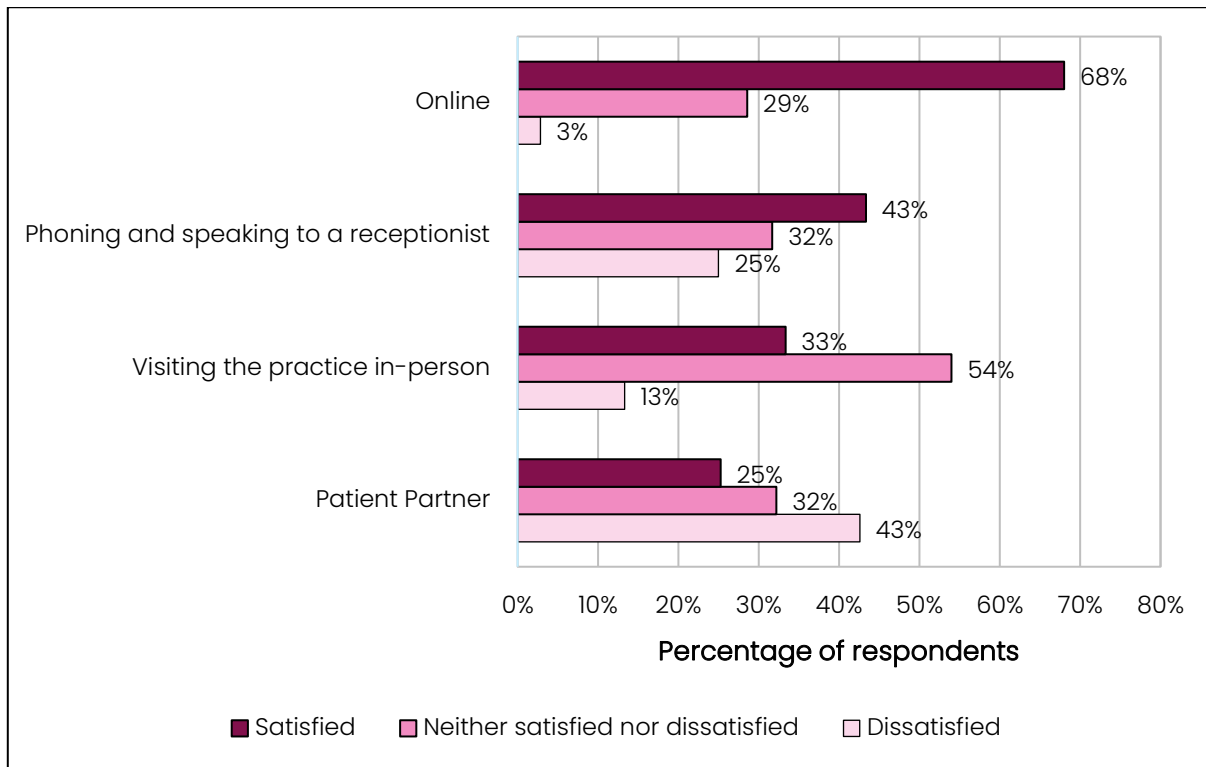


Figure 16. Responses to the question 'How satisfied are you usually with the time taken to receive a response'. Comparison between different methods of contacting the practice.

## What patients would use Patient Partner for

All respondents were asked, if they were to use Patient Partner, what they would use it for. Half of respondents told us they would use Patient Partner to book a same day appointment (50%, 169). Two in five respondents told us they would use Patient Partner to book a routine appointment (40%, 134) and 30% (102) would use it to request a call back from the team (Figure 17).

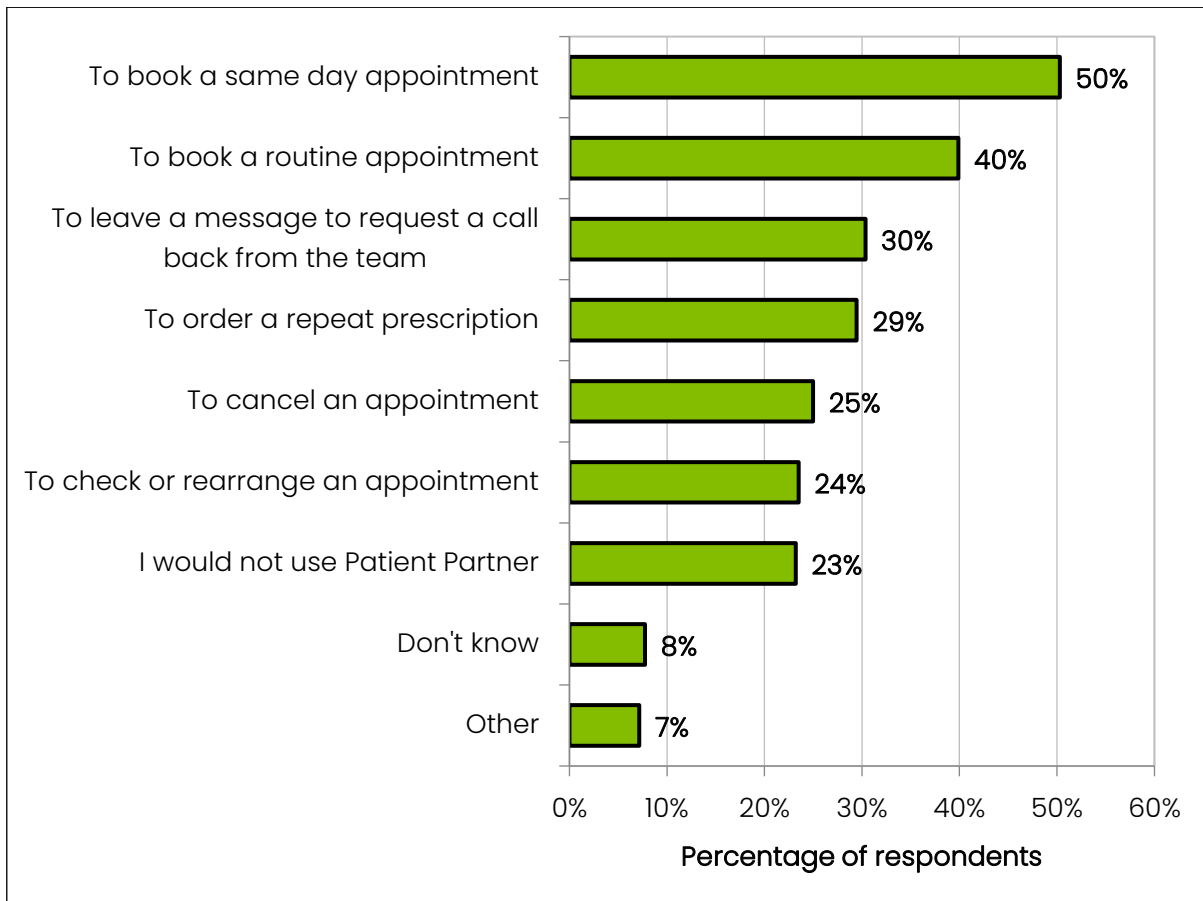


Figure 17. Responses to the question 'If you were to use Patient Partner, what would you use Patient Partner for?'. Respondents could select more than one option.

Overall, there is little variation between respondents who have used Patient Partner and those that have not. Respondents who have previously used the system were more likely to say they would use it to order a repeat prescription (14%, 61) or that they would not use the system (12%, 51). Those respondents who have not used Patient Partner before, were more likely to say they would use it to book a routine appointment (19%, 56) and check or rearrange an appointment (12%, 36).

## Other comments

We asked survey respondents, if they had anything else they would like to tell us about Patient Partner. Most comments covered themes already mentioned, such as the system not working well, it being difficult to use and patients wanting to speak to a person instead. A few respondents were also confused between Patient Partner and PATCHS.

Some participants raised concerns for other patients who may find the system difficult to use, with a few specifically mentioning elderly patients. For example, one participant told us *“I think elderly, vulnerable patients would find it difficult to use and deter them from seeking medical help”*.

A few respondents also mentioned improvements that could be made to Patient Partner, with one patient commenting that it *“needs to be simplified drastically”* whilst another said, *“Make sure the option to speak to someone is clear as this hasn’t always been the case and there are always problems that don’t fit into a neat box”*.

Some participants also used the space to express their dislike of the system and ask the practice to get rid of it.

## Feedback from staff at the practice

Additionally, we asked staff at the practice a series of questions about whether they think patients are aware of Patient Partner, what more staff could do to promote Patient Partner and whether it helps them in their role. This allowed a comparison to be made between staff and patient responses, which helped us to gain a greater insight into both patient and staff experiences of Patient Partner.

Around half of staff who answered our survey told us they thought patients know what Patient Partner is (53%, 8), compared to 20% (3) who did not think patients know what Patient Partner is. Around three in ten staff were unsure (27%, 4). This is displayed in Figure 18.

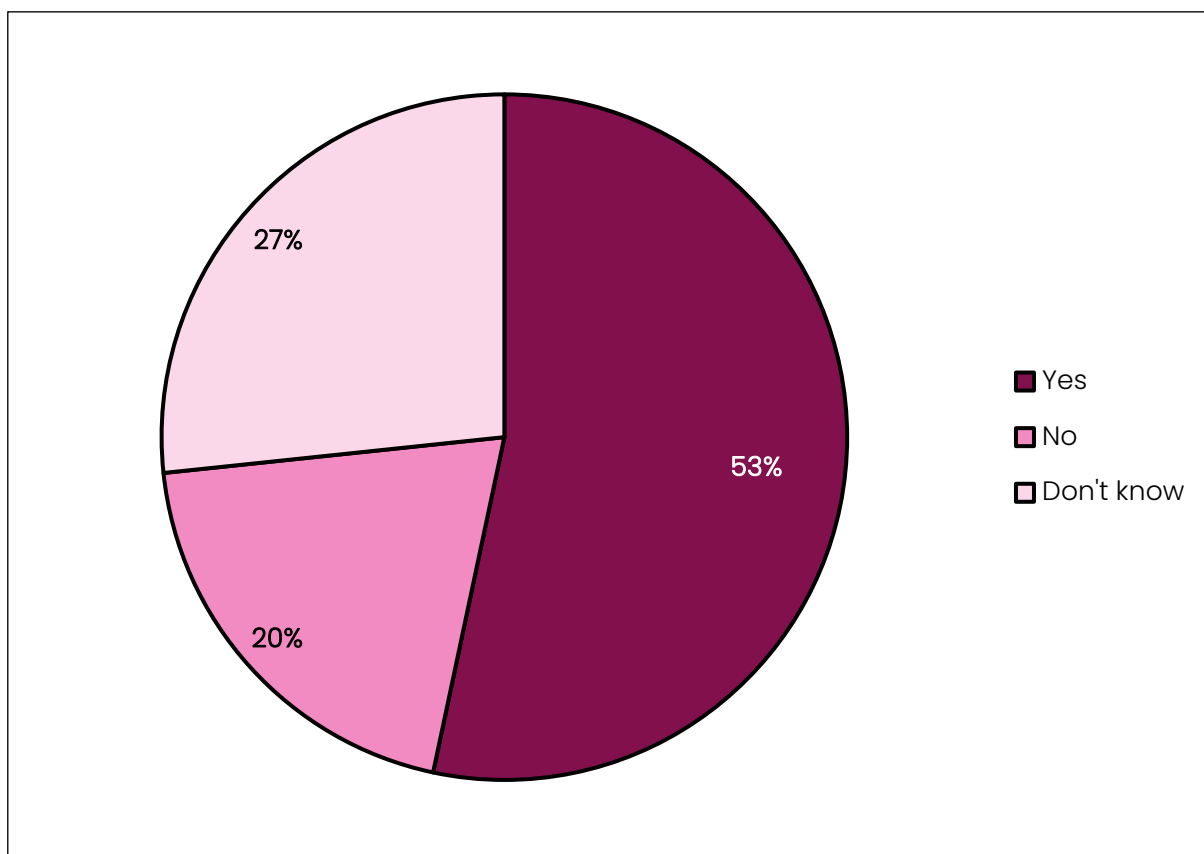


Figure 18. Responses to the question 'Do you think patients know what Patient Partner is?'

One staff member commented that they think patients know what Patient Partner is because *"Patients use the system and it was promoted well"*, whilst another added *"I think patients know what the service is but don't want to use it or doesn't listen to the options properly and then the message hasn't gone through"*.



Most staff told us they were unsure if patients know how to use Patient Partner (53%, 8), 27% (4) told us they think patients know how to use Patient Partner and 20% (3) did not think patients know how to use the system (Figure 19).

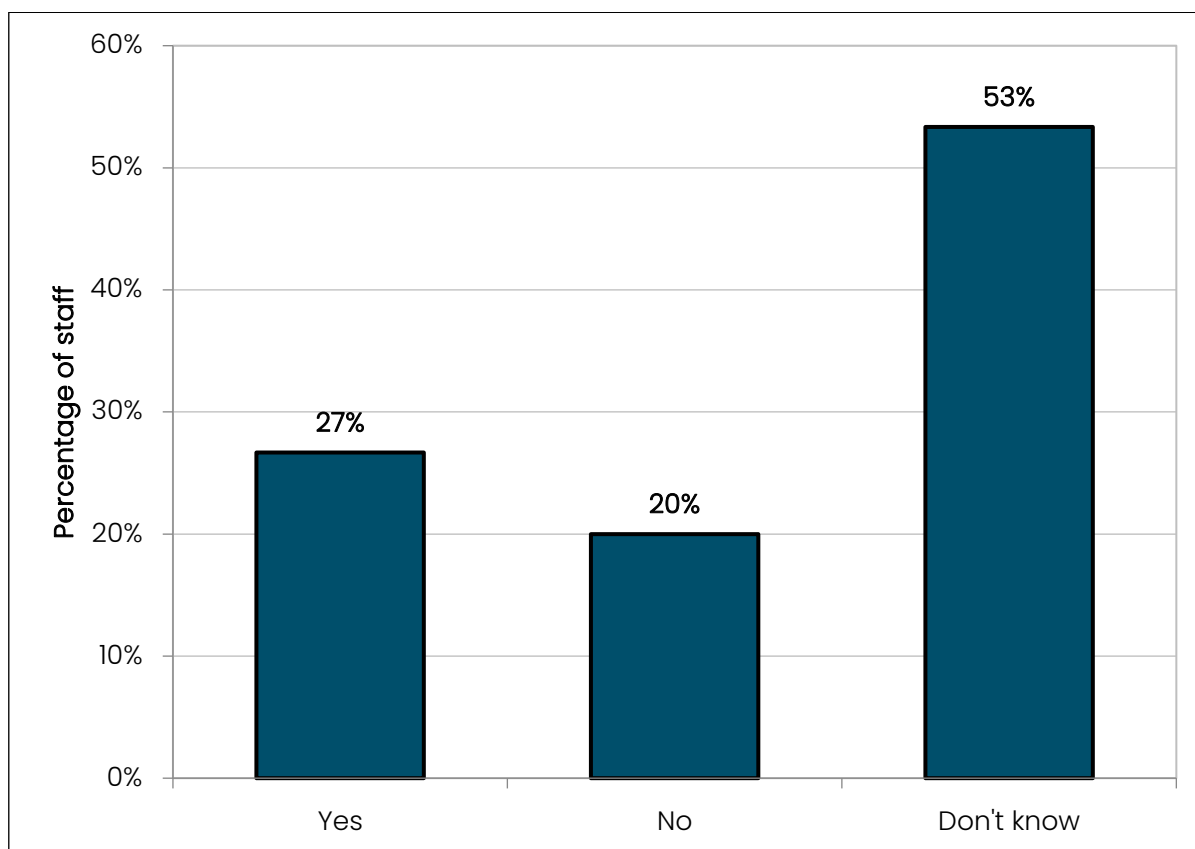


Figure 19. Responses to the question 'Do you think patients know how to use Patient Partner?'

One member of staff commented that whilst some patients know how to use Patient Partner others struggle with it. This is illustrated in the comment below:

*"I dont think they understand how it works so cant really uses it properly . I think they just know to ring for triage during 8-10am. They are only concerned about getting appt or whatever they want and dont want to have to think about how to use the phone system"*

## Why the practice uses Patient Partner

The majority of staff do not think patients know why the practice uses Patient Partner (60%, 9). One in five staff told us that patients did know why the practice uses Patient Partner (20%,3) and some were unsure (20%, 3) (Figure 20).

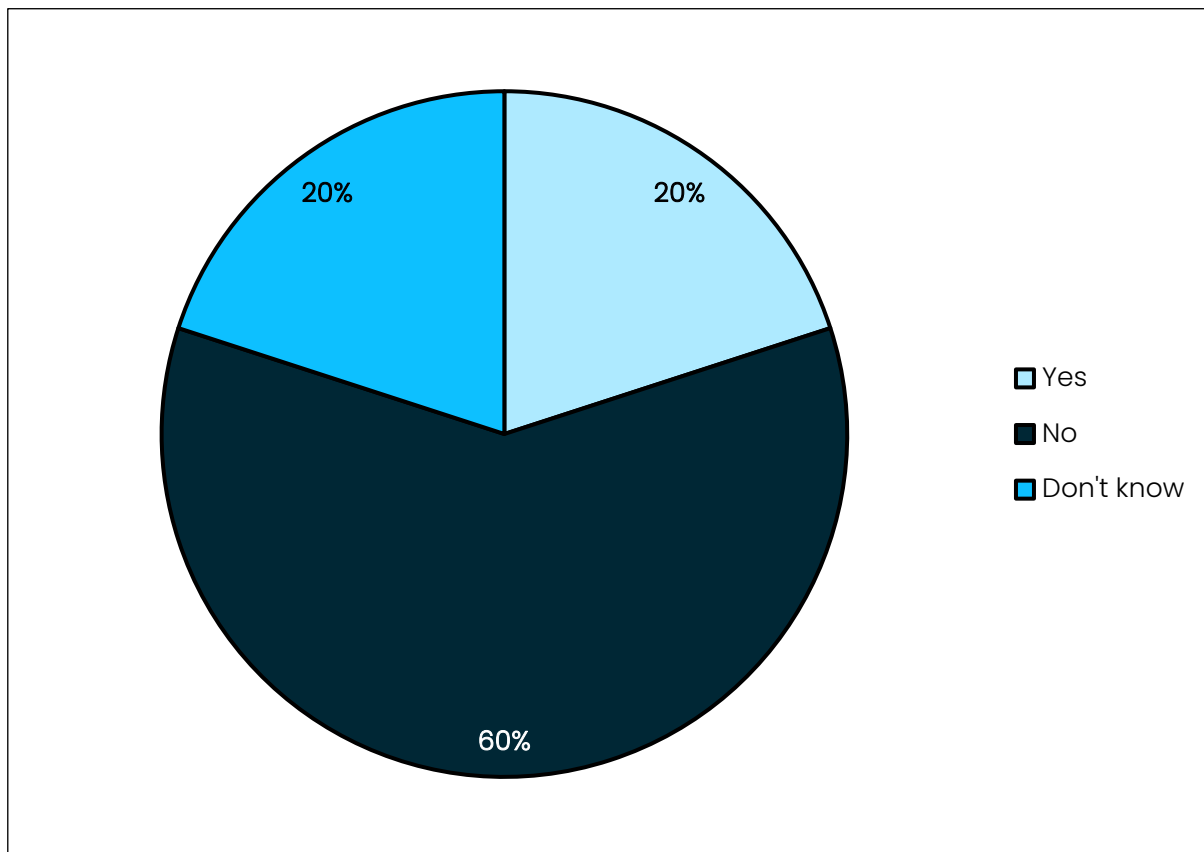


Figure 20. Responses to the question 'Do you think patients know why the practice uses Patient Partner?'

One staff member told us that they also didn't know why the practice uses the system, whilst another said "a lot of patients think its to replace receptionist".

## Patient Benefits

We asked staff whether they think patients know what the benefits of Patient Partner are. As Figure 21 displays, most staff do not think patients know what the benefits of Patient Partner are (67%, 10), compared to 20% (3) who think patients do know the benefits and 13% (2) who were unsure.

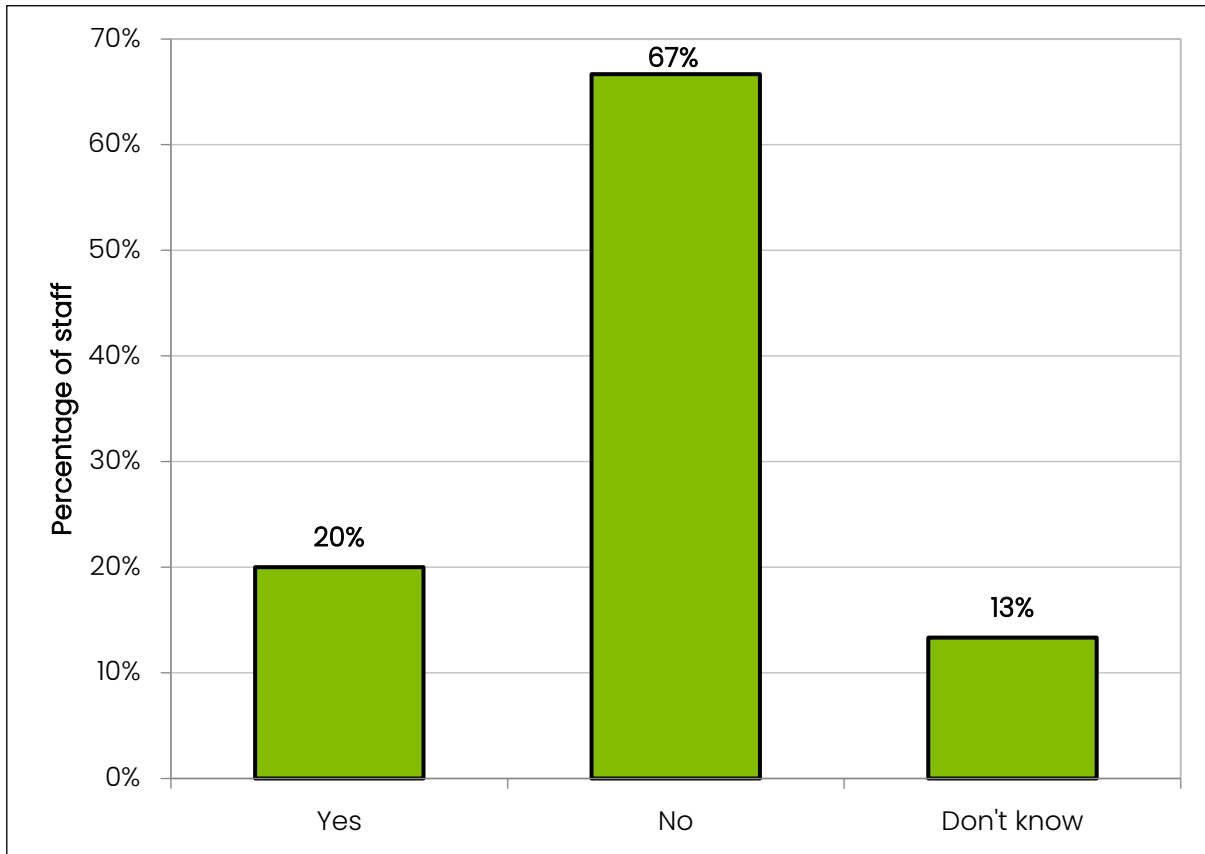


Figure 21. Responses to the question 'Do you think patients know what the benefits of Patient Partner are?'

As part of this question, staff were asked to share further comments on why they had chosen their answer. One staff member commented that *“Patients think its to benefit us rather than them.”* Whilst another added:

*“Again some do and some don’t, most patients just go straight to anger over it and come to front desk or go on the phones saying it doesn’t work and its useless and they can never speak to a human but they can”*

## Promotion of Patient Partner

The majority of staff told us they promote Patient Partner to patients, with 87% (13) saying they promote the system to patients compared to only 13% (2) who told us they do not promote it to patients (Figure 22).

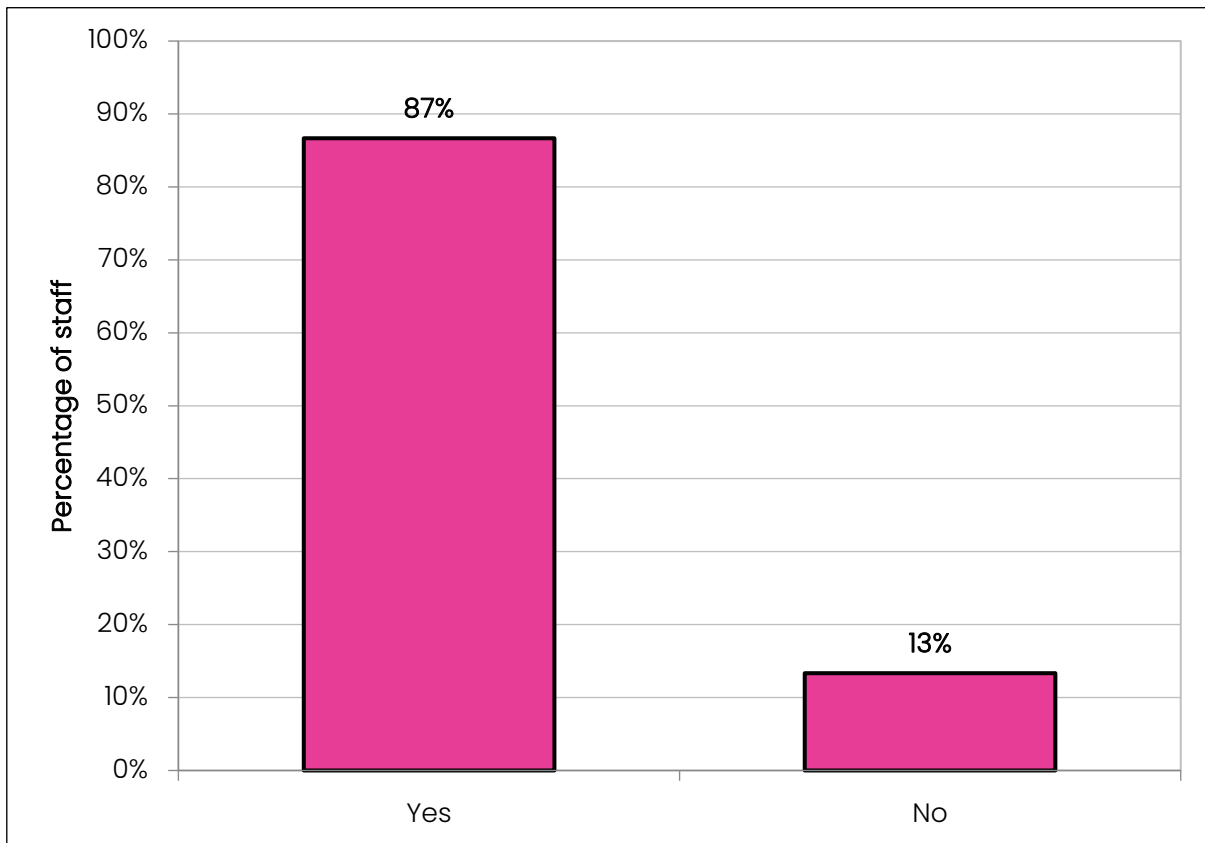


Figure 22. Responses to the question 'Do you promote Patient Partner to patients?'

When asked how they promote the system to patients, there were a variety of answers including posters, email, letters and SMS. Some staff members also told us how they try to explain the system to patients. This is illustrated in the comments below:

- *"I try to explain how to do this and how it works but patients say they want to speak to a real person"*
- *"We try to encourage patients to use this but they say it doesn't work and end up coming into the surgery or selection other options to speak to reception"*
- *"By encouraging them to listen carefully and advising that it is meant to save them waiting in a long call queue. Advising that if they leave a message we will get back to them as soon as we are able"*

## Promoting Patient Partner more to patients

When asked if there is anything they think would help them to promote Patient Partner more to patients, there were a range of answers. Some staff told us was nothing else more they could do, whilst others thought the system could be promoted more. One member of staff suggested that Patient Partner needs to be promoted alongside other methods to help patients distinguish between them. Whilst another added that the good points of Patient Partner should be promoted more.

## Does Patient Partner help you in your role?

More staff do not think Patient Partner helps them in their role (60%, 9) than those who do think it helps them (40% 6). This is displayed in Figure 23.

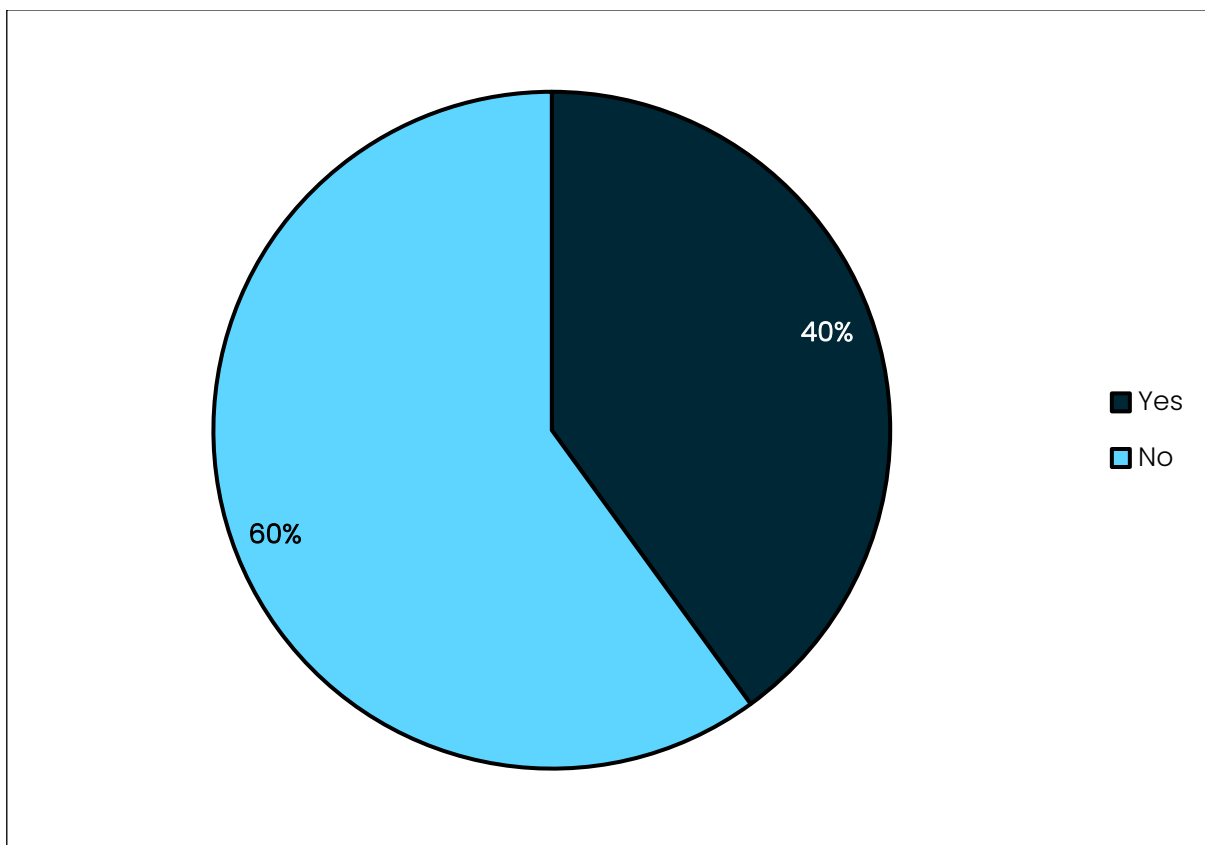


Figure 23. Responses to the question 'Does Patient Partner help you in your role?'

When asked to give further comments on why they had chosen their answer, some staff mentioned how Patient Partner can sometimes create more work for them. This is illustrated in the following comment:

*“sometimes it causes more work for us, with the patients coming into front desk and arguing with us at front desk or on the phones. or if there are only a limited amount of receptionist on we forget to look at patient partner throughout the day.”*

However, one staff member told us that using Patient Partner makes it quicker and easier to triage patients and reduces the call wait times for patients who do not use patient partner, resulting in less confrontation from patients about call wait times.

## **Improving the uptake of Patient Partner**

When asked if there is anything they think could be done to improve the uptake of Patient Partner amongst patients, there were a variety of answers. One staff member told us there was nothing more that could be done, whereas others mentioned that there needs to be a better understanding of the system amongst patients. For example, one staff member commented:

*“Just better understanding and problem solving ie when the patient try [sic] to use it but they get stuck in a loop which keeps taking them back to the start menu, also some people have reported that it will not accept their DOB even though they have used it previously”*

We also asked staff if there is anything else they would like to say about Patient Partner. One member of staff told us it has both pro's and con's, but overall there are more negatives than positives:



*It has its pro's and con's like everything, some patients find it really helpful and some dont and slate it all the time, we have more negatives then positives*



# What this means

There are some limitations to our sample size and who responded to the survey, therefore the responses may not be fully representative of the wider patient or staff population at Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice. We have based our analysis and recommendations on the responses that have been received.

Awareness of Patient Partner could be improved. Whilst most patients were aware that the practice uses an automated telephone system (Patient Partner), many patients only became aware of the system when phoning the practice and are unaware of why the practice uses Patient Partner. Patients are also concerned that Patient Partner is replacing receptionists and think that Patient Partner is the only way they can contact the practice. Despite most staff saying they promote the system to patients; some patients may not have received communication about the system as many were unaware of Patient Partner and why it is being used. The practice should take this into consideration when making changes and how they communicate this with their patients. The practice should also check with patients that messages are getting through to them.

Patient Partner is not benefitting patients or staff as much as it should be. One of the key benefits of Patient Partner is to save patients time waiting on the phone and help to ease pressure on receptionists. However, patients are more dissatisfied with the time taken to receive a response from Patient Partner than other methods of contacting the practice (e.g. talking to a receptionist, going online etc) and most staff told us that Patient Partner does not help them in their role. Only a few patients rated their experience of Patient Partner as good and told us they received a response quicker than other methods. This suggests that patients may be more satisfied if calls went through a receptionist rather than Patient Partner.

In addition, patients find it difficult to use Patient Partner and do not always receive a response. Staff could receive computer prompts telling them to check and respond to Patient Partner, to ensure that they respond to patients. Patients could also receive a confirmation message saying their message has been received. Patient Partner is not patients preferred choice, with many only using the system as they thought it was their only option. There is some resistance towards the system, with some patients not wanting to find out more about Patient Partner and a lot preferring to speak to a receptionist instead. This may

be because they haven't experienced many of the benefits of Patient Partner, so may be unaware of these. Most staff also thought patients are unaware of the benefits of Patient Partner. This suggests that if patients are given more guidance on how to use the system, they could better understand the benefits of the system and continue to use it. This could help to improve the uptake of the system.

Overall, the findings of this report suggest that Patient Partner is not benefitting patients or staff as much as it should be. There is a need for the practice to explore other options which may be more beneficial to patients and staff.



# Recommendations

From the findings of this piece of work, the following recommendation can be made:

1. Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice should explore other options which may be more beneficial to patients and help to ease pressure on receptionists and reduce the call queue. For example, one GP practice shortened their introductory phone message to reduce the length of time patients are on the phone and reduce patient frustration. They also asked senior members of secretarial and management staff to also answer calls at the busiest times and recruited more admin staff (Grange Medical Practice, 2022).

If the practice decides to introduce a new system or alternative method for contacting the practice in the future, the following recommendations can be made, based on the findings of this work:

1. Consult with patients before introducing new systems to find out what patients want from a system.
2. Communicate to patients that the new system is an added option and reassure them that they can still speak to a receptionist. Ensure that it is clear to patients what option they need to select to speak to a receptionist.
3. Give patients more guidance on how to use future systems before they are introduced and ensure that systems are easy to use.

If the practice decides to keep Patient Partner, the following recommendations can be made, based on the findings of this work:

1. When patients first get through to Patient Partner, before asking for their date of birth add a short explanation of why the practice is using Patient Partner and how the system works.
2. Communicate to patients that Patient Partner is an added option and reassure them that they can still speak to a receptionist. Ensure that it is clear to patients what option they need to select to speak to a receptionist.
3. Give more guidance to patients on how to use Patient Partner and consult with patients to see whether this guidance is reaching them and if they

understand it. Guidance should be short, simple and clear and communicated to patients in their preferred communication formats.

4. Set up reminders or computer prompts for staff to remind them to check and reply to Patient Partner throughout the day.
5. Ensure that patients receive confirmation that their message has been sent through Patient Partner (so patients know that if they haven't received a confirmation their message has not been sent). Patients could receive a text, email or message at the end of Patient Partner confirming that the practice has received their message.

# Official response

## Official response from Wendy Dicks, Practice Manager at the Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice

The Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice commissioned Healthwatch Norfolk to look at how they can further support better access to the practice using the automated telephone answering system Patient Partner and how this can be improved.

Having used Patient Partner for approximately two years, it was felt that sufficient time had been given to embed the system and to now evaluate the use of this from hearing views 'direct from the patient.'

In the past 12 months, data shows that Patient Partner did 14,046 appointment transactions and 4725 repeat transactions. Whilst therefore it looks like there is high usage of the system for some patients, it is clear from this report it is not their preferred method of access nor is there understanding of why this is used and the benefits to patients and the practice ie the system is not to replace existing systems but to give more choice for those that wish to use it.

Healthwatch Norfolk responses equate to 349 responses which is 3.8% of the practice population. This report is used in conjunction with other data such as usage reports.

Actions given in this report will be evaluated to look at the findings and how the system can be improved. Advertising and information will be made available to patients through local newspapers, the website and within the surgery to detail the different access methods available and how patients use these systems.

The Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice would like to thank Healthwatch Norfolk, patients and staff for taking the time to bring together this report.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Patient Survey Questions

### Who is Healthwatch Norfolk?

Healthwatch Norfolk is the independent voice for patients and service users in the county. We gather your views of health and social care services to ensure they are heard by the people in charge.

### What is this survey about?

We are working with Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice to understand more about their patient's opinions and experiences of the practice's automated telephone service (Patient Partner). When you phone the practice you will be asked to press option 2 for Patient Partner, option 3 for dispensary (to leave a voicemail or to use Patient Partner) or option 4 to speak to a receptionist.

Whether you always use Patient Partner or have never heard of it- your views are important to us. Hearing directly from patients will allow Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice to gain a better understanding of what their patients think of the software.

**The survey should take around 10 minutes to complete.**

If you would prefer to do this survey with us over the phone, please call Healthwatch Norfolk on 01953 856029 and we will arrange a time to ring you back to complete the survey. Alternatively, please email: [enquiries@healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk) for further support.

### How the survey results will be used

The survey should take around 10 minutes to complete. All responses are anonymous and will be used by Healthwatch Norfolk to make recommendations to service providers as part of a project report. The report will also be publicly available on our website and may be used in other Healthwatch Norfolk Communications.

Survey responses are being collected and analysed by Healthwatch Norfolk. You can

read our full privacy policy at: [www.healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk/about-us/privacy-statement](http://www.healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk/about-us/privacy-statement).

### Want to keep in touch?

To stay up to date with what we are doing at Healthwatch, you can sign up to our newsletter via our website: [www.healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk)

If you do not use email, you can call Healthwatch Norfolk on 01953 856029 to ask to receive our newsletter via post.

Please note that questions marked with an asterisk (\*) require responses.

### Please tick to confirm \*

I have read and understood the above statement

Are you a patient of Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice? \*

Yes

No                      Please end the survey

Don't know              Please end the survey

Healthwatch Norfolk produce newsletters about health and social care in Norfolk. If you'd like to receive this newsletter please leave your email here:

1. Are you aware that Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice use an automated telephone system (this is called Patient Partner)? *When you phone the practice, you will be asked to press option 2 for Patient Partner, option 3 for dispensary (to leave a voicemail or to use Patient Partner) or option 4 to speak to a receptionist.*

Yes

No

Don't know

If yes, how did you find out about Patient Partner? (Who told you and how?)

2. What (if anything) would you like to find out about Patient Partner? You can select more than one option.

- How to use it
- How secure my data is
- Who my message will be shared with
- Why the practice is using Patient Partner
- What Patient Partner can be used for
- I don't want to find out more about Patient Partner
- Don't know
- Other (please specify):

3. Do you know why the practice uses Patient Partner (automated telephone system)? You can select more than one option.

- To save clinical time
- To increase patient safety
- To replace receptionists
- To give patients more choice in how they contact the practice
- To reduce waiting time on the phone
- Don't know
- Other (please specify):

4. Have you ever used Patient Partner (automated telephone system)? *When you phone the practice, you will be asked to press option 2 for Patient Partner, option 3 for dispensary (to leave a voicemail or to use Patient Partner) or option 4 to speak to a receptionist. \**

- Yes
- No            Please go to question 13
- Don't know    Please go to question 17

5. What did/ do you use Patient Partner (automated telephone system) for? You can select more than one option.

- To book a same day appointment (contacting the practice between 8:00-10:00am)
- To book a routine appointment

- To check or rearrange an appointment
- To cancel an appointment
- To order a repeat prescription
- To leave a message to request a call back from the team
- Not sure/ can't remember
- Other (please specify):

6. Why did you use Patient Partner? Instead of speaking to a receptionist or completing an online form

7. How satisfied are you usually with the time taken to receive a response?

- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

8. How would you rate your overall experience of using Patient Partner (automated telephone system)?

- Good
- Neither good nor bad
- Bad

Please use this space to tell us why you have chosen this answer:

9. What (if anything) did you like about Patient Partner?

10. Is there anything you think could improve Patient Partner? You can select more than one option.

- Prompts telling you what to do
- A longer amount of time to leave a voice message
- More guidance on how to use it
- If I received a response faster
- If it was easier to use



- If it was more accessible (e.g. available in other languages)
- Nothing
- Don't know
- Other (please specify):

**11. Would you use Patient Partner again?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Please use this space to tell us why you have chosen this answer:

**12. Compared to other methods you have used to contact the practice (e.g. online, in-person or on the phone), how would you rate Patient Partner?**

- Better
- About the same
- Worse

Please use this space to tell us why you have chosen this answer:

**Please only answer questions 13-16 if you answered 'no' to using Patient Partner (automated telephone system).**

**13. Why have you not used Patient Partner? You can select more than one option.**

- I wasn't aware of it
- I prefer to speak to a receptionist
- I don't know how to use it
- I think my message will get lost
- It is not accessible to me (e.g. available in other languages)
- I think it will be difficult to use
- I don't know who my message will be shared with
- Other

Don't know

Please use this space to tell us why you have chosen this answer:

**14. Is there anything that would make you more likely to use Patient Partner (automated telephone system)? You can select more than one option.**

- More guidance on how to use it
- A longer amount of time to leave a voice message
- I would never use Patient Partner
- If there were prompts telling you what to do
- If it was more accessible (e.g. available in other languages)
- Don't know
- Other (please specify):

**15. What method do you use most often to contact the practice? Please select one option.**

- Phoning and speaking to a receptionist
- Visiting the practice in-person
- Online
- Don't know
- I do not contact the practice
- Other (please specify):

**16. How satisfied are you usually with the time taken to receive a response?**

- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied

**17. If you were to use Patient Partner, what would you use Patient Partner for? You can select more than one option.**

- To book a same day appointment (contacting the practice between 8:00-10:00am)
- To book a routine appointment
- To check or rearrange an appointment
- To cancel an appointment

- To order a repeat prescription
- To leave a message to request a call back from the team
- Don't know
- I would not use Patient Partner
- Other (please specify):

18. If there is anything else you would like to say about the Patient Partner software, please leave it here.

19. If you'd like to talk more about your experience, please leave your details (preferred contact information) below and a member of our team will contact you.

## 6. Demographics

### About you

In this next section we will be asking you some questions about yourself and your life. All these questions are optional. Your answers help us make sure that we hear from people from different backgrounds and that we understand the needs of different groups in our community. Remember: all your answers are strictly confidential and the survey is anonymous.

20. How old are you?

21. What is the first half of your postcode?

22. In the last six months approximately how often did you contact your surgery?

- More than once a week
- Once a week
- Once a fortnight
- Once a month
- Less than once a month
- I have not contacted them in the last six months

### 23. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Genderfluid
- Genderqueer
- Intersex
- Prefer not to say
- Prefer to self-describe:

### 24. What is your sexuality?

- Bisexual
- Gay or Lesbian
- Heterosexual or straight
- Pansexual
- Prefer not to say

If you feel the choices do not provide a suitable option, please write how you would describe your sexual orientation:

### 25. Please select any of the following that apply to you:

- I have a disability
- I have a long term condition
- I am a carer
- None of the above
- I prefer not to say

### 26. What is your ethnic group?

#### Arab:

- Arab

#### Asian / Asian British:

- Bangladeshi

- Chinese
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Any other Asian / Asian British background

**Black / Black British:**

- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black / Black British background

**Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups:**

- Asian and White
- Black African and White
- Black Caribbean and White
- Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups background

**White:**

- British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh
- Irish
- Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller
- Roma
- Any other White background

**Other:**

- Any other Ethnic Group
- Prefer not to say

If other, please specify:

**27. Where did you hear about this survey?**

- GP website
- Healthwatch Norfolk Event
- Healthwatch Norfolk Newsletter
- Healthwatch Norfolk Website
- News (website / radio / local newspaper)

- Podcast
- Search Engine (e.g. Google)
- Social Media (e.g. Facebook / Instagram / Twitter)
- Through a friend or co-worker
- YouTube
- Other (please specify):

Thank you for completing this survey

## Appendix 2: Demographics

		Percentage of respondents	Number of respondents
<b>Age</b>	16-25	1%	3
	26-35	5%	16
	36-45	8%	25
	46-55	17%	51
	56-65	21%	62
	66-75	32%	98
	76-85	14%	43
	86+	1%	4
<b>Gender</b>	Female	61%	193
	Male	35%	110
	Non-binary	>1%	1
	Prefer not to say	2%	5
	Prefer to self-describe	2%	6
<b>Sexuality</b>	Heterosexual or straight	82%	258
	Bisexual	2%	5
	Gay or Lesbian	2%	6
	Prefer to self-describe	5%	30
	Prefer not to say	10%	16
<b>Ethnicity</b>	British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh	92%	285
	Any other White background	2%	6
	Any other Black / Black British background	>1%	1
	Asian and White	>1%	1
	Black African and White	>1%	1
	Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups background	>1%	1
	Prefer not to say	5%	14
<b>Disability</b>	I have a disability	14%	41
<b>Long Term condition</b>	I have a long term condition	45%	136

<b>Carer</b>	I am a carer	7%	22
In the last six months approximately how often did you contact your surgery?	More than once a week	2%	7
	Once a week	4%	12
	Once a fortnight	9%	27
	Once a month	29%	91
	Less than once a month	48%	151
	I have not contacted them in the last six months	9%	29



## Appendix 3: Staff Survey Questions

### Who is Healthwatch Norfolk?

Healthwatch Norfolk is the independent voice for patients and service users in the county. We gather your views of health and social care services to ensure they are heard by the people in charge.

### What is this survey about?

We are working with Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice to understand more about their patient's opinions and experiences of the practice's automated telephone service (Patient Partner). When patients phone the practice they will be asked to press option 2 for Patient Partner, option 3 for dispensary (to leave a voicemail or to use Patient Partner) or option 4 to speak to a receptionist. As part of this project, we would also like to gain an insight into what staff at Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice think of Patient Partner.

The survey should take around 10 minutes to complete.

If you would prefer to do this survey with us over the phone, please call Healthwatch Norfolk on 01953 856029 and we will arrange a time to ring you back to complete the survey. Alternatively, please email: [enquiries@healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk) for further support.

### How the survey results will be used

All responses are anonymous and will be used by Healthwatch Norfolk to make recommendations to service providers as part of a project report. The report will also be publicly available on our website and may be used in other Healthwatch Norfolk Communications.

Survey responses are being collected and analysed by Healthwatch Norfolk. You can read our full privacy policy at: [www.healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk/about-us/privacy-statement](http://www.healthwatchnorfolk.co.uk/about-us/privacy-statement).

### Want to keep in touch?

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If you do not use email, you can call Healthwatch Norfolk on 01953 856029 to ask to receive our newsletter via post.

Please note that questions marked with an asterisk (\*) require responses.

Please tick to confirm \*

I have read and understood the above statement

Are you a member of staff at Reepham and Aylsham Medical Practice? \*

Yes

No

Healthwatch Norfolk produce newsletters about health and social care in Norfolk. If you'd like to receive this newsletter please leave your email here:

1. Do you think patients know what Patient Partner is?

Yes

No

Don't know

Please use this space to tell us why you have chosen this answer:

2. Do you think patients know how to use Patient Partner?

Yes

No

Don't know

Please use this space to tell us why you have chosen this answer:

3. Do you think patients know why the practice uses Patient Partner?

Yes

No

Don't know

Please use this space to tell us why you have chosen this answer:

4. Do you think patients know what the benefits of Patient Partner are?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Please use this space to tell us why you have chosen this answer:

5. Do you promote Patient Partner to patients?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how do you do this?

6. Is there anything that would help you to promote Patient Partner more to patients?

7. Does Patient Partner help you in your role?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how?

8. Is there anything you think could be done to improve the uptake of Patient Partner amongst patients?

9. If there is anything else you would like to say about the Patient Partner software, please leave it here.



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