

## Orthotics Services for Adults and Children

The orthotic services for both adults and children in the borough of Barking and Dagenham have had a history of long delays in providing patients with their required support so Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham decided to enquire and find out whether they are meeting the needs of the residents.

One of the main concerns was that appointment frequency was inadequately long. As far as children were concerned, this meant that the provided support did not fit from one appointment to the next.

However, after speaking with professionals and interviewing 17 parents or carers of children between the ages of 18 months and 15 at the Child and Family Doctors Surgery (79 Axe St, Barking, Essex IG11 7LZ), we found out that the service was excellent: parents expressed they mostly had to wait no more than 2 months to receive their first orthotic support from the initial assessment and felt it had made a positive difference to their child's life. All parents commented positively regarding the staff, said they felt listened to and given all the information they needed to feel confident about the service.

*'The staff are helpful and kind', 'I was worried before but now I am happy my daughter is in good hands', 'Our needs were dealt with very well', 'The staff gave me all the info I needed to feel confident as a parent'.*

However, over both days we attended the clinic to interview parents/carers, 13% of appointments were not kept. The lead orthotist, occupational therapist and physiotherapist working on those days all confirmed that they generally have a massive issue with 'Did Not Attends' regardless of all their best efforts to encourage their own patients to attend. The clinic already has in place a text message/call system where they remind service users of their imminent appointment but this does not seem to help.

In the light of these findings, it appears the orthotic team in Barking and Dagenham is delivering a good and satisfactory service for children and therefore Healthwatch have decided not to inquire further.

However, for the sake of the service and those delivering it, a way should be found to lower the number of people who don't attend appointments. Healthwatch would recommend a phone call to the service users after an appointment has been missed. This may help to identify if there is any trend in why appointments were not attended. Also we would recommend a cross service exchange of strategies to help lower DNAs as other services experience the same problem and may have found other ways of tackling it.

We have found it more challenging to gather the views of adult service users. We tried to engage those using the services of the Long Term Medical Centre in Harold Wood. We provided 100 questionnaires with stamped addressed envelopes which were distributed to patients, but no responses were back.

Attending the clinic in person to interview service users was decided not to be time efficient because Havering as well as Brentwood and Barking and Dagenham patients use the service at this location.

Taking these reasons into consideration, Healthwatch decided not to pursue the enquiry but will reconsider whether this service requires further investigation if residents give us negative feedback in the future.