



Mini Report

Workshop at Derby Refugee Advice Centre – GP services in Derby City.

Healthwatch Derby is an independent Watchdog for health and social care services in Derby City.

Aim

- To gain knowledge of the experiences that refugees and asylum seekers have of local GP services.

Outreach

On the 21/11/19 Healthwatch Derby did a workshop at the Bosnia and Herzegovina Centre in Derby where the Derby Refugee Advice Centre operates from. We spoke to a group of around 27 people about their experiences of:

- Registering with a GP
- What works well with your GP
- What could be improved with your GP and how

People gave general feedback about accessing and using GP services and also gave specific experiences about individual GP practices. Healthwatch Derby sends 6 monthly reports to all practices within the city so these practices have already received their individual comments.

Overview of refugees and people seeking asylum:

Definitions

The 1951 Refugee Convention is a key legal document and defines a refugee as:

“someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”

You must apply for asylum if you want to stay in the UK as a refugee. So not everyone seeking asylum will be recognised as a refugee, but every refugee is initially seeking asylum.

Housing in Derby

There are 2 main types of housing in Derby for seeking asylum.

Initial Accommodation Centre

If a person claiming asylum in the UK has no means of supporting themselves and nowhere to stay, they may be entitled to financial support and/or accommodation provided by the Home Office while they await the decision on their asylum claim.

Initial Accommodation Centre is a hostel type accommodation provided either on full board basis or as self-catering. People usually stay there for a few weeks, while their application for asylum support is being processed. If this application is successful, asylum seekers are moved to a longer term, so called dispersal accommodation. This can be anywhere in the UK and is provided on a no-choice basis.

Derby has an Initial Accommodation Centre that houses up to 225 people.

Dispersal accommodation

Following the Initial accommodation centre people seeking asylum are then moved to dispersal accommodation, these are mainly (Houses of Multiple Occupancy) HMOs and houses for families. Asylum seekers have no choice of location. Derby houses around 700 asylum seekers in dispersal accommodation but this will fluctuate. With people staying in this accommodation for roughly 18 months until a final decision is made about their refugee status. If a person is given refugee status, they have just 28 days to find accommodation and apply for mainstream benefits before having to leave dispersal accommodation. Some refugees can become homeless if they have not contacted the relevant agencies at this stage.

DRAC have informed Healthwatch Derby that refugees can still become homeless even if they do see the relevant agencies. This is due to lots of different reasons such as: not enough social housing for single people and difficulties in getting people in to private rented accommodation.

Derby Refugee Advice Centre (DRAC)

Derby Refugee Advice Centre is run by the charity Derby Refugee Forum. They support asylum seekers and refugees in Derby. They offer advice, advocacy, support with asylum, contacting Home Office, accessing education, health care, clothing, food (for destitute clients) English classes and workshops. In 2018/19 they held 2278 advice sessions to 734 service users. 8.4% of these advice sessions were around health matters.

Some of the regular issues involving GP surgeries and primary care:

- Helping choosing a GP practice
- Helping clients with GP registration - filling in the GMS1 and or/new patient health questionnaire
- Occasionally, going with them to the practice, as they had been told they could not register unless they had photo ID and proof of address with their name on the document
- Help with a health issue that they had presented to their GP
- Help with claiming benefits related to ill-health is better as a separate point
- Help with changing to a different GP practice
- Help with obtaining the HC2 which entitles them to free prescriptions and free access to dentists and opticians.

Asylum seekers and Refugee's Health

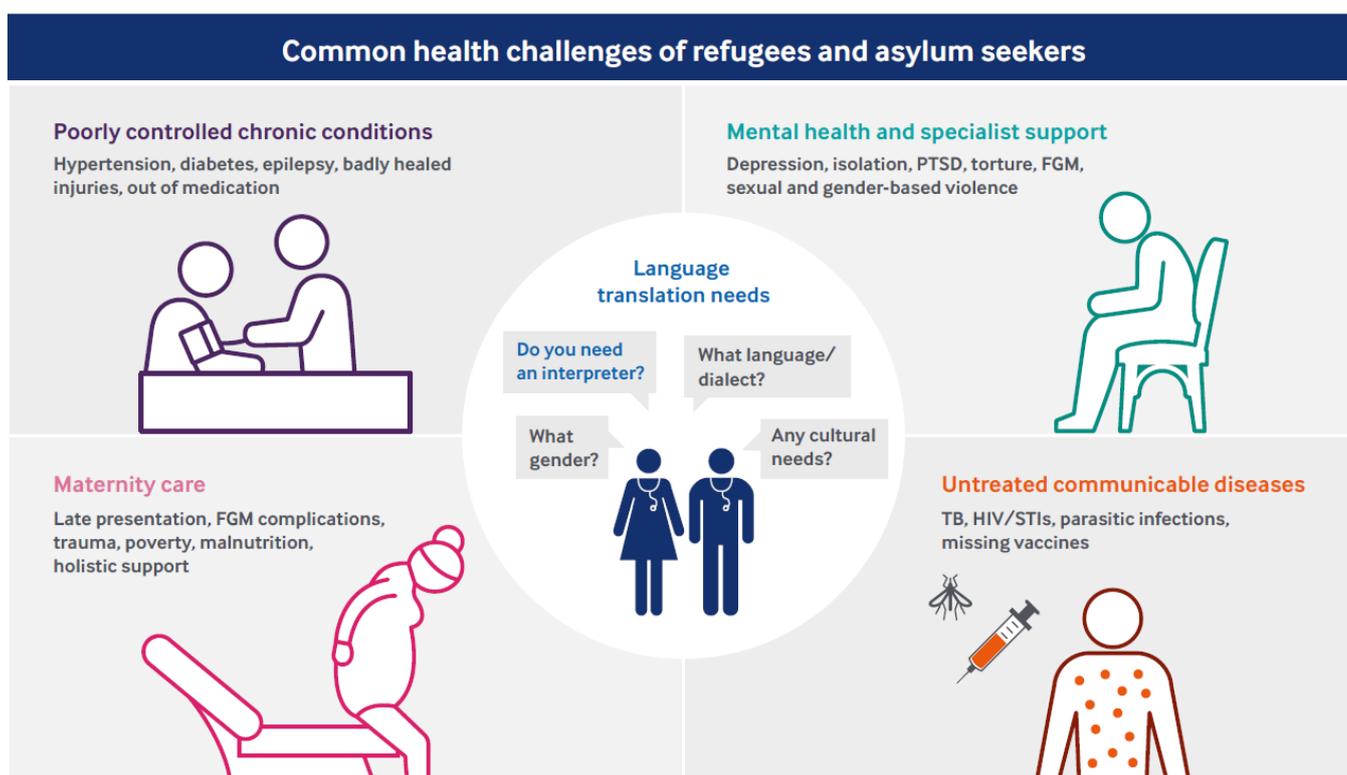
The British Medical Association recently wrote a health resource report for professionals around refugee and asylum seekers. Link to full document at end of report.

Refugees and asylum seekers can have complex health needs. These may be influenced by experiences prior to leaving their home country, during transit or after arrival in the UK. Holistic and person-centred care is essential to support resilience and help them adapt to life in the UK.

Common health challenges include:

- untreated communicable diseases
- poorly controlled chronic conditions
- maternity care
- mental health and specialist support needs.

Despite this, there is no evidence that refugees and asylum seekers use a disproportionate share of NHS resources, and migrants in the UK and elsewhere in Europe **tend to use fewer services** than native populations.



What people told us about their experiences in Derby

How was it to register at your GP

People spoke about their individual experiences of registering with their GP surgery and general issues that they have found when registering. There was 1 positive experience though the rest were negative or mixed experiences. From looking at these experiences the main theme was:

Barriers in Communication:

- When completing registration paperwork

Other issues that people raised were:

- Lack of sign posting for support service that could help complete paperwork
- Issue raised about proof of ID at registration – When allocated into dispersal accommodation people are given documents of their new address but this does not have their name on it so it cannot be used as a proof of address.

“First time, not easy, I didn't speak English and no one to translate, so I went to Derby Refugee advice centre and they helped me. In 2017 it was easy.”

“Very difficult, lots of forms to fill, red cross helped to fill in forms, had to bring in extra information.”

“Easy but hard now with extra paperwork hard to register.”

“Derby Refugee Advice Centre contacted GP to get paper work and helped to fill it out, I was not referred by GP to get to Derby Refugee Advice Centre.”

“When Asylum Seekers arrive at Serco they give them documents to say they live in Derby but don't give proof of address.”

“Easy to register.”

“Difficult to fill in forms due to language, Derby Refugee Advice Centre helped with the forms, no GP offered to help.”

What works well with your GP

People spoke about what they thought worked well with their GP surgery and generally about the NHS.

The areas people said worked well were the general overall services, the staff being caring and their communication techniques. Please see comments below:

“Everything has been good, difficult with language.”

“Staff try to help by pointing to pain, it helped.”

“Staff caring and listen.”

“Grateful that we can see a GP for no cost as it’s really expensive in our country.”

What could be improved and how

People spoke about what they thought could be improved with their GP services and also general comments about using GPs. (Please see comments below; please note some of these comments have been broken down)

The main areas people spoke about was problems getting an appointment, this was from issues such as:

- Unable to get through on the phone
- A lack of appointments or no-online appointments available.

“Online no appointments but can get one over the phone.”

“Appointments, it's hard to get one, ring just over the phone.”

“No one answer's the phone, wait a long time.”

Alongside this people also raised the additional problem of communication barriers when trying to make an appointment in regards to:

- Being able to speak on the phone and/or explain their symptoms
- Being reliant on organisations or friends to make appointments for them.

If they ring at 8:00am no one to understand, come to DRAC at 9:00am then there's no appointments left, need to be able to do face to face at GP to book appointments.

"Bigger/longer times with GP, takes longer as English is not my first language and have to come back. There was an Admin error which was rectified. Had to get Derby Refugee Advice Centre to book an urgent appointment."

"Translation issue with speaking to receptionist my friend helped me."

"Can't get appointments, when you call red cross helps get appointments, staff changes all the time, no translation service."

Communication was also the key factor raised around consultation in regards to being able to explain symptoms and having to repeat information to different staff members due to not being able to see the same staff member. Solutions were offered by people who suggested that refugees could be offered more time during consultations if required.

"Can't see same doctor, makes it difficult to explain, have to explain over and over to new doctor's."

"Trying to explain with no interpreter, with symptoms couldn't explain, just left an online interpreter, some staff just say go as no interpreter."

Another issue that was raised was cultural needs. That someone may prefer a same sex health professional.

Too shy to say anything or just don't go to appointments, there's a note on my file to state preferences.

Due to cultural needs some Asylum Seekers/Refugee's need to see a doctor of the same gender, with English not their first language means they aren't understood.

Key Messages of the Report

The main area that ran throughout the report is communication being a barrier. This was the main area highlighted in registrations, making appointments and consultation.

There were positive comments about GP services in general and the staff members.

There were also areas raised around the understanding of cultural needs.

Going Forward

Communication issues are not something that can be overcome easily. This report has shown that it is the main barrier and it runs throughout someone's journey with their GP.

Below is the link to the British Medical Association's Refugee and asylum seeker health resource: To find out more about their specific health needs and how to overcome common barriers.

<https://www.bma.org.uk/advice/employment/ethics/refugee-and-asylum-seekers-health-resource>

Following this workshop DRAC are putting together a workshop for health professionals/service providers to increase their awareness of refugees and the problems they are likely to face.

The key refugee awareness training for professionals, key learning points would be :

- How to define asylum seekers and refugees. What drives people to seek asylum, what might their journey be like and what kind of reception might they meet on arriving in the UK.
- What is the process of making an asylum claim, how long it takes for a decision to be reached on a claim and what happens if the claim is refused.
- What accommodation is provided for them, and what financial support do they receive. What support agencies are there in Derby and how might asylum seekers and refugees access these agencies.
- What health care asylum seekers and refugees are entitled to. What care can refused asylum seekers access.
- What difficulties do asylum seekers face in registering with a GP. How can they be helped in this process. How to ensure that members of GP practice staff understand the difficulties. How to ensure that staff know that, although it helps the practice if applicants to join the practice can produce photo ID and proof of address, this is not mandatory. Using interpreting services when necessary.
- The ability of general practice staff to refer to secondary care without having to decide whether or not they might be entitled, as this decision is taken at secondary care level.
- Making sure that asylum seekers are aware that they can have travel costs to hospital appointments reimbursed by accessing the correct office at the hospital.
- Understanding how the health needs of asylum seekers and refugees relate to their experiences of persecution, their journey to a place of sanctuary and their sense of loss and isolation as a result of losing their network of friends and family.

- What help do asylum seekers need in accessing mental health services. How might acute psychiatric admission be particularly disruptive to asylum seekers.
- Who to contact in Derby for help with issues facing asylum seekers, such as their asylum claim, accommodations needs- ie DRAC and the Red Cross.

The staff who would benefit from the above awareness training- all general practice staff, particularly reception staff, practice managers and GPs.

If you would be interested in discussing this in more detail for your service then please contact:

drac2@hotmail.co.uk

Other Actions

Healthwatch Derby and DRAC have been working with St Thomas Road Surgery (One Medical Group).

St Thomas surgery is now working with DRAC to devise a course ran by a health professional to give a regular presentation/workshop to refugees and asylum seekers about GP services, pathways, what to expect, how to deal with communication issues, culture needs and how to raise concerns. This will be starting over the next few months.

Covid- 19 Update

The initial workshops have been put on hold at present until it is safe to do so but all parties are committed to ensure that these workshops and awareness training go ahead.

Healthwatch Derby have been recently informed via a local meeting that there have been reported issues with asylum seekers not being able to register with local GPs and issues around accessing interpreters for health appointments. Healthwatch Derby will be looking in to this in more detail.

Healthwatch Derby would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this report.