

The Survey

Surveys were sent out to every GP surgery in Wales in June 2012, some 680 in total. Nearly 20% have so far responded. Given the timing of the Health Minister's statement on evening and weekend opening hours on Tuesday 3rd of July, we have decided to release early analysis of the GP survey relating to surgery opening hours. The full survey will be released in due course.

The questions we asked were:

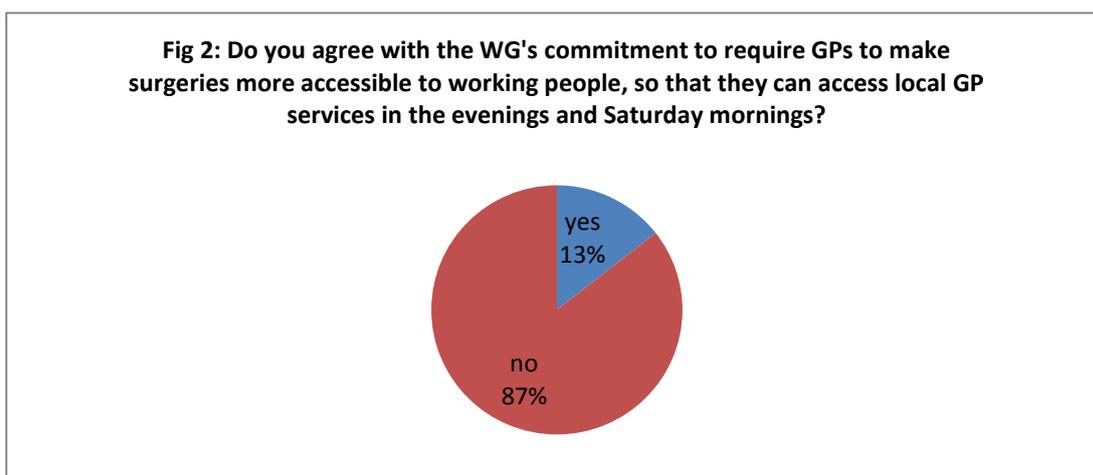
Do you agree with the Welsh government's commitment to require GPs to make surgeries more accessible to working people, so that they can access local GP services in the evenings and Saturday mornings?

If no, please state why you don't agree with the Welsh Government's commitment?

Do you believe that the Welsh Government will be able to implement the above policy without providing additional finance?

Evening and weekend opening hours.

Do you agree with the WG's commitment to require GPs to make surgeries more accessible to working people, so that they can access local GP services in the evenings and Saturday mornings?



87% of respondents do not agree with the Welsh Government's proposal of extending opening hours to the evenings and weekends. The majority of GPs feel that their current opening hours already give patients adequate access and that there is no need to extend opening hours. Some GPs said that they had carried out their own surveys asking what patients want with little or no call for evening or weekend access to

their GPs. *“We have asked our patients; only one respondent said they wanted Saturday access and that person was unemployed,”* wrote one GP. Another wrote: *“We have opened on Saturdays and were lucky to see two patients. We also trialled an open health clinic/surgery on a Saturday which had a very poor response despite being in the middle of flu season.”*

Another respondent took evidence from across the border to justify their disagreement *“Experience in England has shown that the enthusiasm for this from interviewed population is limited.”*

Other GPs said that their surgeries have already trialled evening and weekend opening hours with little take-up. *“We used to run this service and found it was underused.”* They argue that people are already able to leave work to attend doctors’ appointments when they need to and that there is no demand for extended opening hours in their area – usually because the majority of their patients are retired or perhaps unemployed.

GPs also oppose this policy on cost grounds. While 63% of GPs said that there is no need to implement this policy, 37% said that it will be too costly. One GP wrote *“in times of financial crisis, this is a luxury the NHS cannot afford.”* Another responded *“If practices are to be open longer hours this will require funding.”* One GP pointed out *“They would have to take money from elsewhere thus depriving someone of a needed service.”*

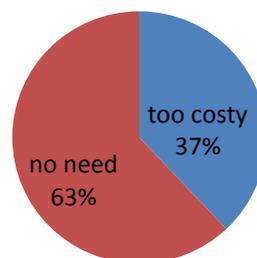
Some doctors also suggest that extending opening hours could make a career as a GP less appealing, and could ultimately exacerbate the existing problem of recruiting doctors. They stated that GPs who are already close to retirement would take early retirement if they had to work evenings or weekends *“The cost will be loss of future GPs – put off by this requirement and loss of [aged] 50+ GPs to retirement. GPs in their late 50s will not need much of a push to decide they are better off retiring as the work already is stressful and harmful to health and family/social life.”*

Additional comments from GPs on the policy

- *“This is an outrage! How do the WG propose we make the employed staff work unsocial hours (that's how they see it) given our employment laws.”*
- *“No. No need. We used to run this service and found it was underused.”*
- *“We have asked our patients; only one respondent said they wanted Saturday access and that person was unemployed.”*

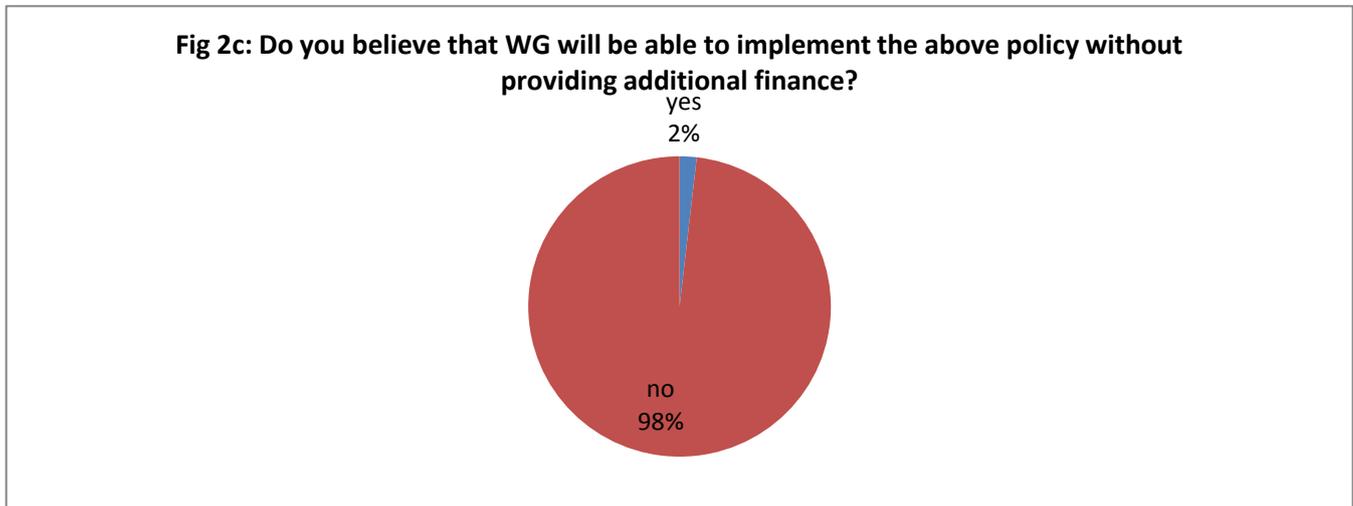
- *“We have open on Saturdays and were lucky to see 2 patients. We also trialled an open health clinic/surgery on a Saturday which has a very poor response despite being in the middle of flu season.”*
- *“A GP cannot work alone. Bad practice. You will need a receptionist and a nurse as a minimum requirement... A whole new contract will need to be renegotiated. We will also need to renegotiate staff contracts.”*
- *“General practice in Wales and the UK generally feel be beleaguered by frequent change and pressure on budgets, prescribing and referring in recent years. Most of my colleagues are suffering from low morale and many GPs over 50 are considering early retirement (I have already take 24hr retirement 6 years earlier than planned. I fear greatly that general practice as we know it is being dismantled piece by piece by central government.”*
- *“You would not expect the same of a solicitor or accountant or dentist for that matter. Employers are supposed to allow staff time off to attend a doctor.”*
- *“Difficult in a small practice. Large surgery can offer flexible working. Smaller cannot.”*
- *“Like dental, optical, hospital, appts etc if you need a GP apt you make the time in between opening hours. Extended access could be costly and abused by patients.”*

Fig 2b: If no, please state why you don't agree with the WG's commitment



Funding evening and weekend opening hours

The Health Minister, Lesley Griffiths, has already stated that there would be no additional cost implications as the policy would be achieved under the existing GP contract. In our survey, almost all of the GPs who responded (98%) do not believe that the policy could be implemented without additional funding.



GPs' comments responding to this question were particularly strong:

- *"In this practice, we already work from 8 – 6:30 officially 5 days a week. Unofficially, we never leave until 7:30pm. If we are required to open longer we will need funding for reception staff, admin staff and nursing staff. And as much as I love my job, I'm not working for free. Let's not forget up until 2004 we did work Saturday mornings but the new contract took away the funding for that."*
- *"Definitely not. It is not safe for patients or doctors for lone working. Therefore other staff will need to be in the building. Assuming the doctor is not being contracted for extra hours surgeries would then have to close during the day as clinical staff require doctor supervision. This was a silly, poorly thought idea. There would have to be funding for these extra staff. Does the First Minister know what a contract is? We are contracted for certain hours. Extra will have to be renegotiated."*
- *"They would have to take money from else where thus depriving someone of a needed service."*
- *"Would you work a weekend for free?"*
- *"Because I will refuse to work at the weekend."*
- *"They will meet with fierce resistance"*
- *"Would you get on a plane with an overworked and tired pilot!?"*