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Isles of Scilly off island medical travel Survey

# Off-island travel to St Mary's for pre-arranged medical appointments

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# Introduction

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## Introduction

Healthwatch Isles of Scilly is an independent, publicly-funded organisation. We have statutory duties and a remit to ensure health and social care services on the Isles of Scilly are the best they can be for people, now and in the future.

We were looking to gather feedback on people's experiences of off-island medical travel to St Mary's for pre-arranged medical appointments.

The survey ran from September through to December 2020 and asked residents of the Isles of Scilly about their experiences of off-island medical travel for pre-planned appointments.

## Who we worked with to set up the survey

We ran the survey through our own website in order to obtain results for the Isles of Scilly. Leaflets were distributed to each of the five islands to highlight the role of Healthwatch and to inform residents of the specific areas that we were interested in gathering research for. The leaflets were aimed at targeting residents who do not have access to the internet, in order to ensure that we could obtain as many responses as possible to our survey.

# Introduction

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## Where we advertised

The survey was hosted on the Healthwatch Isles of Scilly website and advertised on the social media network, Facebook and on leaflets distributed across all of the islands.

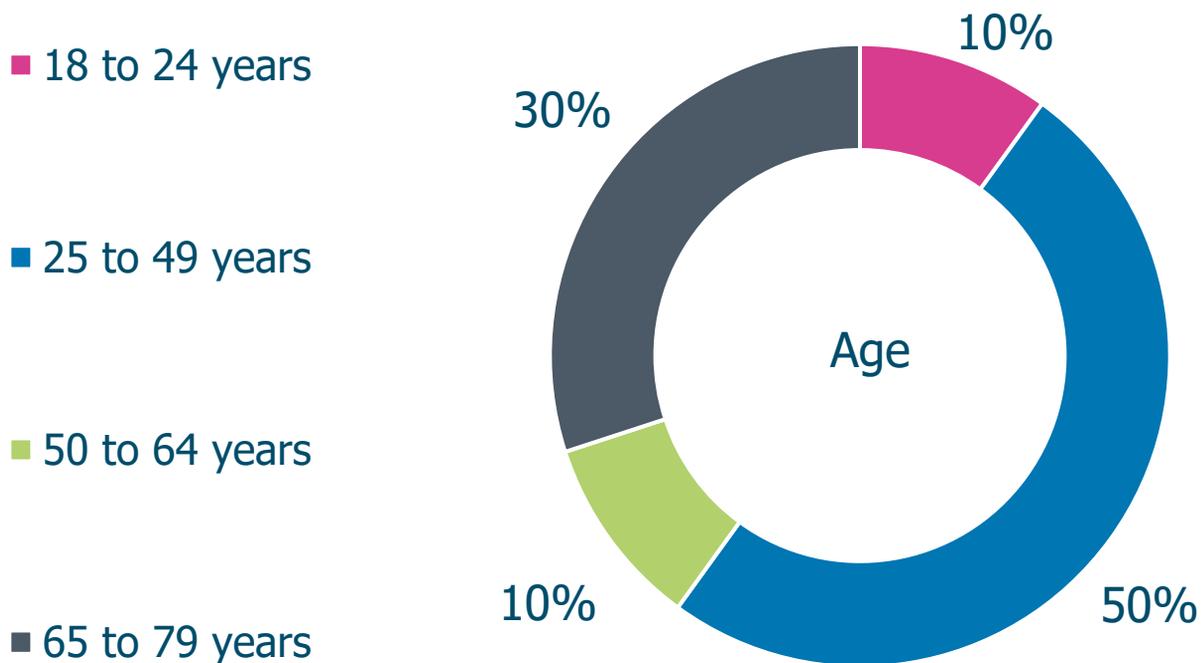
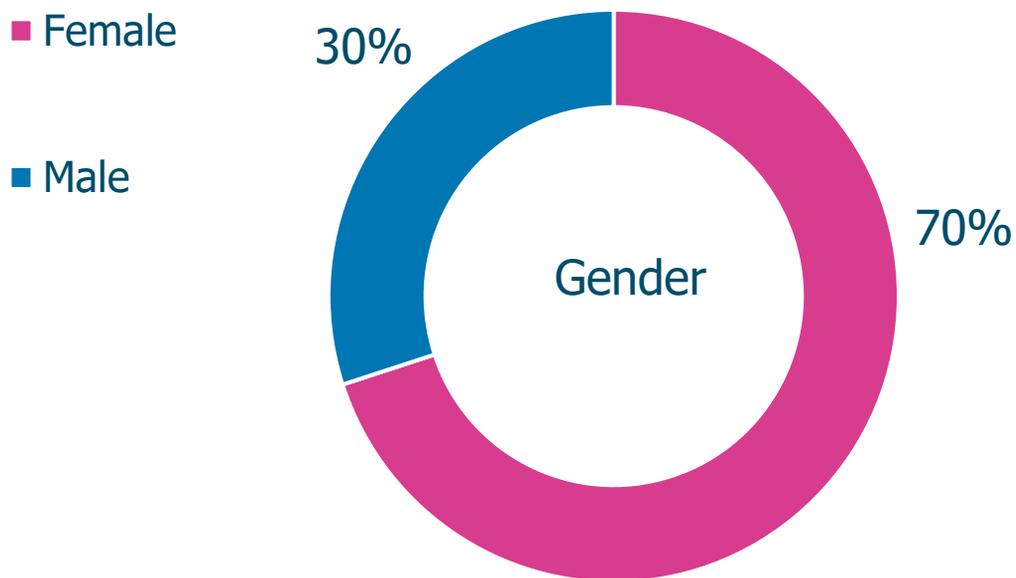
## Who took part

10 people from the Isles of Scilly completed the survey. Respondents were predominantly female and between the ages of 25-49.

## Key Findings

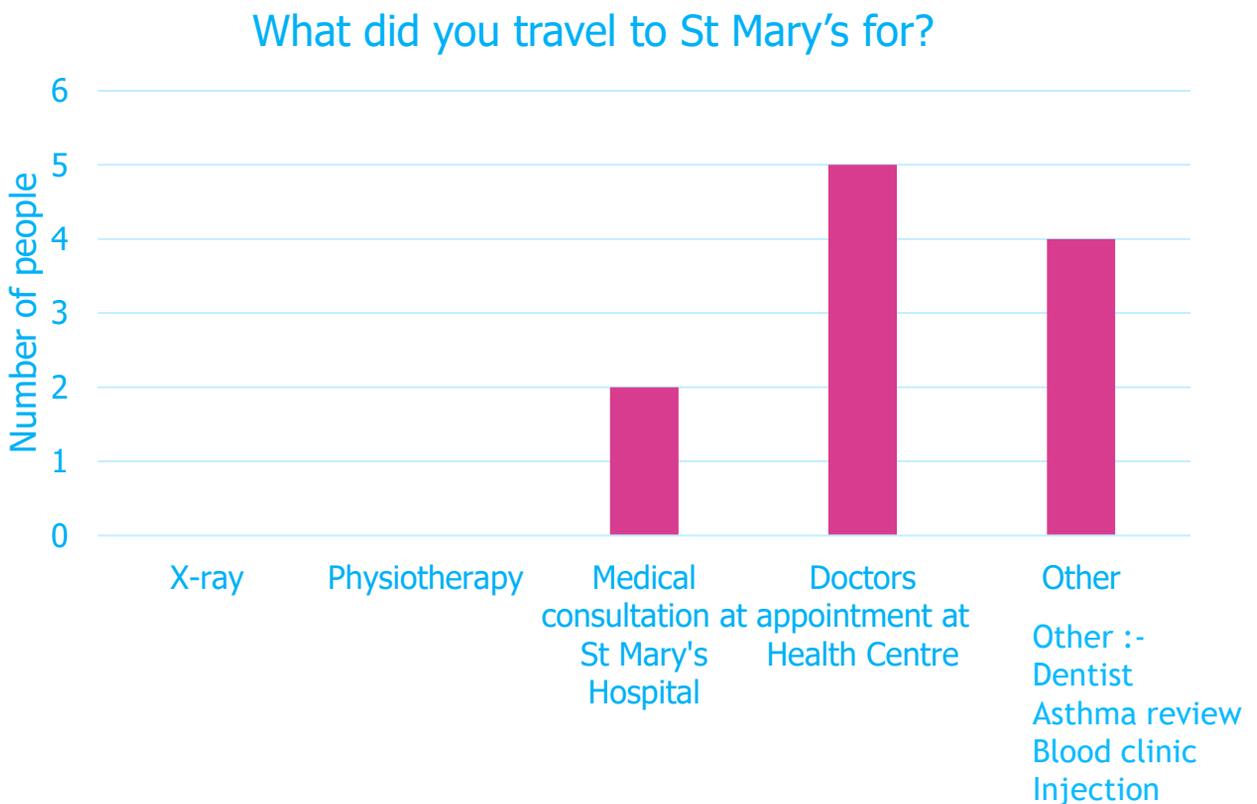
- The majority of respondents travelled to St Mary's for an appointment at the Health Centre.
- Wednesday saw the most people travelling to St Mary's for an appointment.
- Just over half of the respondents used a 'special boat' to travel across.
- Only 30% of respondents found the process of arranging travel to their appointment difficult.
- The majority of appointments were cancelled by the patient due to the weather conditions affecting boating, followed by the cost involved in arranging boating (as shown on survey results).
- No respondents found it difficult to access a Doctor appointment on the island that they live on.

## Respondent Demographics



## Results from the survey

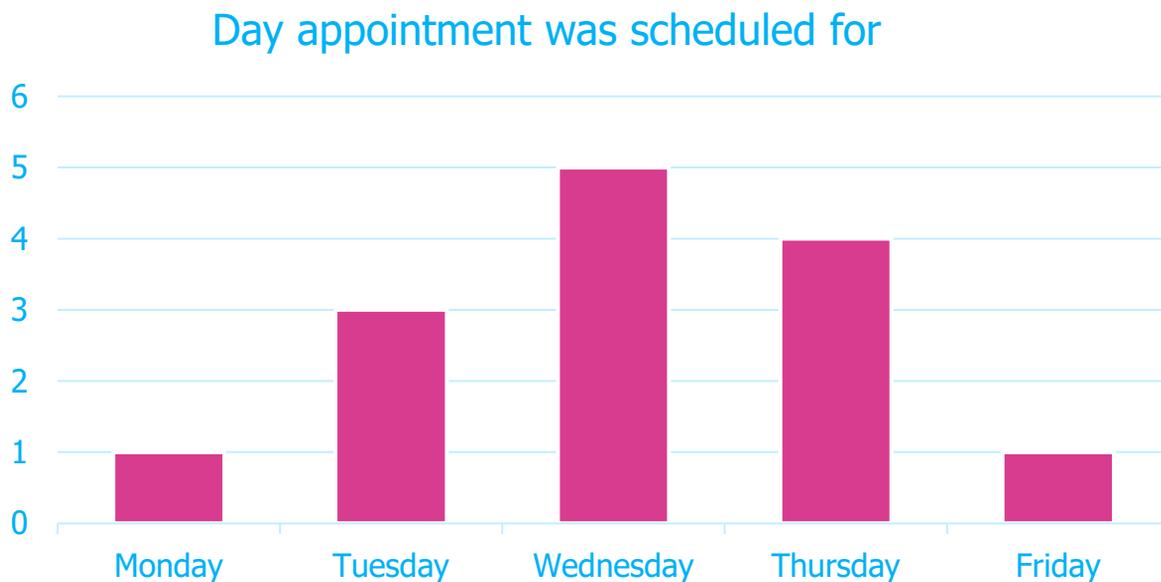
Q1. What did you travel to St Mary's for?



Five out of the 11 responses travelled to St Mary's for a doctors appointment at the Health Centre. The venue for the 'other' reasons for travelling are unknown, although likely to be at the Health Centre or Hospital.

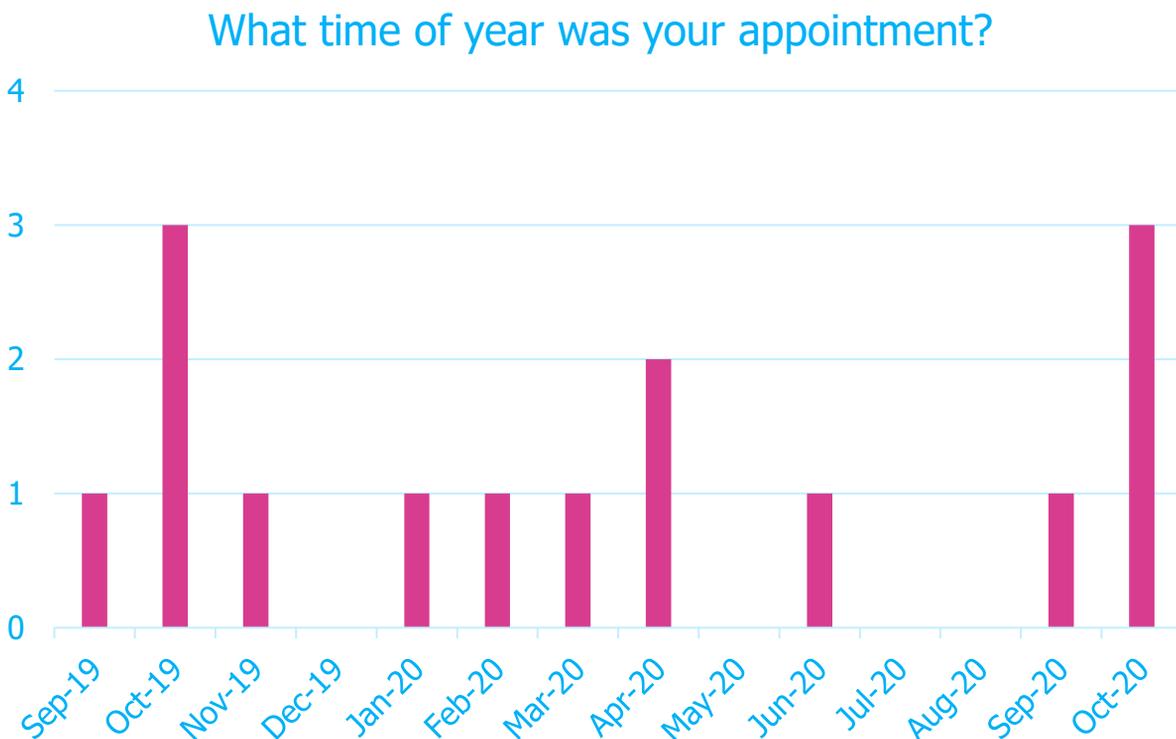
## Results from the survey

Q2. What day was your appointment scheduled for?



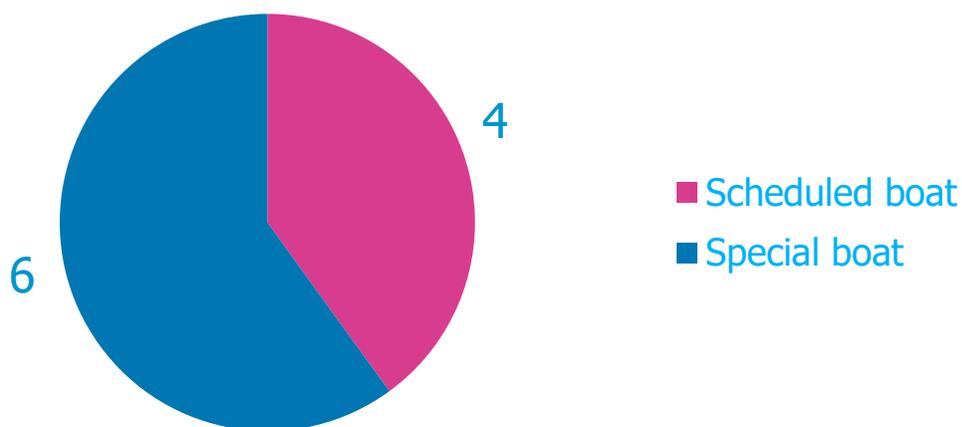
## Results from the survey

Q3. What time of year was your appointment?



Q4. How did you travel to your appointment?

How did you travel to your appointment?



The majority of people (60%) arranged a special boat to travel to their appointment.

## Results from the survey

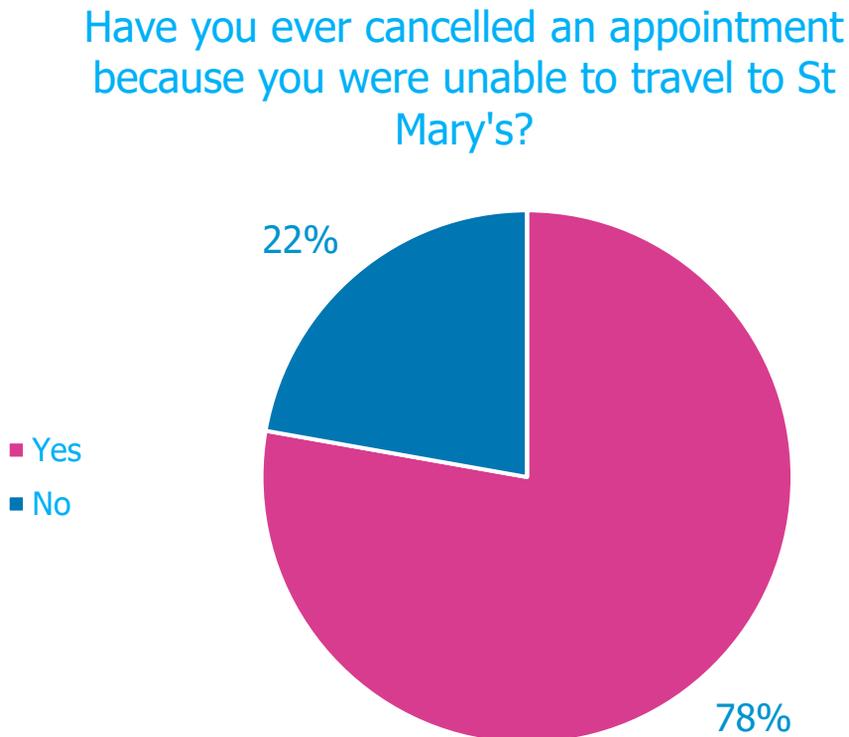
Q5. How easy did you find the process of arranging travel to your appointment?



40% of the respondents found the process of arranging medical travel easy. 30% neither found it easy or difficult and 30% found it difficult / extremely difficult.

## Results from the survey

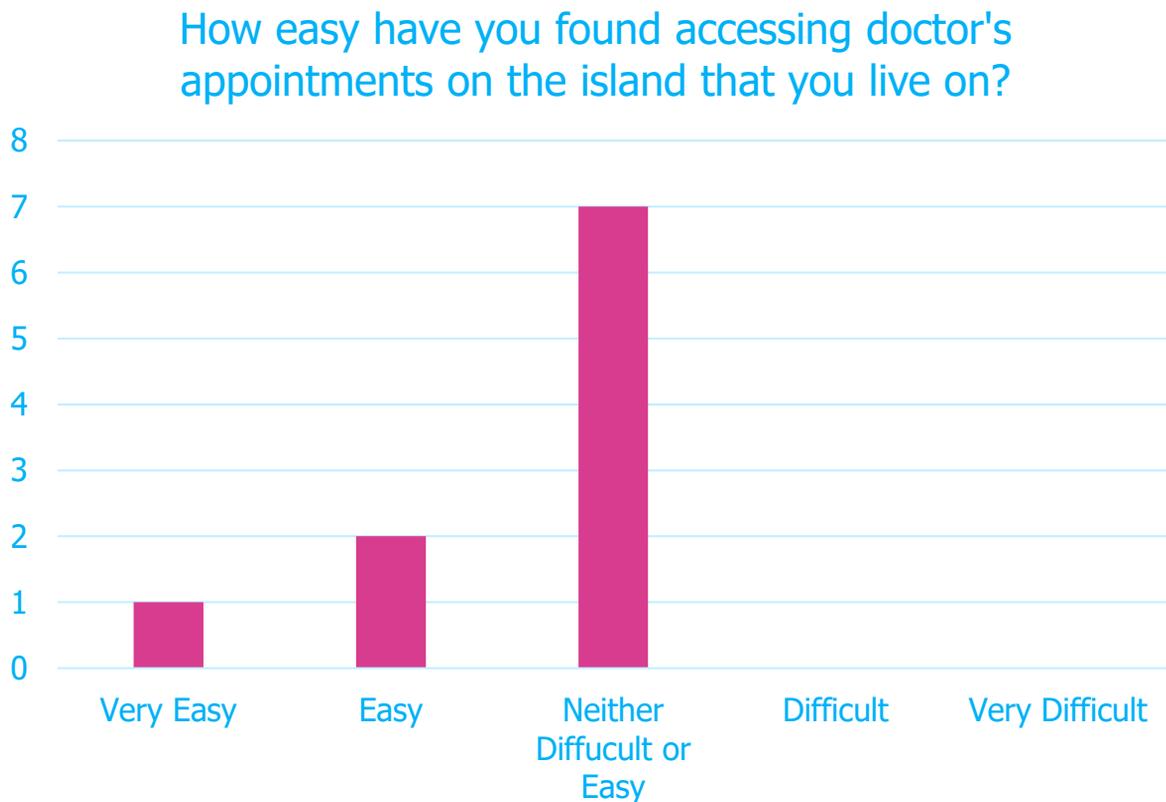
Q6. Have you ever cancelled an appointment because you were unable to travel to St Mary's?



78% of responses indicated that an appointment has had to be cancelled because they were unable to travel to St Mary's.

## Results from the survey

Q7. How easy have you found accessing doctor's appointments on the island that you live on?



30% of respondents found it either easy or very easy accessing appointments. 70% found it neither easy or difficult. No one found it difficult to access doctor's appointments on the island they live on.

# Stories

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What went well and what could have been better?



## Stories

Q5. How easy did you find the process of arranging travel to your appointment? **Please provide more detail:**

**Easy -**

*"I just rang tresco boats to arrange it."*

**Easy:**

*"This was during lockdown and was an appointment because I had chest pains. I did have trouble contacting the Council for a health pass ticket for a special boat. This call ended up by being transferred to someone in Park House. However as a result I was emailed a ticket and then the arrangement for the boat was very straightforward."*

**Easy:**

*"When booking a special, Tresco Boats are usually accommodating where they can be, subject to their other commitments. This is extremely costly though so we try to avoid having to come to the doctors in winter!"*

**Difficult:**

*"Because of the time of the clinic (very early) and winter boating it wasn't easy to get a straight answer whether there would be transport available. The scheduled shopping boat is much later and wouldn't make the blood clinic."*

**Difficult:**

*"Difficult finding scheduled boating to St Marys that fits in with appointment time. It sometimes would mean spending all day on St Marys and missing a day of work. Winter season is near impossible and very expensive."*

**Extremely Difficult:**

*"Accessing NHS services from the off-islands, particularly during the winter is prohibitively difficult and expensive. Especially in the case of more urgent appointments, it is almost impossible to use scheduled boats during the winter. The cost of return 'special' boats is in excess of £100. It is all the more frustrating when there is a 'medical launch', complete with a Board of Trustees, that does not seem to provide an affordable, on demand medical launch service."*

## Stories continued:

**Q6. Have you ever cancelled an appointment because you were unable to travel to St Mary's? Please provide more detail:**

**Yes:**

*"Due to tides/ weather/cost of a special."*

**Yes:**

*"During winter if storms mean a scheduled boat i.e. Thursday morning shopping boat has been cancelled I would have cancelled an appointment."*

**Yes:**

*"Weather - too rough to make the boat trip."*

**Yes:**

*"Had to cancel due to weather/boating conditions once and had to cancel an appointment for our child due to no appropriately timed tripper boats being available and not being able to afford two specials."*

**Yes:**

*"Sometimes in winter it has to be a special which can be up to £120 return. Not worth the money."*

**Yes:**

*"Weather closed in and the boats could not run."*

**Yes:**

*"Unfortunately the tides meant I could not get to my appointment on time."*

**(Did not answer yes or no)**

*"Not cancelled, but postponed. Whilst experiencing acute dental pain, I had to defer an urgent appointment until later in the week when I could use a weekly scheduled boat. In the interim, I was left to manage the acute pain with opiate painkillers borrowed from other people - this seems unnecessary and dangerous."*

## Stories

Q7. How easy have you found accessing doctor's appointments on the island that you live on? **Please provide more detail:**

### Very Easy:

*"At the moment have become very confused if the over 65 flu jab will be done on the off Islands or it has been done already over here and I will have to travel to St Marys. Facebook has mentioned that the practice will be in touch with the over 65's and vulnerable jabs, have not yet been contacted, then Facebook mentioned they are out of over 65s jabs, and then they will be doing under 65 jabs on the off Islands."*

### Easy:

*"The present system of a phone call from the doctor to arrange an appointment on the off-island is working well. If a video call could be set up I think that would be even better and would reduce the number of appointments on the off-island."*

### Easy:

*"It is usually easy to make an appointment with the doctor. The exception to this can be during the summer when visitors can swamp the availability of slots - it would be nice if some sort of priority was available to regulars at the surgery at these times."*

*I have enjoyed the quick phone/video consultations which have appeared over lockdown."*

### Neither easy or difficult:

*"I have had appointments cancelled due to being only patient booked in and during Covid it wasn't easy."*

### Neither easy or difficult:

*"In the summer the clinic which is only held once a week can be booked up and that then means waiting another week for an appointment or trying to get to an appointment on St Marys."*

## Stories continued:

### Neither easy or difficult:

*"Some services not available on island. Have turned up to appointments where doctor doesn't have correct equipment."*

### Neither easy or difficult:

*"Can be very difficult as can't book a certain time - you have to have the time you are given. As I work full time and am unable to leave work premises during the day, I often have to try and 'time' when I ring and ask for an appointment. Ring too early in the week and they can only give me an appointment which is too early as they fill appointments up in chronological order. Leave it too late and risk the clinic being full (which has happened many times!)"*

## Stories

### Additional information about off-island travel you would like to share:

*"Sometimes to get to an appointment it can mean either getting to St Marys at 8am and waiting for your appointment, as there is nowhere warm to wait this is awful."*

*"I believe that medical travel from off-islands should not be free, but should carry a cost equivalent to regular scheduled boating travel. However, the cost of boating should never be a barrier to accessing healthcare to a portion of the population - just because of where they live. This is a wider 'social' problem, not limited to health services - healthcare, Council, social care and education should all be working together to address this issue and find a sustainable and affordable solution."*

*"The lack of a dedicated St Martins boating service now makes accessing St Marys for any reason very difficult unless booking specials. This makes accessing medical care on St Marys very expensive and therefore unobtainable for me."*

*"During winter months it can be very expensive to access appointments on St Marys, as there is very limited time to access appointments on a Thursday and only between 9.45 and 13.00 the only day when there is a scheduled boat."*

*"It's very expensive if you can't get on a scheduled boat. Or can be crowded during season. Also unpleasant sitting outside due to Covid".*

# Conclusion

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## Conclusion

Only ten members of the community completed the survey which was slightly disappointing and meant that it was difficult to draw any solid conclusions from the results.

When looking at the reasons for travelling to St Mary's, 45% of responses were for travelling for a doctors appointment at the Health Centre. 18% of responses were for travelling for a medical consultation at the hospital. 36% of responses were for travelling for other reasons which were for dentistry, asthma clinic, blood clinic and for an injection (although these would have likely been held at either of the two venues mentioned above).

Wednesday saw the majority of respondents travel to St Mary's for medical appointments, with 35% of responses travelling on this day. 28% of responses were for travelling on a Thursday, 21% of responses were for travelling on a Tuesday and 7% were for travelling on a Monday and Friday.

The majority of respondents (60%) booked a special boat to travel across, while 40% of respondents used a scheduled boat.

70% of respondents found it easy or neither easy or difficult to arrange travel to their appointment. 30% found it either difficult or extremely difficult to arrange.

78% of responses indicated that they have had to cancel an appointment on St Mary's because they were unable to travel.

When looking at how easy it is to access doctor's appointments on the island residents live on, 30% of respondents found it either easy or very easy accessing appointments and 70% found it neither easy or difficult. No one found it difficult to access doctor's appointments on the island they live on.

## Conclusion

All three respondents who said they found the process of arranging travel to their appointment on St Mary's either difficult or extremely difficult provided more detail around this. The general theme was that getting a scheduled boat was impossible or very difficult and it was very expensive to travel across in winter. Of the seven respondents who said they found the process easy or neither easy or difficult, only two added more detail and one of these said although they find it easy to arrange, It's expensive so they try and avoid seeing a doctor on St Mary's in Winter!

The majority of the reasons for respondents cancelling appointments were due to the weather conditions, meaning that boats could not travel. Tide was also mentioned which affects boating times. The cost of the boat was mentioned several times as a reason for cancelling appointments. In one case, a patient postponed their appointment to a time when they could use a scheduled boat at a cheaper cost and in the mean time borrowed painkillers from another resident! In another case, it was a child's appointment that was cancelled as they could not afford the cost of two special boat trips.

No respondents found accessing doctor's appointments on the island they live on difficult. Although two respondents explained that the present system of a phone call to arrange an appointment is working well, one person commented that as the appointments fill up in chronological order, it is difficult to get a time that they can fit around their work. One person has had their appointment cancelled as they were the only person booked in and two commented that in the summer season, the clinics get booked up quickly and then they have to wait another week to see a Doctor.

## Conclusion

Additional comments made reference once again to the cost of getting across to St Mary's for appointments and that it is very expensive. One person felt that the cost of boating should never be a barrier to accessing healthcare and another person said that it is very expensive and unobtainable for them due to a lack of scheduled boats. One person also commented that during winter it is very expensive and residents are limited to accessing appointments on a Thursday between 09:45 and 13:00, when a scheduled boat does runs. A couple of comments stated that getting across for an appointment can mean a lengthy wait out in the cold, depending on appointment time.

## Recommendations

From the survey the following recommendations have been made:

- \* In the winter, appointments should be booked on a Thursday where possible as this is the only day that a scheduled boat runs.
- \*Cost of special boats for primary care appointments covered for all off-island residents travelling for a pre-arranged medical appointment on St Mary's, when unable to use a scheduled boat.
- \*More scheduled boat times in winter.
- \* For doctors appointments on the off-islands, have a system where residents have more flexibility in booking a time slot to see a doctor. The patient be given a chosen time and only moved if the clinic has not filled up and they need to be seen earlier.

# Contact us

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AdDoctoress and contact details of the organisation holding the local Healthwatch contract as of 31/03/2020.

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