

Exploring patient choice in GP services

December 2014

This research was commissioned and funded by Monitor

Aims and Methodology

Aims

- This study was carried out by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Monitor, as part of Monitor's review of GP services.
- The survey explores what patients look for in a GP practice and whether and how patients exercise their right to choose a GP practice.
- The aims of the survey are to try and understand:
 - whether patients engage in actively considering their choice of GP services provider;
 - whether patients are able to assess which GP services provider best satisfies their needs; and,
 - whether patients are able to successfully change to a GP services provider which best meets their needs.

Methodology

- Interviews were carried out by Ipsos MORI's face-to-face omnibus survey.
- 3,315 interviews were completed with adults between 7th and 20th November 2014.
- Data has been weighted to be representative of adults / GP patient population aged 15+ in England.

Convenience, access and quality are key considerations when choosing a GP practice

- **Most people are registered with a GP practice, and those that are tend to use it regularly**
 - 96% are currently registered with a GP practice.
 - 75% of those who are registered have visited their GP practice in the last 6 months.
- **Convenience of location, access and quality are the main things patients say they look for in a GP practice**
 - Proximity of the practice to their home (58%), how easy it is to get an appointment (57%) and good quality diagnosis and treatment (41%) are the most common things people seek from a GP practice.
- **However, when patients actually make a choice, convenience of location is the main consideration**
 - 77% of patients who have registered with their GP practice in the last 10 years say its location close to their home was the main reason for choosing their GP practice.
- **Most patients are satisfied with their GP practice and their expectations are largely being met**
 - One in ten patients (10%) are dissatisfied with their GP practice.
 - The majority of patients say that their GP practice meets their expectations, particularly around aspects of convenience of location and quality.
- **However, a significant minority of patients feel their expectations around appointments are not being met by their current GP provider**
 - At least three in ten patients say their practice is below their expectations for ease of getting an appointment (30%), being offered appointments online (34%), being able to see the same doctor every time (35%) and being open evening and weekends (46%).
- **When patients are unable to get a GP appointment some say they would use urgent or emergency services instead**
 - 27% say they would go to a walk-in centre instead.
 - 17% say they would go to A&E / hospital instead.

Although choice is seen as important, a lack of 'engagement' with choice means few actually consider alternatives when choosing a GP practice

- **The vast majority of patients say they are aware that they have the right to choose their GP practice, and think it is important to be able to do so**
 - 91% know they have the right to choose a GP practice, while 89% know they have the right to ask to see a particular GP within a practice.
 - 92% think it is important to be able to make a choice about which GP practice to register with.
- **However, when registering with a GP practice only a minority considered an alternative GP practice or compared GP practices in their area**
 - Most patients who registered with their GP practice in the last 10 years did not consider any other practices at the time that they registered (84%).
 - 40% of these patients have never tried to compare GP practices, rising to nine in ten (88%) of those who have been registered for more than 10 years.
- **The majority of patients rate their current GP practice as average or above average, which may show that patients are unaware of the true performance of their GP practice relative to others in their area**
 - 3% say that their GP practice is below average.
 - 42% say their GP practice is average, 40% say their GP practice is better than average.
- **A significant proportion of patients do not feel as though they have a choice of GP practice if they wanted to change**
 - 29% do not feel they have a choice.
 - 65% feel they have a choice of GP practice if they wanted to change.
- **Worsening quality of diagnosis (for a serious illness) and dissatisfaction with care are the most likely reasons to make patients change GP practice**
 - Though the availability of appointments and other quality and access issues are also important for some.

Most patients rely on word of mouth to compare GP practices rather than on available information about GP practices' performance

- **When comparing GP practices patients tend to rely on word of mouth rather than information available on quality and access**
 - 60% of patients who compared GP practices relied on recommendations from family and friends.
 - Few use public sources of information when making these comparisons; 15% use the NHS Choices website while just five per cent use GP patient survey results.
- **The majority of those who have used information on GP practice performance found it easy to find and understand**
- **However, information on quality of diagnosis and treatment was not as easy to find and understand**

Majority of patients find registering easy, but there is room for making the process simpler

- **The vast majority of patients find registering with a GP practice easy**
 - 88% of those who have registered with their GP practice in the last 10 years say they found it easy to do.
- **For the minority who found it difficult, they cite inconvenience and time as the main issues**
 - 20%* of these patients cite inconvenience of paperwork as an issue.
 - 18%* cite both the time taken to transfer records and the number of procedures as issues.
- **A small number of patients who considered alternative GP practices when choosing their current GP practice cite practice boundaries and being refused registration as main reasons why they did not register with an alternative provider**
 - 21% of those who have registered with their GP practice in the last 10 years say their GP practice was the only one they were in the catchment area for.
 - 12% of these patients say they tried to register with another GP practice but were refused registration / they were full.

Overview



Interpreting the data

Interpreting the data

- For each question, the responses to each answer are presented as a percentage (%).
- The number of respondents answering (the base size) is stated at the bottom of each slide for each question.
- For questions with fewer than 100 responses, we strongly recommend that findings are interpreted with caution.
- Where results do not sum to 100%, or where individual responses (e.g. tend to agree; strongly agree) do not sum to combined responses (e.g. strongly/tend to agree) this is due to rounding.
- Text summaries have been included for particular subgroups of interest, only significant differences (at 95% significance level) have been commented on in these cases.

Nearly all are registered with a GP practice, with many registered with their current GP practice for a long time

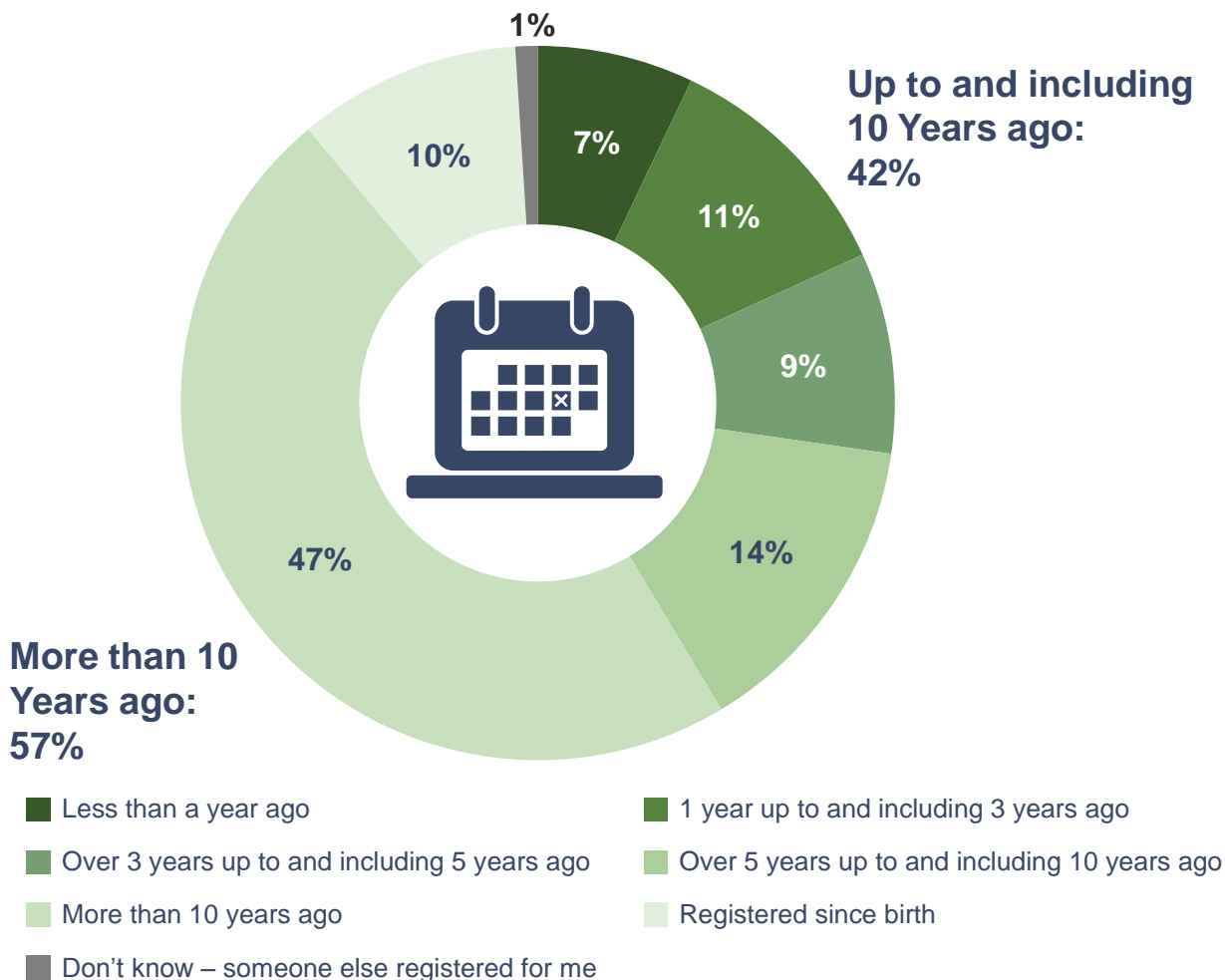
S1. Are you currently registered with a GP practice?

Q3. When did you register with your current GP practice?

S1. Are you currently registered with a GP practice

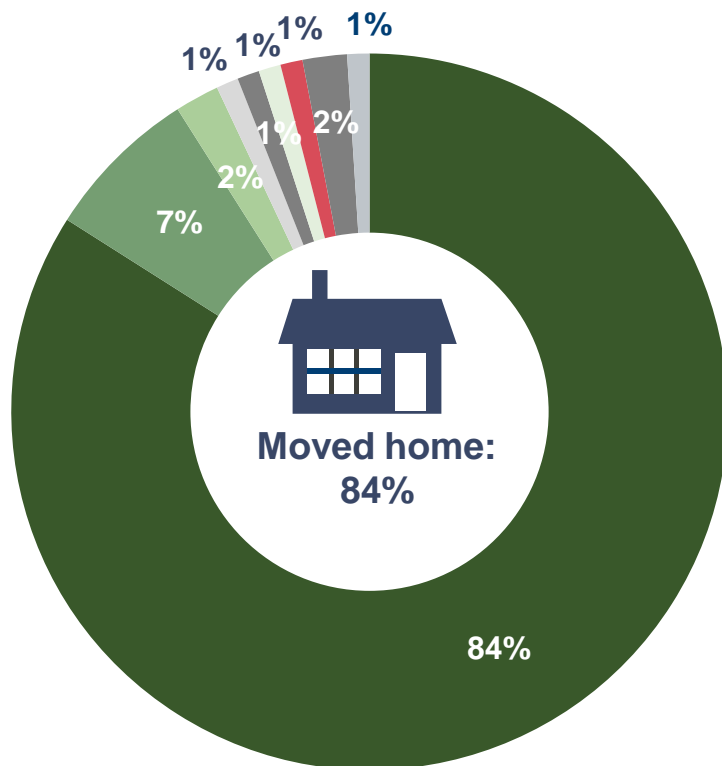
- Most people (96%) are registered with a GP practice – significantly more women than men are (98% v 94%).
- Households with children are more likely to be registered than child-free households (97% v 95%).
- Likelihood of being registered with a GP practice increases with age – those aged 15-24 least likely to be registered (89% v 96% overall).

Q3. When did you register with your current GP practice?



When patients do change GP practice this is usually because they have moved home

Q4. Why did you need to register with a new GP practice at that time?



Moved home

Move to GP practice that delivers particular service I need

GP retired/passed away/left

Surgery closed down

Don't know / Can't remember

Dissatisfied with my previous GP practice / GP

Did not register with new GP

Location/nearer home

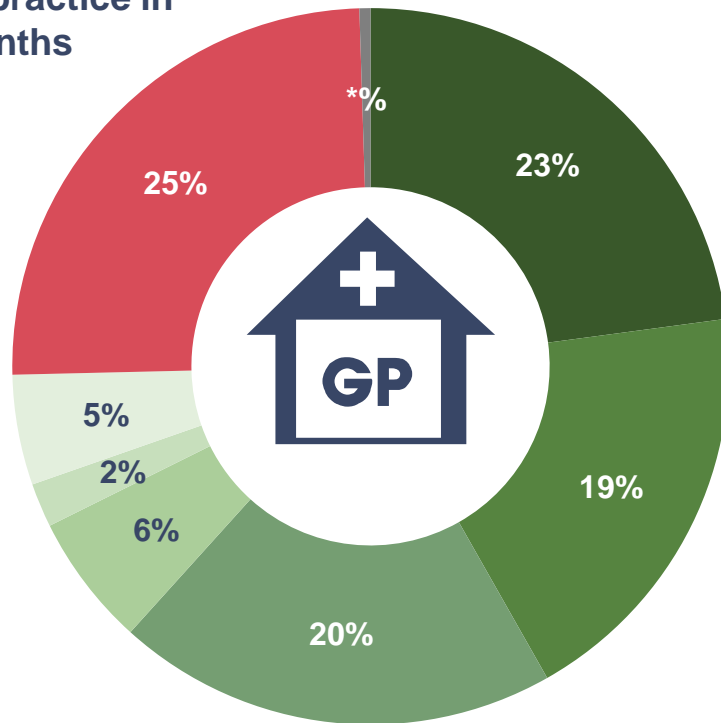
Other (specify)

- Moving home is the most common reason to move GP practices – women (86%), those aged 25-44 (89%) and full-time workers (87%) are more likely than others to give this reason (84% overall).
- People aged 65+ are more likely to change GP practice due to being dissatisfied with their previous GP practice (17% v 7% overall).

Many use their GP practice regularly, with three-quarters visiting their GP practice in the last 6 months

Q2. Thinking about the last 6 months, how many times, if any, have you visited your GP practice?

75% have visited their GP practice in last 6 months



Those more likely to be frequent users (3+ times in last 6 months) include:

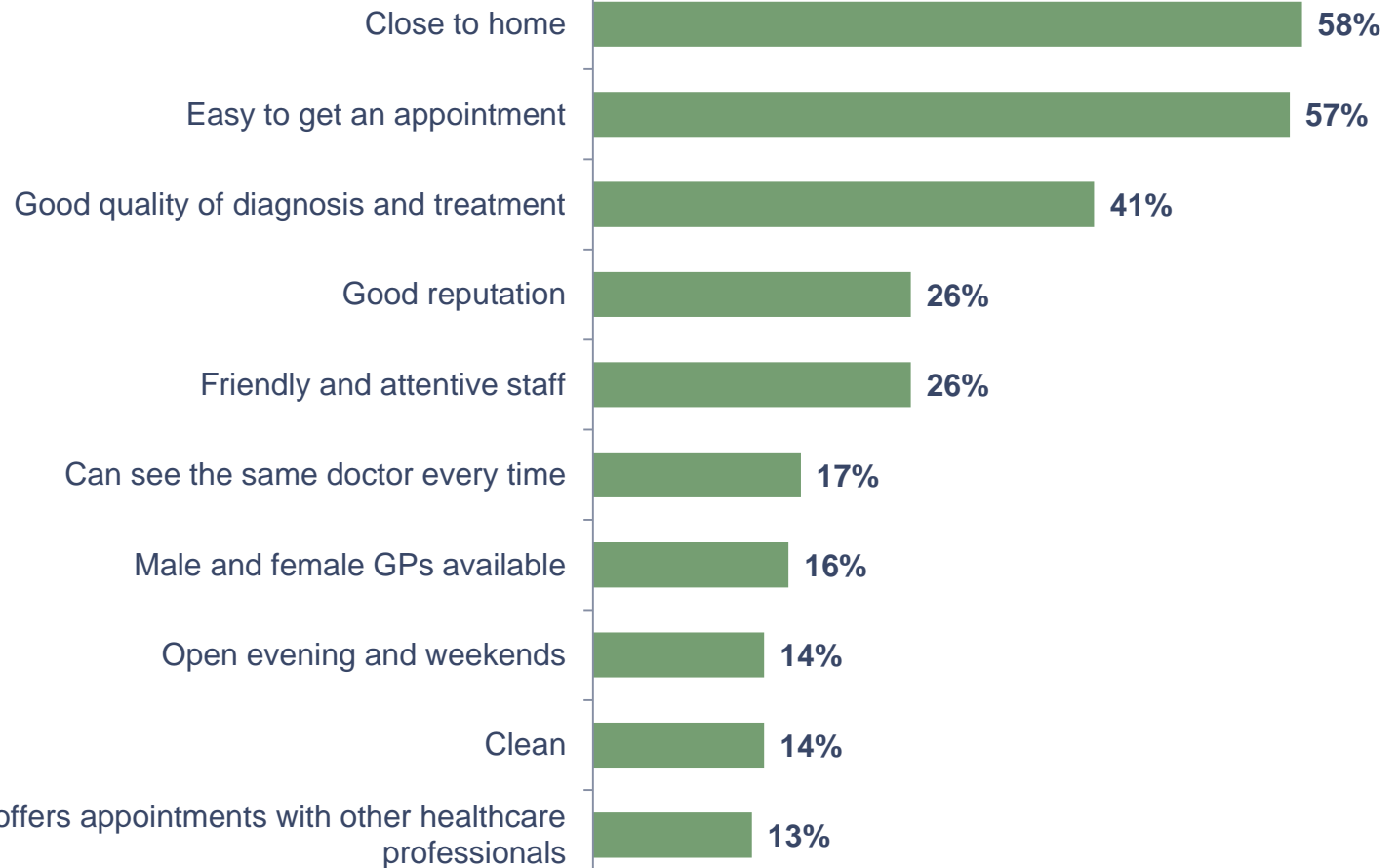
- **Women** compared with men (39% v 25%).
- **Those aged 65+** compared with those aged under 65 (43% v 30%).
- **Those from less affluent social grades (DE)** compared with those from social grades ABC1C2 (39% v 30%).
- **Those with a long-term condition (LTC), disability or infirmity** compared to those who do not have any of these (57% v 23%).

Location, accessibility and quality are the main things people say they look for in a GP practice...

Q1a. What are the main things you look for in a GP practice? Please read the list of 26 options and then select up to five options.



Top 10 responses

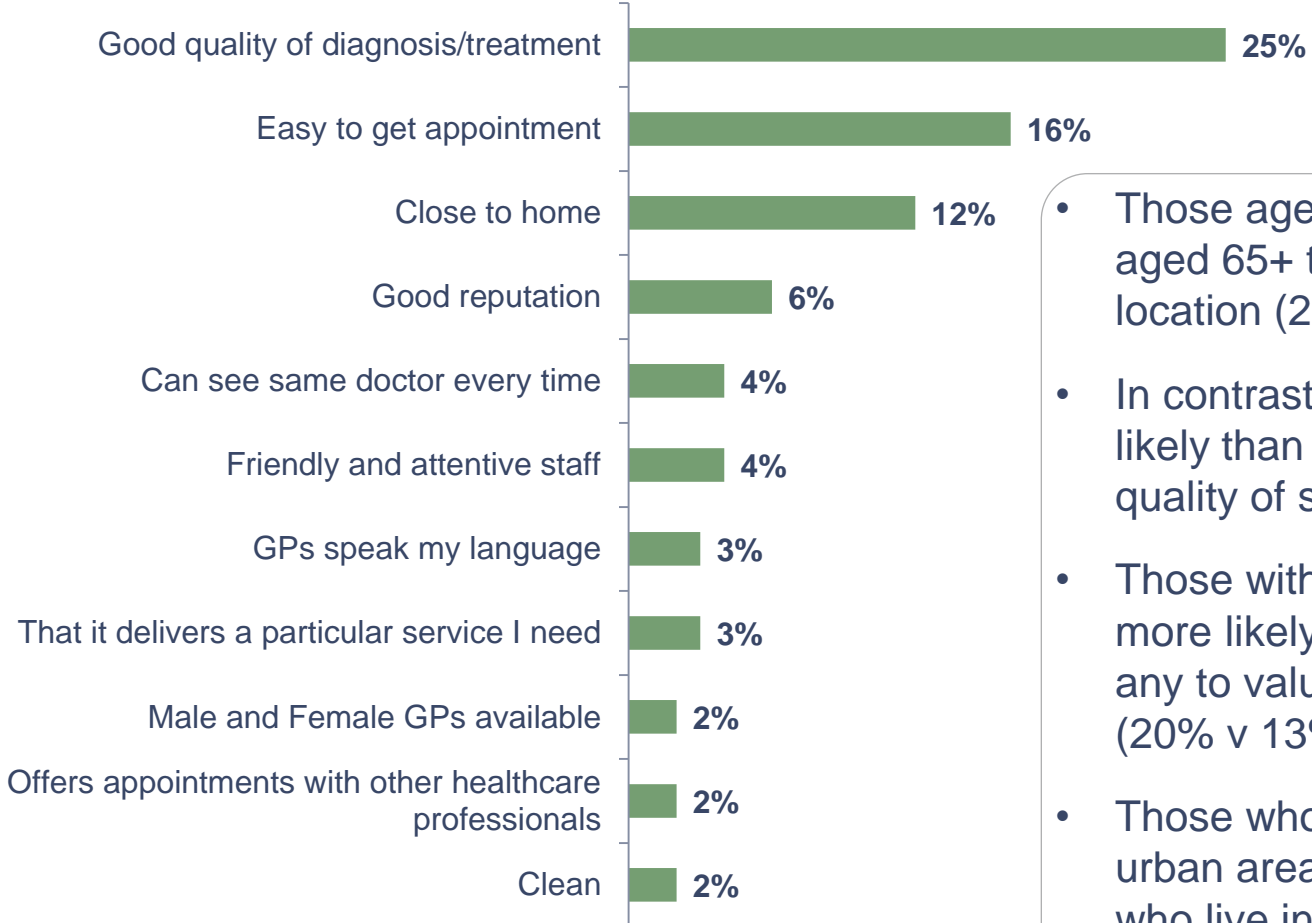


... and are also the aspects that continued to be valued by those who have been registered with their GP practice for a long time

Q28b. You mentioned a number of aspects you value about your current GP practice. Which one of the following is the MOST important aspect to you?



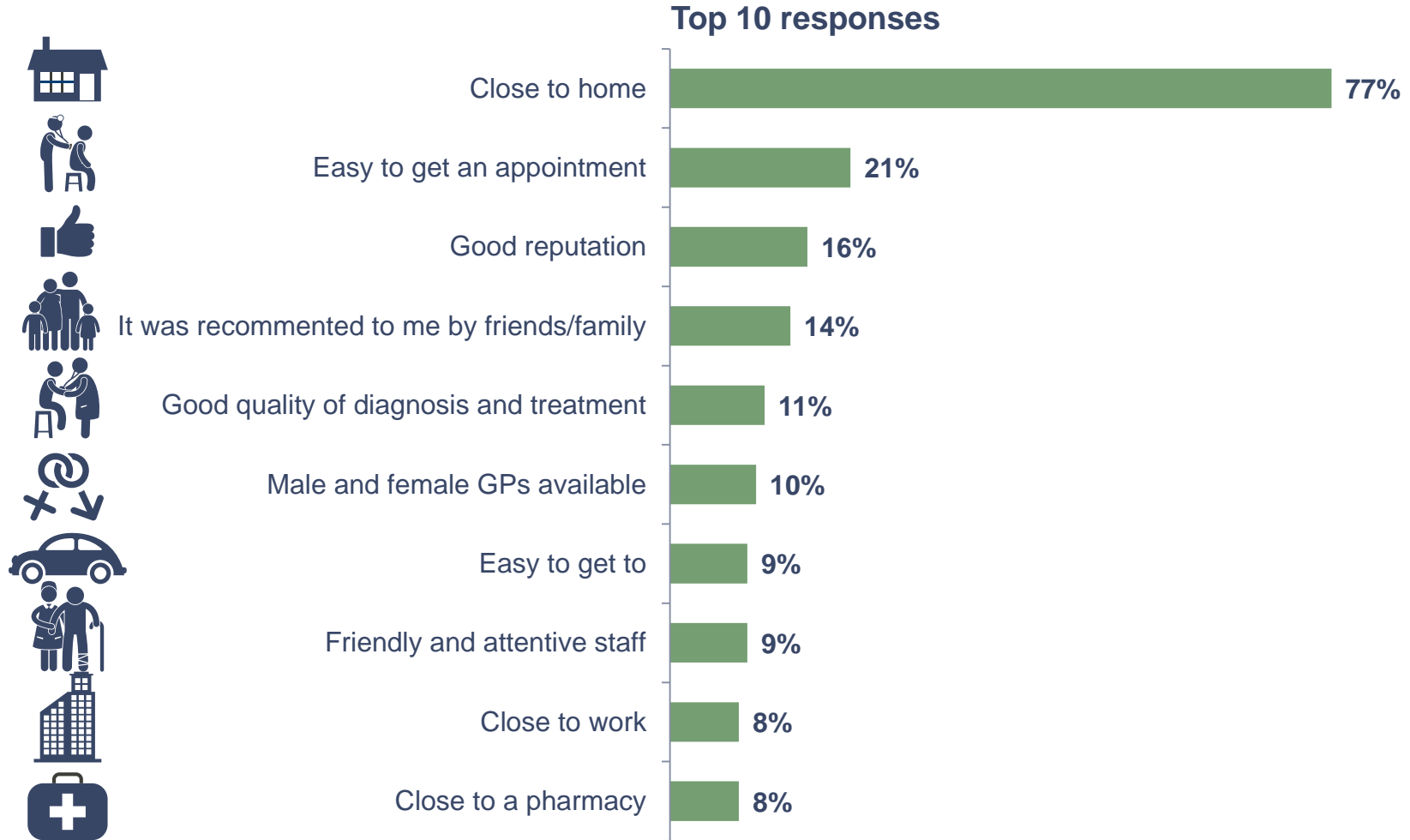
Top responses shown (2%+)



- Those aged 15-44 more likely than those aged 65+ to value convenience of location (24% v 10%).
- In contrast, those aged 65+ are more likely than those aged 15-24 to value quality of services (47% v 36%).
- Those with children in the household more likely than those who do not have any to value convenience of location (20% v 13%).
- Those who live in metropolitan and urban areas are more likely than those who live in rural areas to value convenience of location (16% v 10%)*.

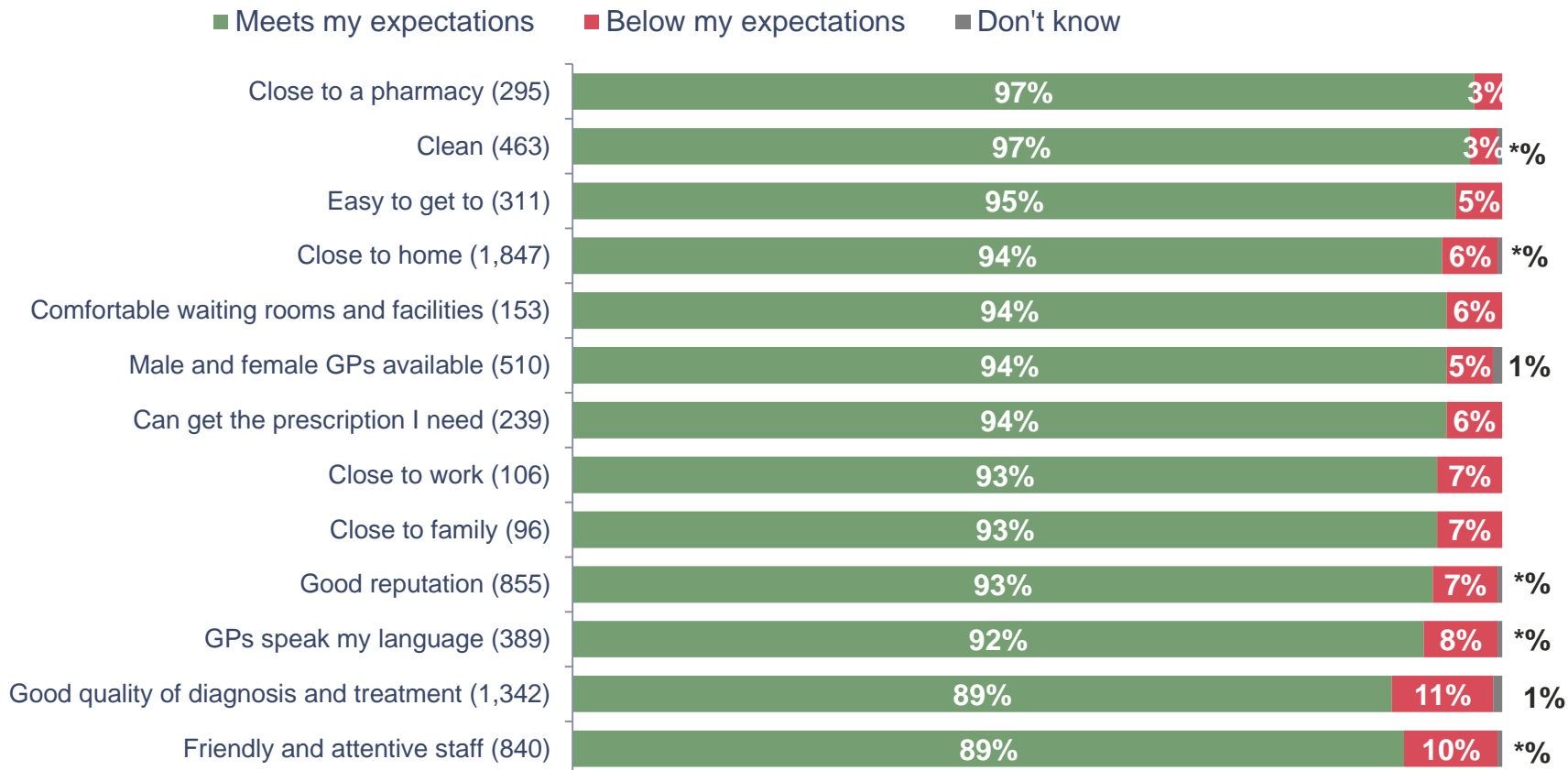
However, when people actually make a choice of which GP practice to register with, the majority do so based on its proximity to their home

Q7a. Why did you choose to register at your current GP practice?



The majority of patients are mostly happy with their GP practice's offering

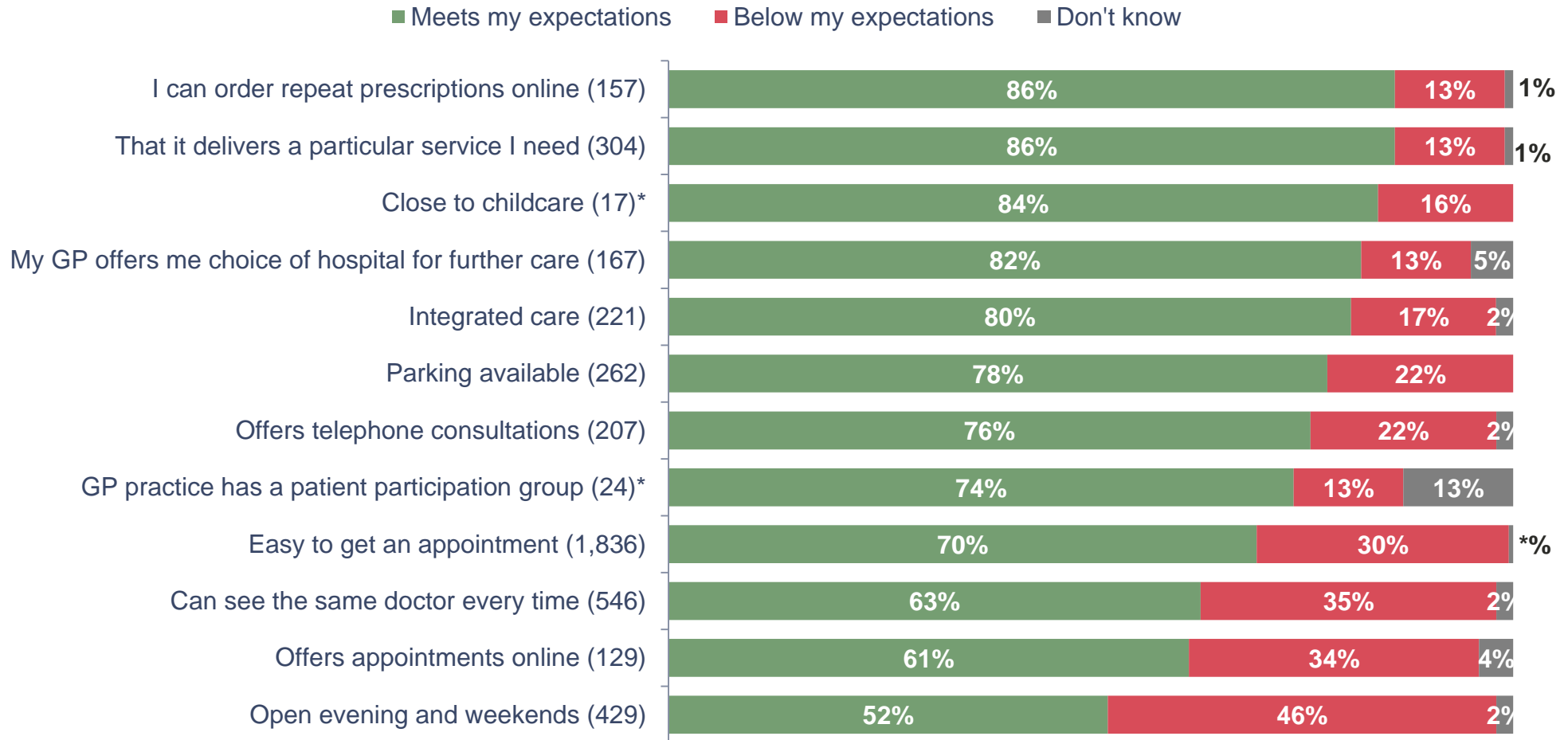
Q1b. And for each of the things you look for in a GP practice, to what extent, if at all, does your current GP practice meet your expectations?



- However, when we asked patients to rate the performance of their GP practice only four per cent said their GP practice was worse than average. This raises the question about how well informed patients are about the quality of GP services.

However this is not the case for all aspects – particularly the convenience of opening hours and the ability to get appointments

Q1b. And for each of the things you look for in a GP practice, to what extent, if at all, does your current GP practice meet your expectations?



This is an issue as when appointments are unavailable, people tend to seek treatment elsewhere rather than wait

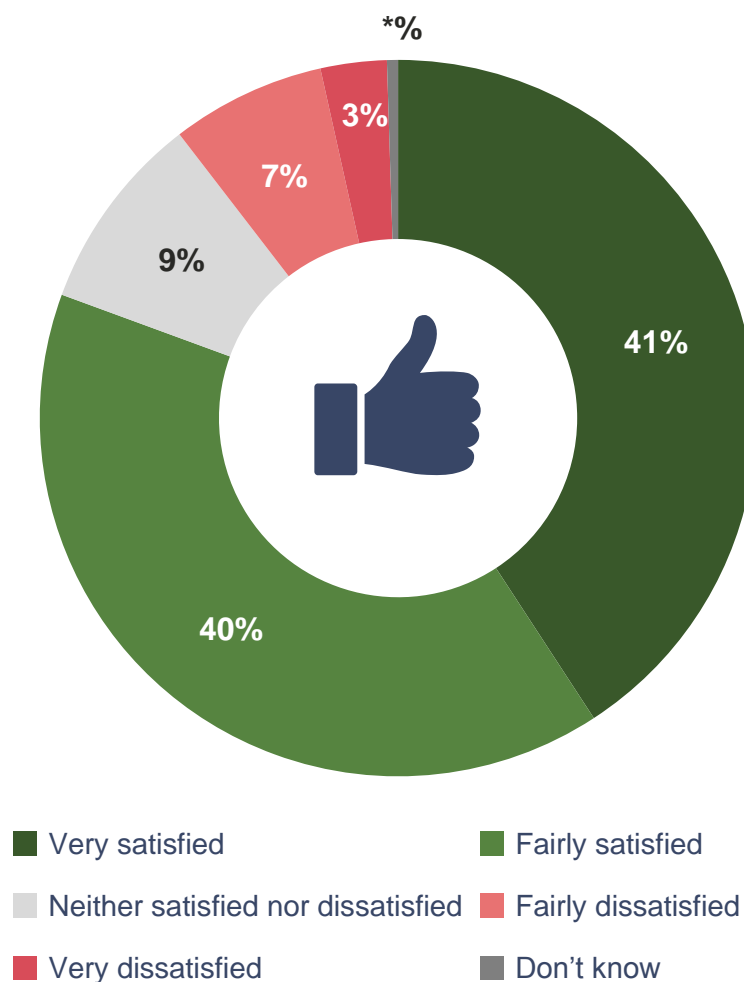
Q8/Q29. If you wanted to see a GP because you were unwell but were unable to get an appointment when you wanted, what would you be most likely to do instead?



While most are satisfied with their GP practice, one in ten are dissatisfied

Q21/Q36. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your current GP practice?

- People aged 65+ are more likely to be very satisfied than those aged 15-54 (54% v 36%).
- Those from more affluent social grades (ABC1) are more likely to be satisfied than those from less affluent social grades (C2DE) (83% v 78%).
- Those who have a car in their household are more likely to be satisfied than those who do not (82% v 77%) – perhaps linked to the issues around expectations of opening hours and appointments.
- Those living in rural areas are more likely to be satisfied than those in metropolitan areas (85% vs 78%).
- Those registered with their GP practice for more than 10 years are more satisfied than those who registered with their practice in the last 10 years (82% v 78%).



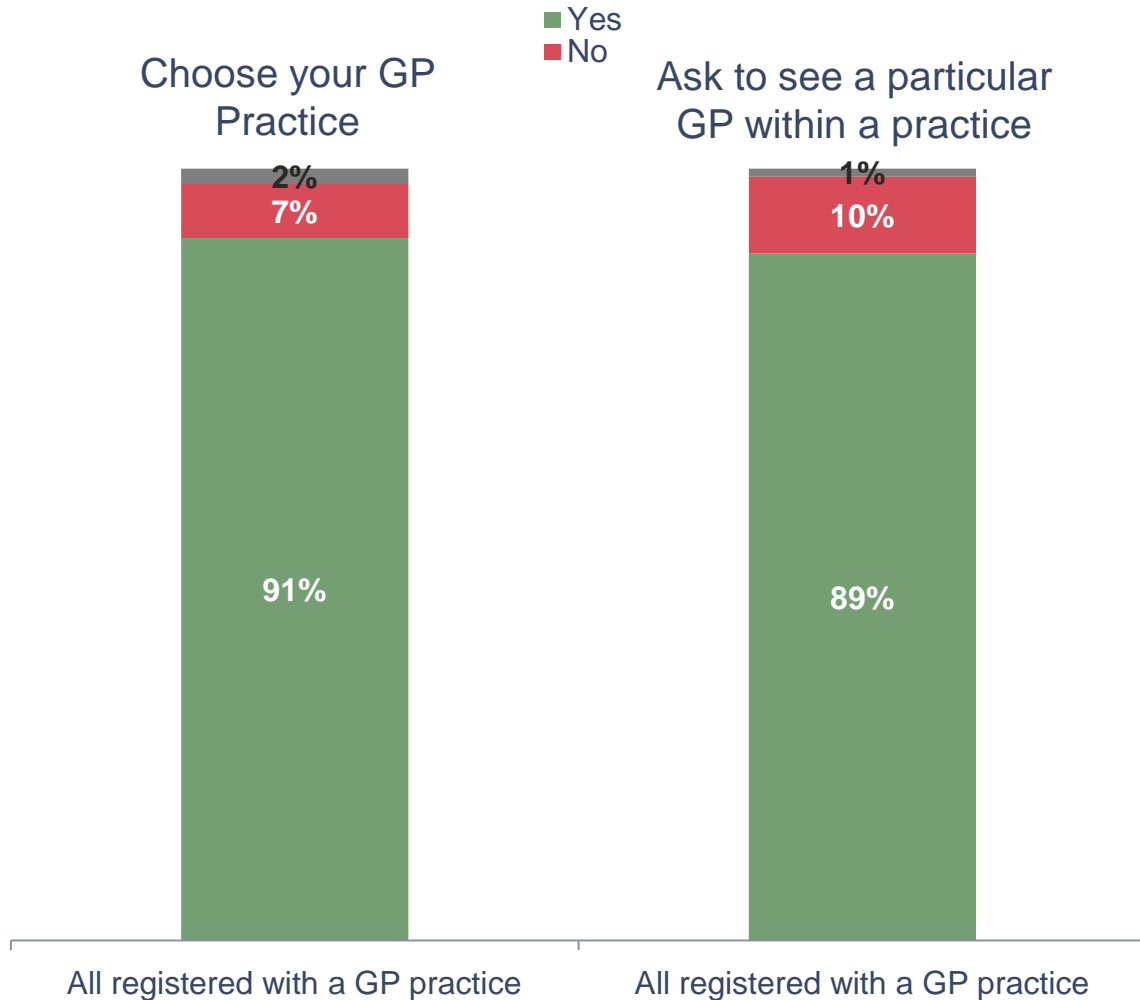
Are respondents able to engage:

Are respondents aware they can choose their GP practice?



Most people know they have a right to choose their GP practice and ask to see a particular GP

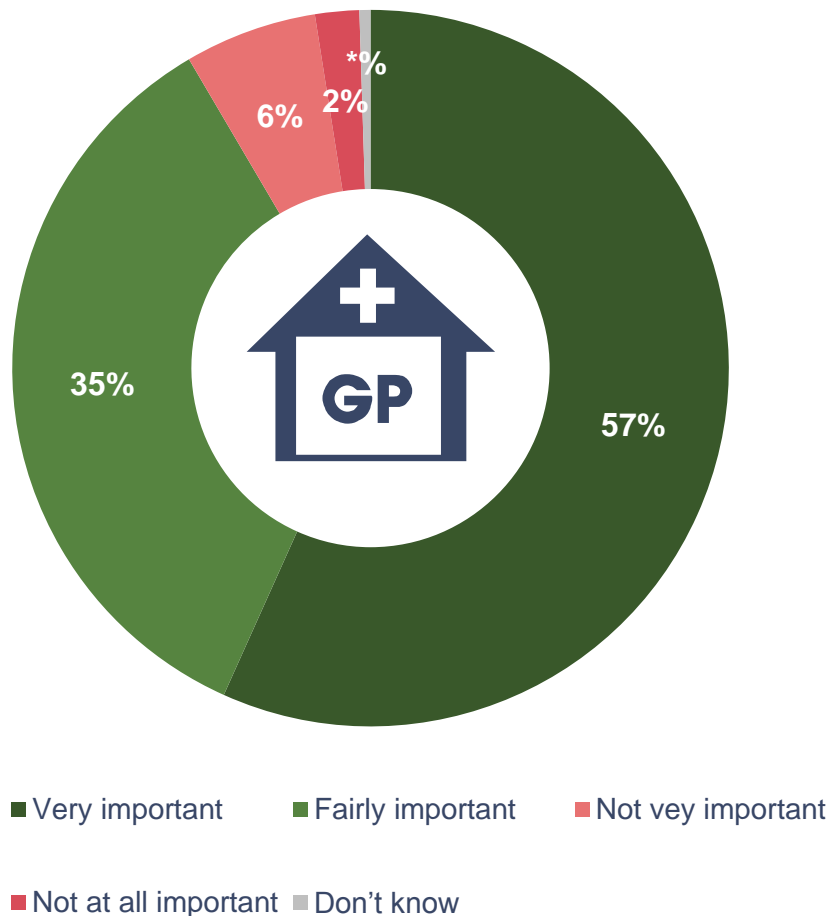
Q5/Q26. Do you think you have the right to...?



- People aged 65+ are more likely than younger age groups (15-34) to report being aware that they have a right to choose their GP practice (94% v 88%).
- Women are also more aware than men that they have this choice (92% v 89%).
- People who think choice is important are more likely to be aware they are able to choose their GP practice than those who do not think it is important (93% v 73%).
- However, those who live in metropolitan areas are less likely than those who live in urban, suburban or rural areas to be aware that they have the right to choose their GP practice (85% v 93%).
- There is less variation between sub-groups in claimed knowledge of the right to ask to see a particular GP within a practice.
- Those who have visited a GP practice at least 5 times in the last 6 months are more likely to know they can ask to see a particular GP in the practice than those who have not visited in this time period (93% vs 86%).

Most also think having a choice of GP practice is important

Q6/Q27. How important, if at all, do you think it is to be able to choose the GP practice you register at?



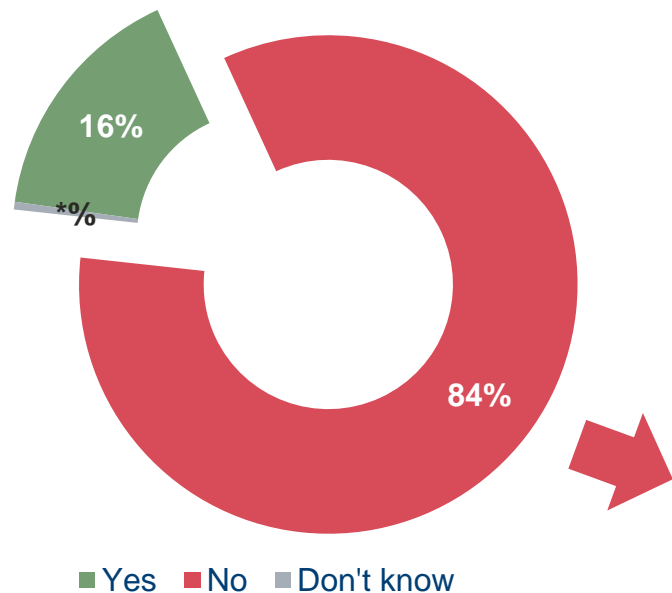
- Women are more likely than men to think that having this choice is very important (61% v 52%).
- As do those aged 55+ compared with those aged 15-24 (60% v 43%).
- Those from more affluent social grades (AB) are more likely than other patients to think this choice is not important (10% v 8%).
- All those who moved to their current GP practice because they were unsatisfied with their previous GP think that choice is important (100%).

Despite this, few actually exercise this choice; only a minority considered alternative GP practices – with proximity to home a big reason for not doing so

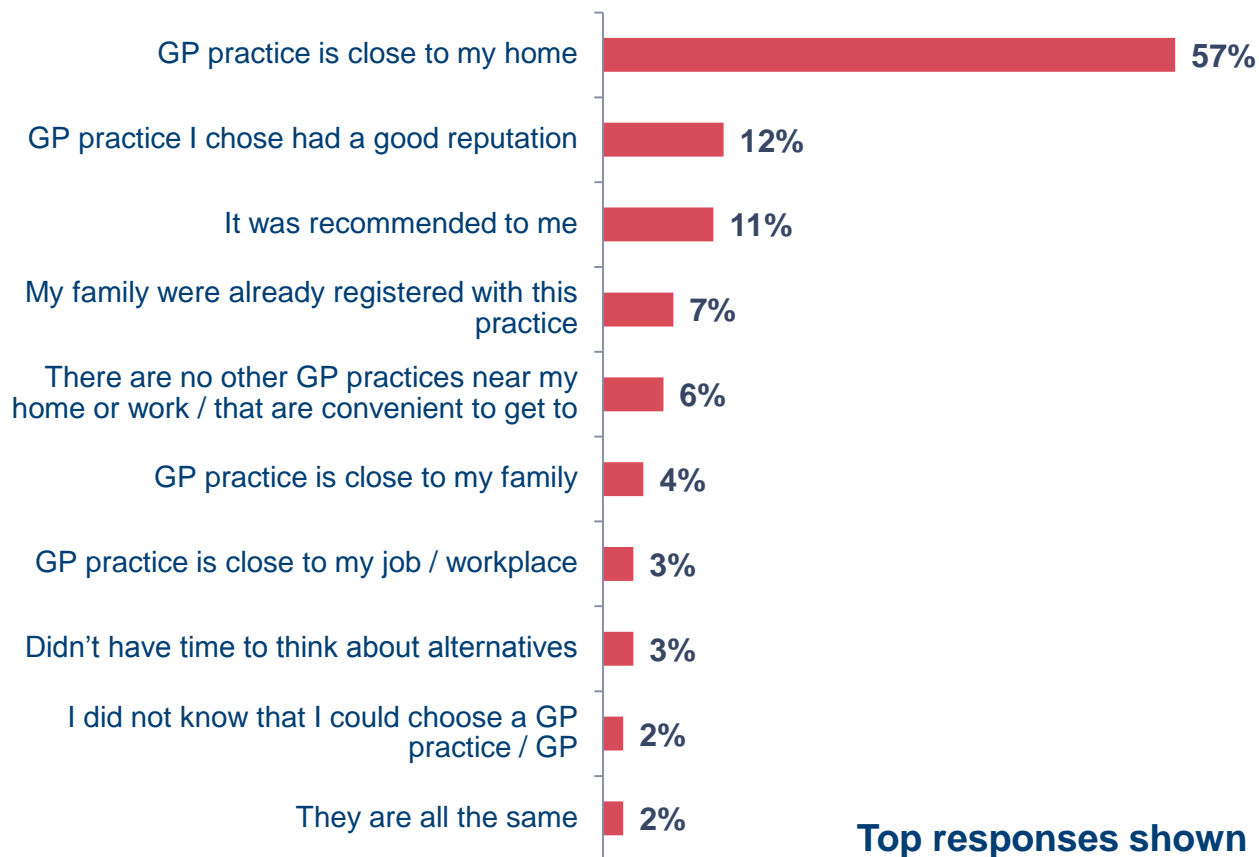
Q11. At the time when you registered with your current GP practice, did you consider any other GP practices?

Q12. What were the main reasons why you did not consider any other GP practices at that time?

Q11. Did you consider any other GP practices?



Q12. What were the main reasons why you did not consider any other GP practices at that time?

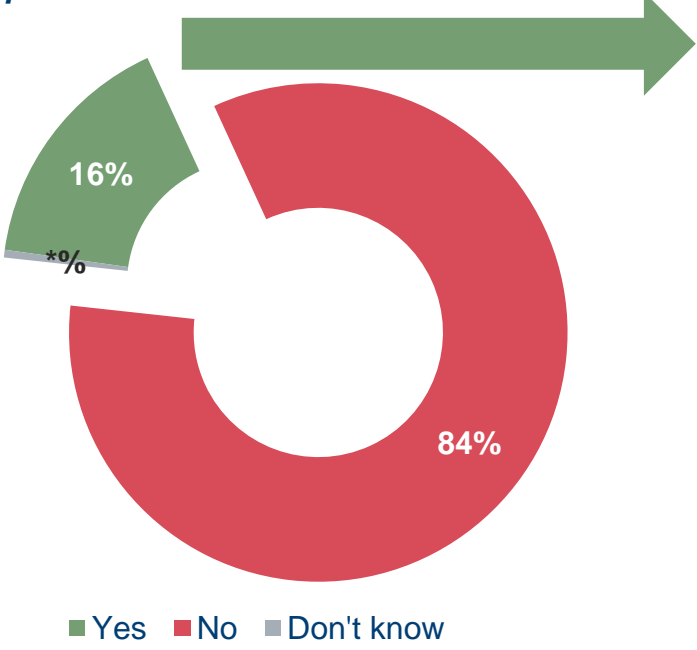


Top responses shown

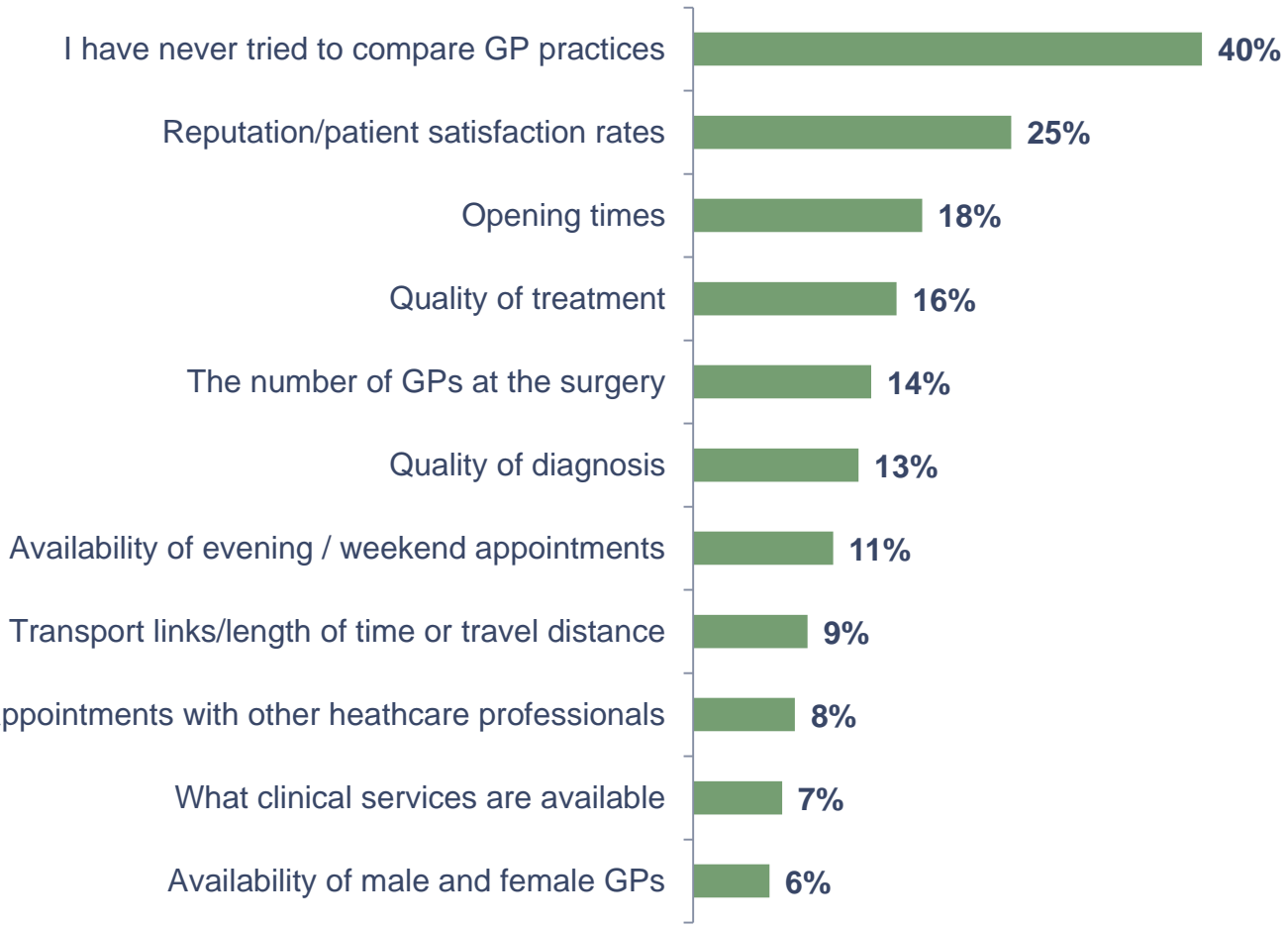
Only a small number of patients appear to exercise choice; those who did consider alternatives being most likely to compare on reputation / patient satisfaction

Q11. At the time when you registered with your current GP practice, did you consider any other GP practices?
Q15. When you were choosing your GP practice, did you try to compare GP practices for any of the following?

Q11. Did you consider any other GP practices?



Q15. When you were choosing your GP practice, did you try to compare GP practices for any of the following?



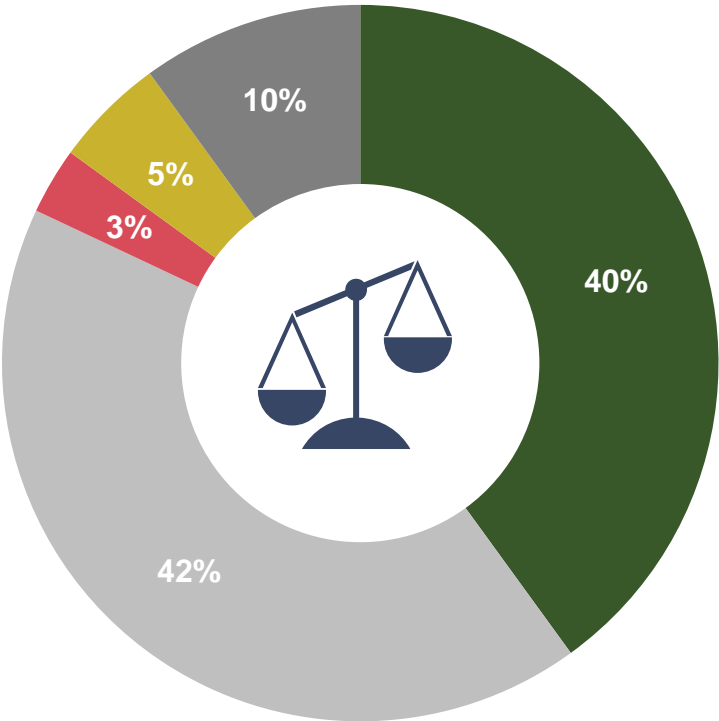
Exercising choice is also low among those who have been registered with their GP practice for a long time

Q30. Have you ever tried to compare GP practices for any of the following?



The majority of patients rate their current GP practice as average or above average, which may show that patients are unaware of the true performance of their GP practice relative to others in their area

Q19/Q34. How would you describe your GP practice relative to other practices in your local area, would you say it was...?

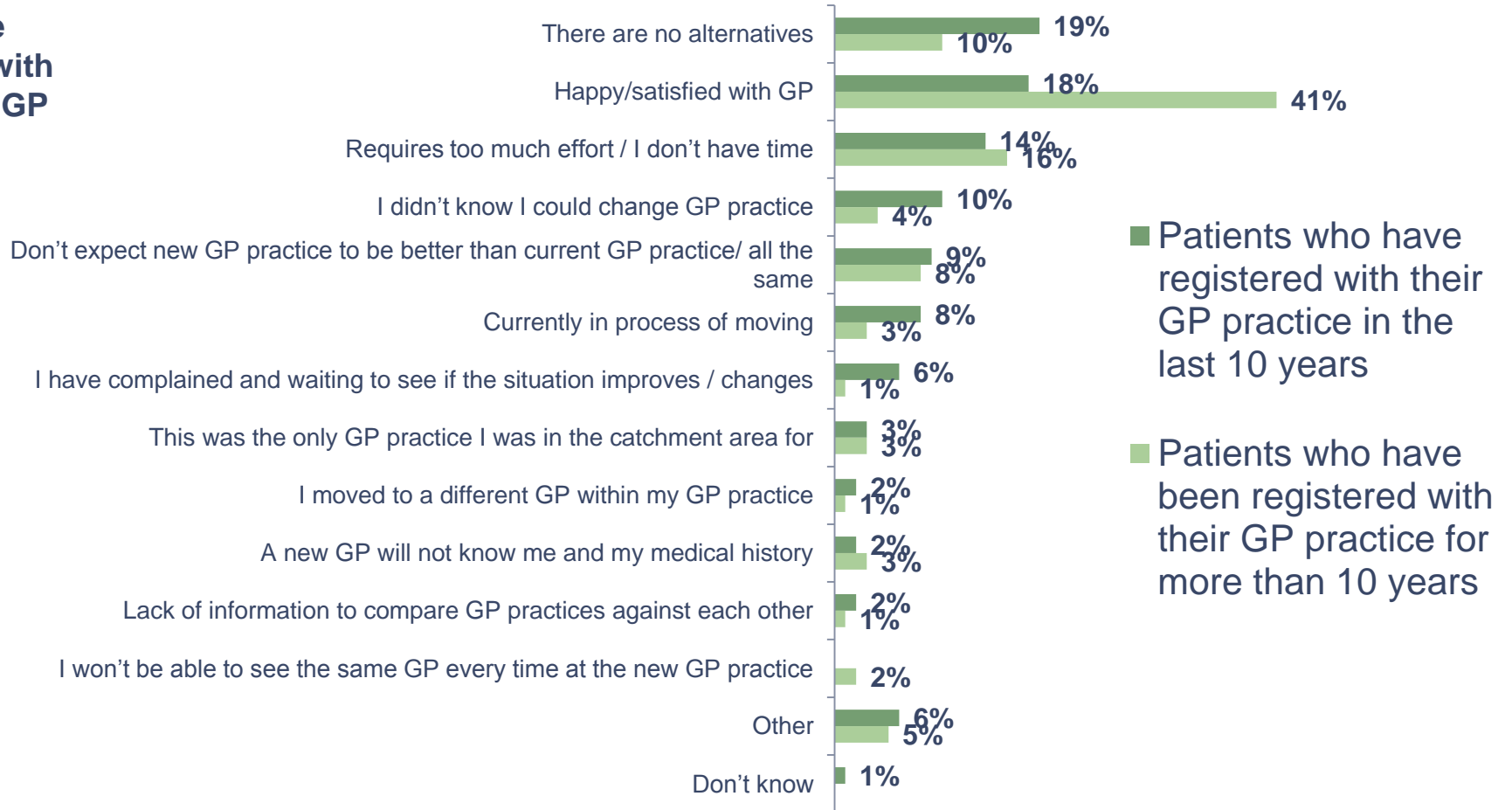


- Better than average
- Average
- Worse than average
- No other GP practices in my local area
- Don't know

A lack of alternatives, satisfaction with an individual GP or effort in changing GP practice is preventing those who are dissatisfied from switching GP practice

Q23/Q38. What is the main reason why you have not moved to a different GP practice?

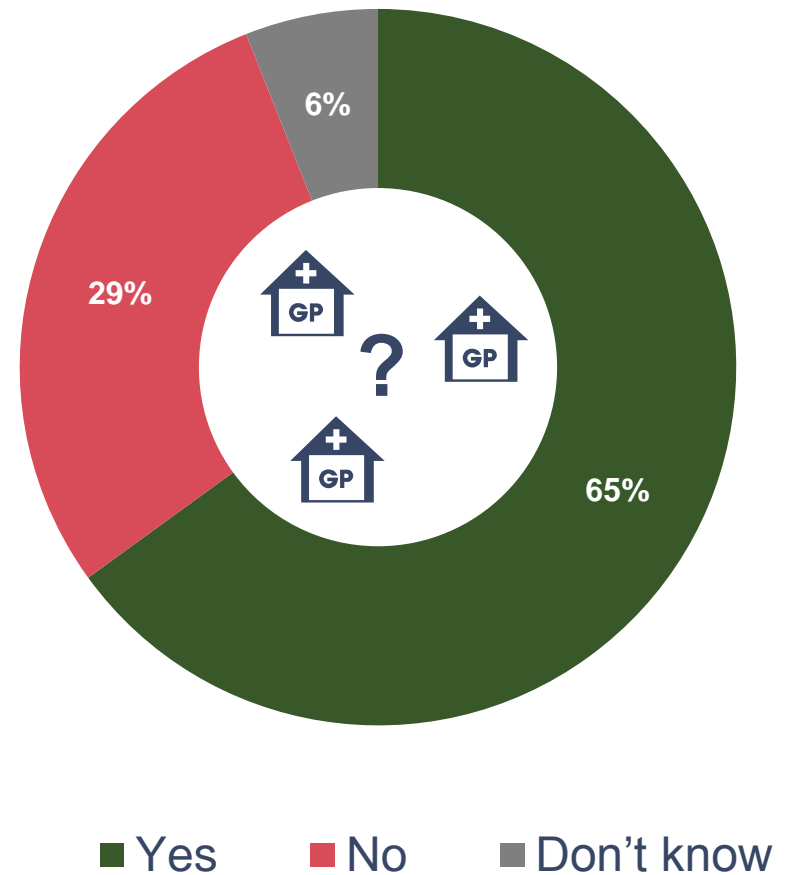
Only 10% are dissatisfied with their current GP practice



A significant minority of patients feel as though they do not have a choice of GP practice if they wanted to move

Q24/Q39. If you wanted to register with a different GP practice, do you feel you would have a choice of GP practices to choose from?

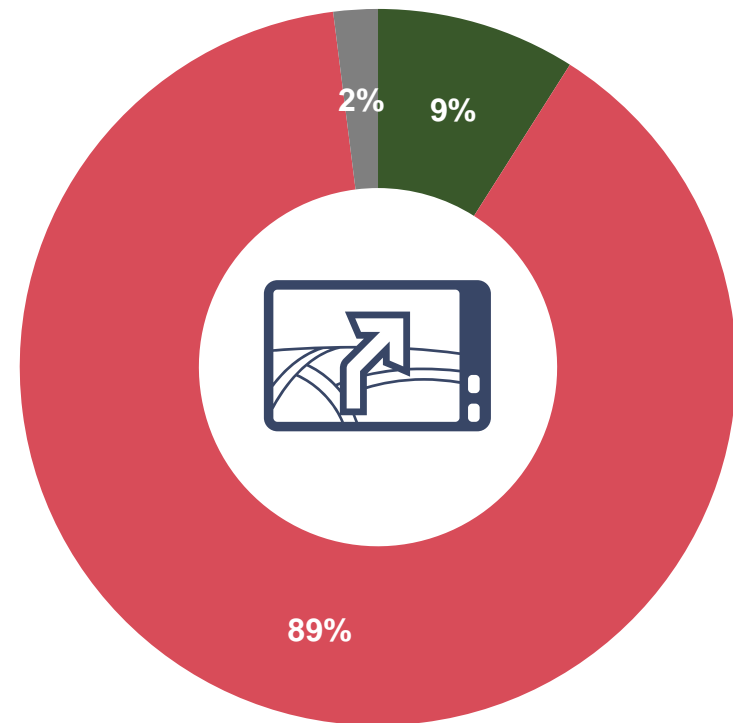
- People who have a car in their household are more likely to feel they have a choice of GP practices than those who do not (69% v 59%).
- Those who feel it is important to have choice are more likely to feel they do have a choice (67% v 51%) – likewise, those who do not think it is important tend to feel they do not have a choice (41% v 28%).
- Those aged 15-24 are more likely to think they do not have a choice of GP practices (35% v 29% overall).
- As are those from less affluent social grades (C2DE) compared to those from social grades ABC1 (31% v 27%).
- Those who live in metropolitan areas are more likely to think they do not have a choice than those living in rural, urban and suburban areas (39% v 25%).



Few have actually considered moving GP practice

Q22/Q37. Have you ever considered moving from your current GP practice and registering with a different GP practice?

- Those who live in households with children are more likely to have considered moving GP practice than child-free households (12% v 8%).
- Those aged 25-34 are most likely to consider moving GP practices (14% vs 9% overall).
- More frequent and heavier users of GPs (i.e. those who have used their GP practice 5 or more times in the last 6 months) are more likely to have considered moving GP practice than those who have not used it at all over the same period (14% v 8%).
- Those who are dissatisfied with their current GP practice are more likely than those who are satisfied to have considered moving practice (31% v 5%).



■ Yes

■ No

■ I did not know I could register at a different GP practice

Worsening of clinical quality is most likely to make people switch GP practice

Q25/Q40. I am going to read out a number of situations. For each please tell me how likely or unlikely you would be to move to a different GP practice as a result.

Statement	Total	Respondents who have been registered with their GP practice for less than 10 years	Respondents who have been registered with their GP practice for more than 10 years
If you found out that the diagnosis of a serious condition (such as cancer) became less accurate	6.70	7.03	6.46
If you became less satisfied with the treatment you received for your condition (e.g. back pain)	6.02	6.45	5.72
If the facilities at the GP practice became less clean (for example the waiting room, toilets etc.)	5.54	5.93	5.27
If it became more difficult to get an appointment when you wanted one	5.47	5.91	5.16
If it became less likely that you would be offered a choice of hospital for further care	4.97	5.39	4.66
If it became more difficult to order repeat prescriptions	4.83	5.26	4.52
If it became more difficult to see the same GP / the GP you wanted to see	4.56	4.94	4.28
If the receptionist became less polite / friendly	4.12	4.58	3.79

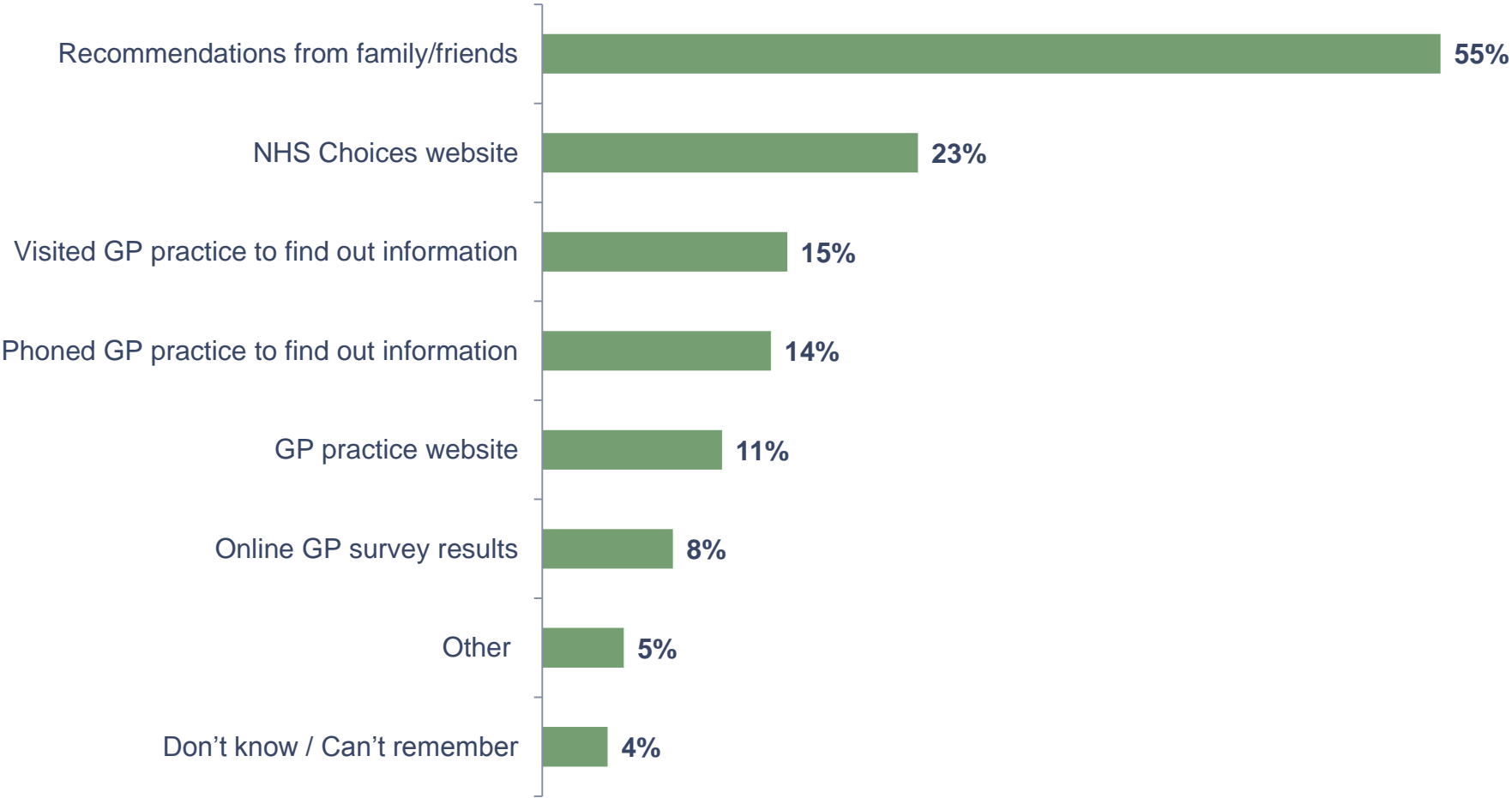
- Those registered with their GP practice for more than 10 years are less likely to switch for any of the situations, compared to those who registered with their GP practice in the last 10 years

Are respondents able to assess their options?



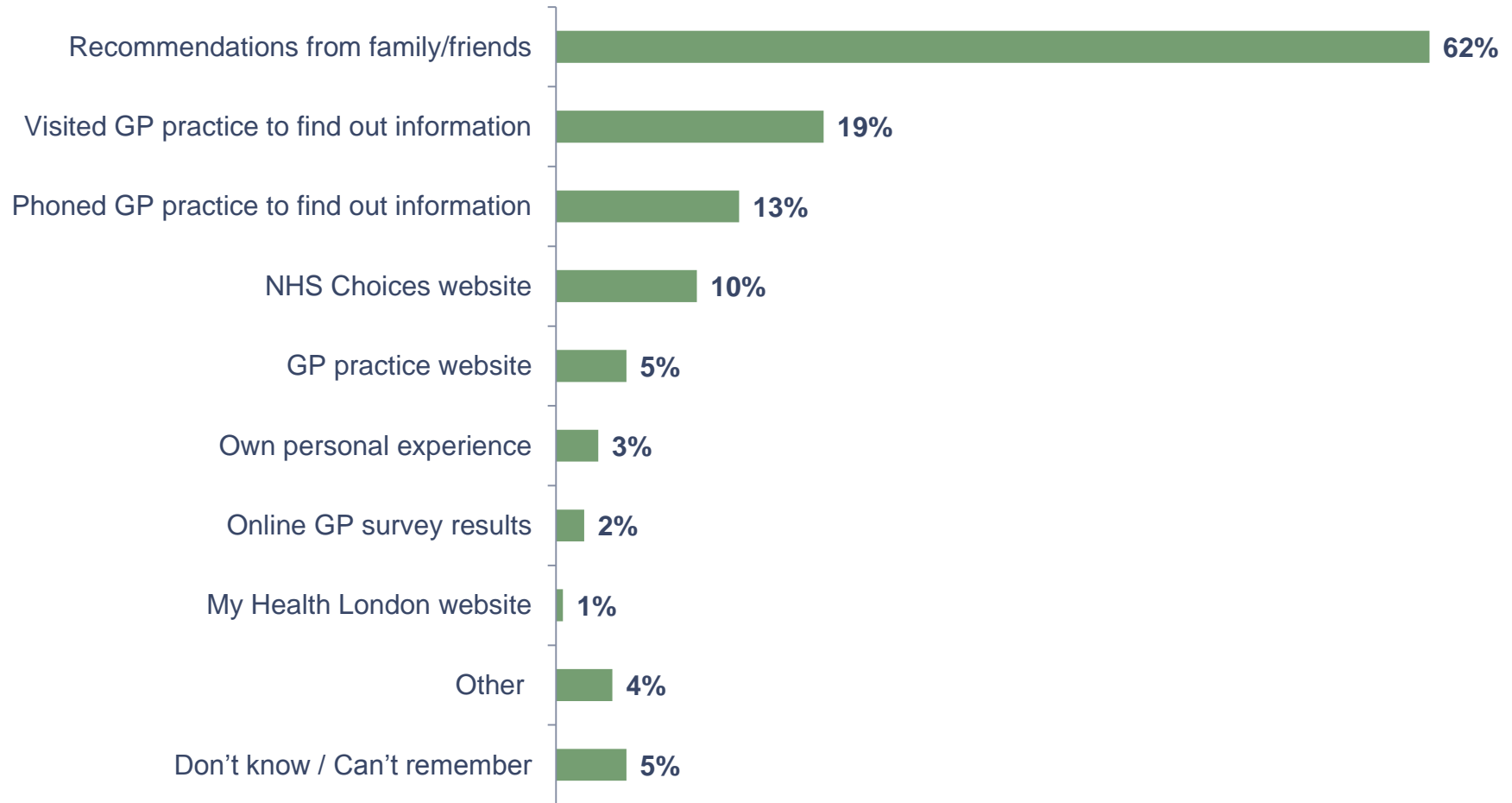
Recommendations from family/friends and NHS Choices website are two key sources of information for those registered with their GP practice in the last 10 years

Q16. And what were the main sources of information you used when you were comparing GP practices?



Whilst those registered with their practice for more than 10 years tend to rely on their friends and family as a source of information

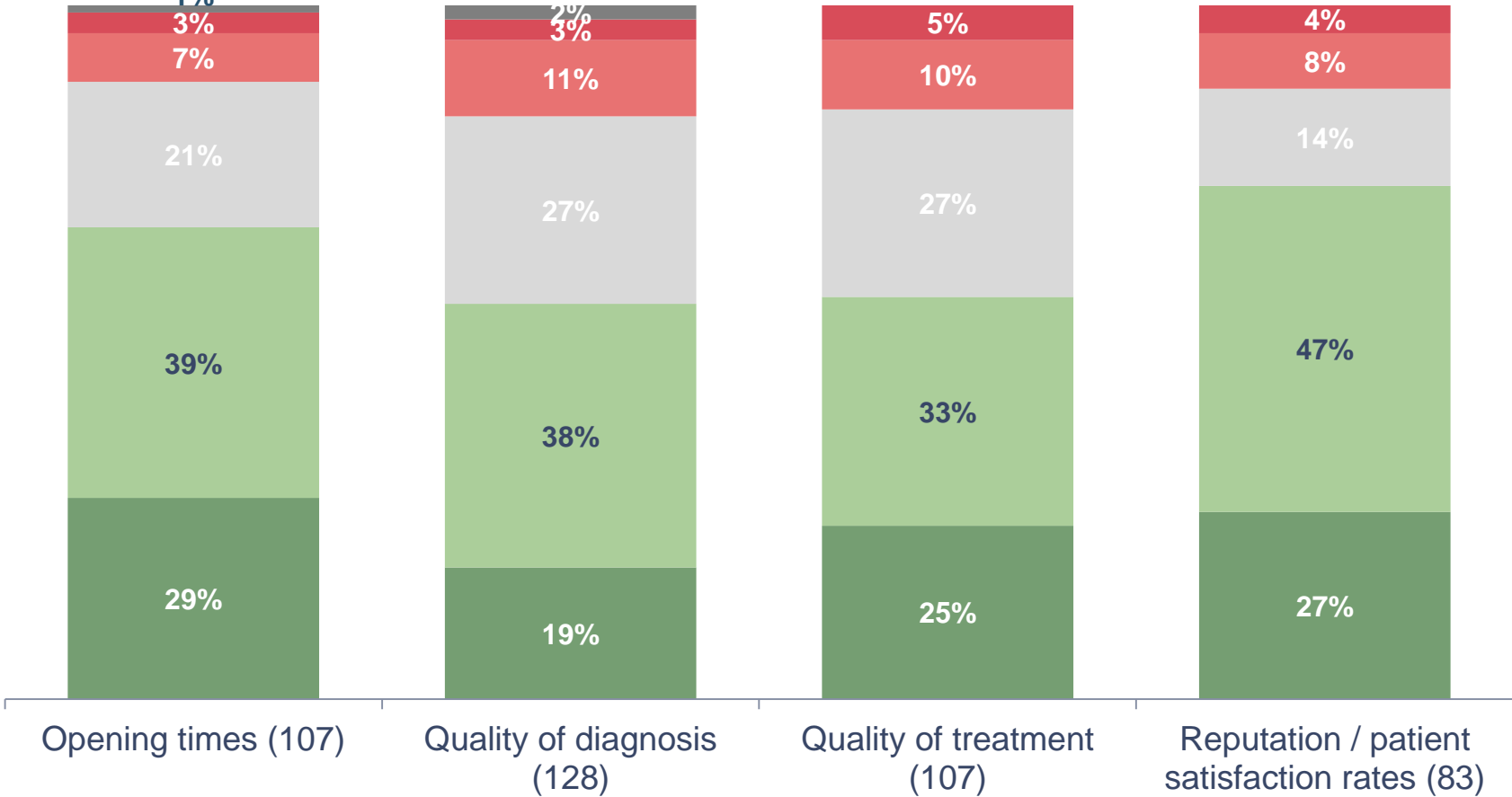
Q31. And what were the main sources of information you used when you were comparing GP practices?



Those who have looked for information report that it is relatively easy to locate for opening times and reputation / patient satisfaction rates

Q17/Q32. How easy or difficult was it to find information on...

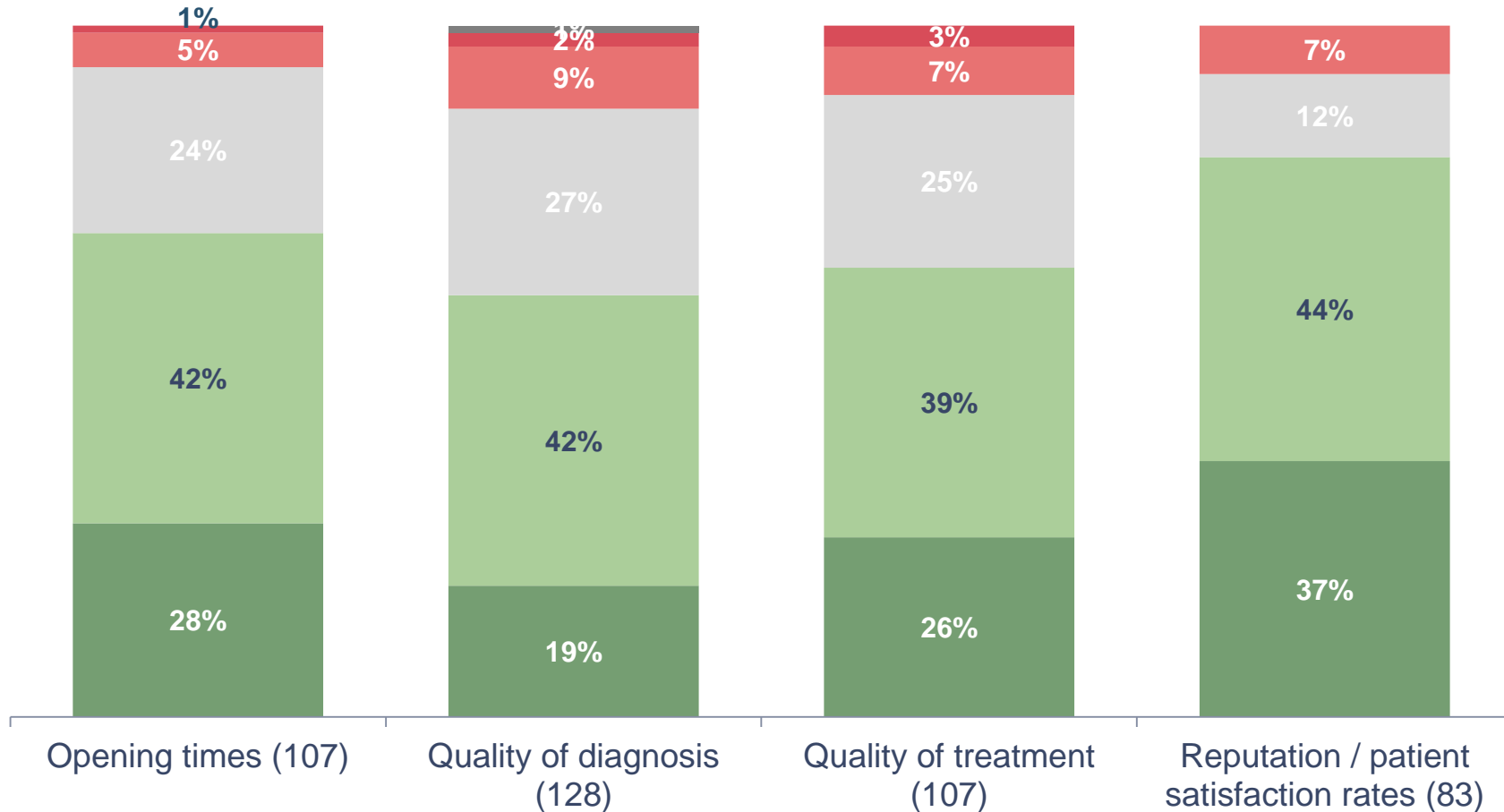
■ Very easy
 ■ Fairly easy
 ■ Neither easy nor difficult
 ■ Fairly difficult
 ■ Very difficult
 ■ Don't know



Most who found the information they looked for say it was easy to understand – although there is some difficulty with information on quality

Q18/Q33. How easy or difficult was it to understand the information about...

■ Very easy
 ■ Fairly easy
 ■ Neither easy nor difficult
 ■ Fairly difficult
 ■ Very difficult
 ■ Don't know



Patients tend to use public information when forming their opinion on the service their GP practice provides

Q20/Q35. You said that you think your GP practice is better than/ worse than/average, why do you say that?

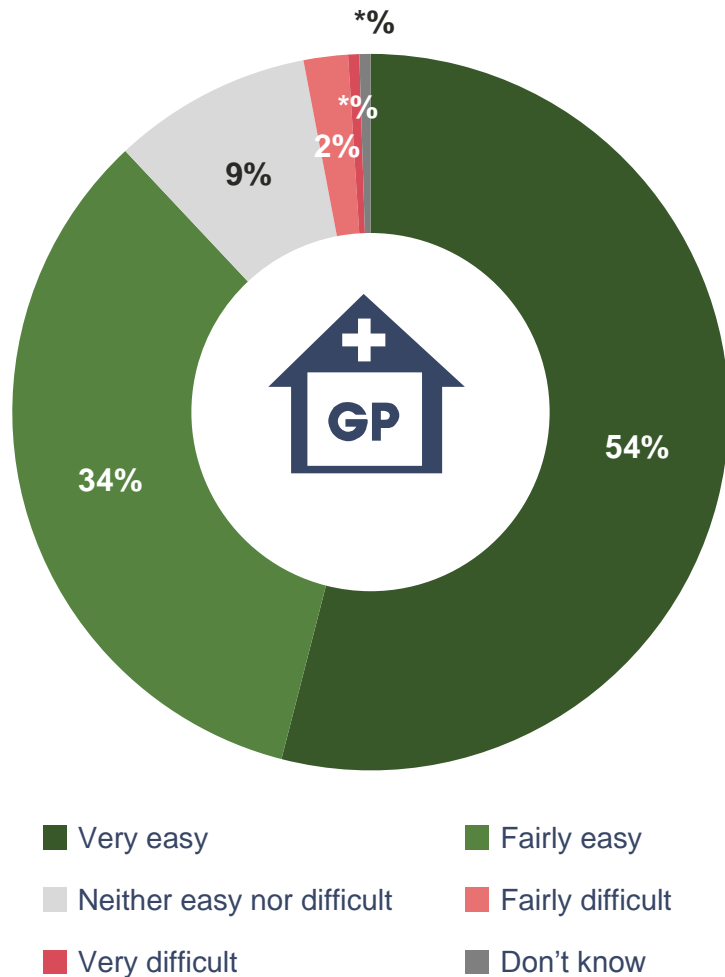


**Are respondents able to
successfully switch?**



The vast majority report registering with a GP practice as easy

Q9. How easy or difficult did you find registering with your current GP practice?



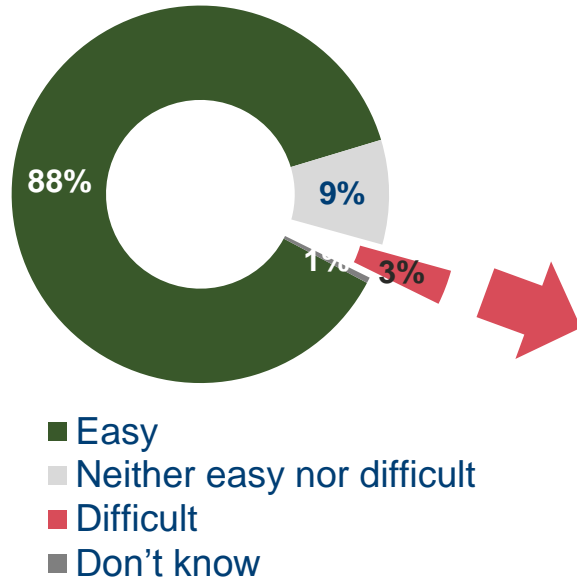
Those groups more likely to find registering with a GP practice as easy include:

- **Those aged 35+** – compared with those aged 15-24 (91% v 80%).
- **Those in more affluent social grades (ABC1)** – compared with those in social grades C2DE (91% v 84%).
- **Those with access to a car in their household** – compared with those who do not (90% v 84%).
- **Those who think their GP practice is better than average** – compared with those who say it is average or worse than average (92% v 85% and 70% respectively).

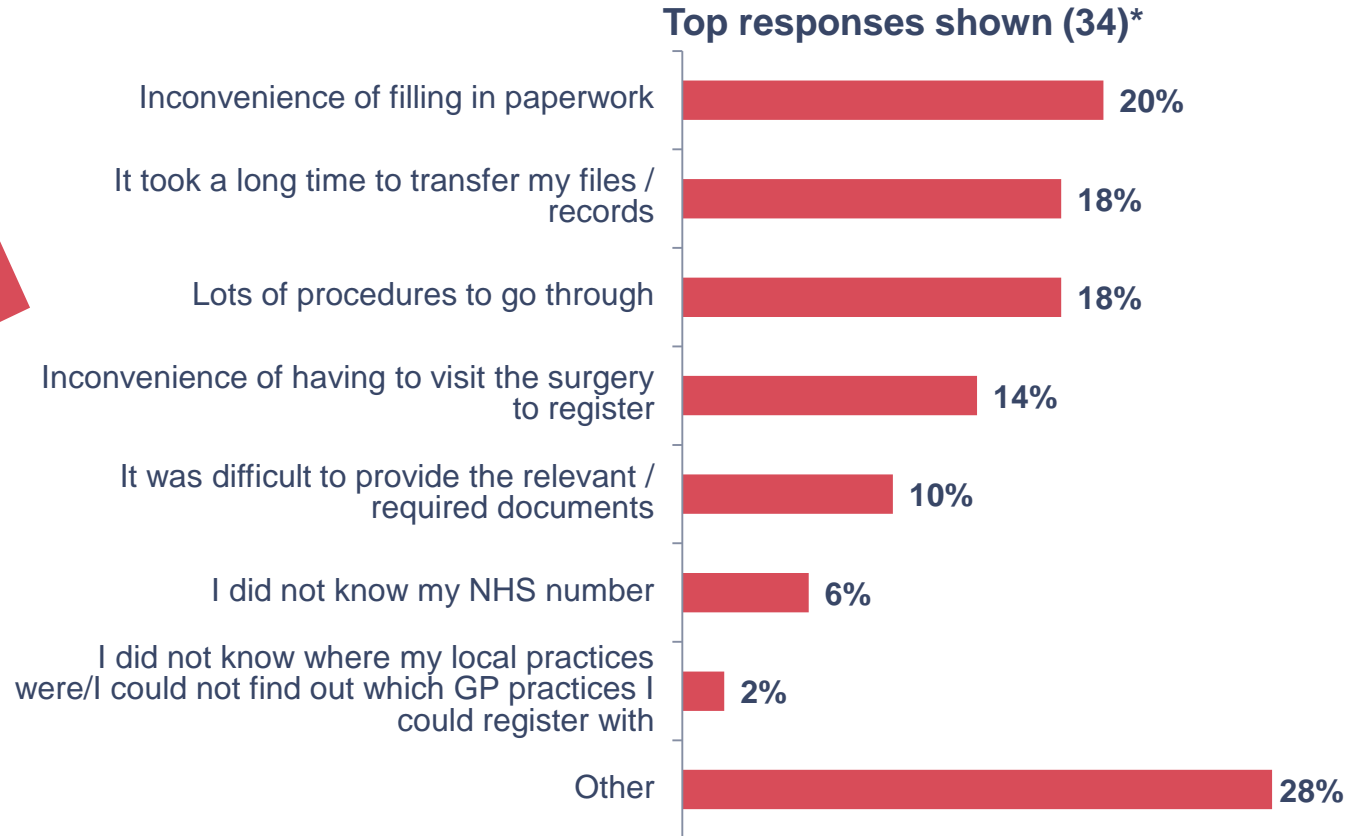
Of the few who found it difficult, paperwork, time and inconvenience are the main reasons why they say this

Q10. For what reasons did you find registering with your current GP practice difficult?

Q9. How easy or difficult did you find registering with your current GP practice?

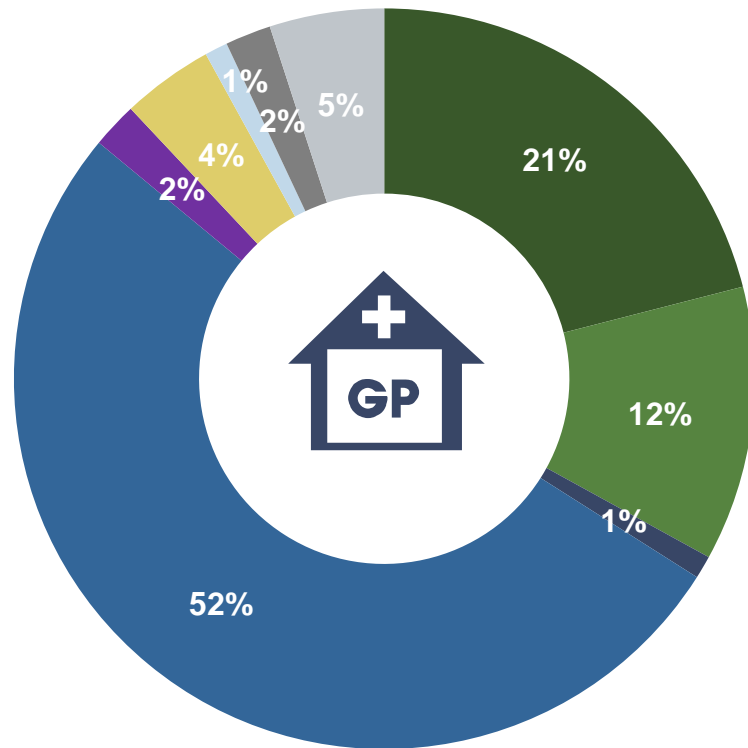


Q10. For what reasons did you find registering with your current GP practice difficult?



For patients who have moved GP practice, boundaries and full GP practices appear to prevent some patients from exercising choice

Q13. What was the main reason why did you not register with any of the other GP practices you considered?



- Those without a car in their household are more likely than those with a car to say they are with their current GP as it is the only one in their catchment area (30% v 16%).
- People with a car tended to choose the practice that was the best option for them (59% v 39% without a car).

■ Only GP practice I was in the catchment area for

■ I expected that I would not be allowed to register

■ I thought registering with a new practice would be difficult

■ Better / more modern facilities

■ Other

■ Tried to register with another GP practice but they refused / were full

■ I found that this was the best option

■ GP practice close to home

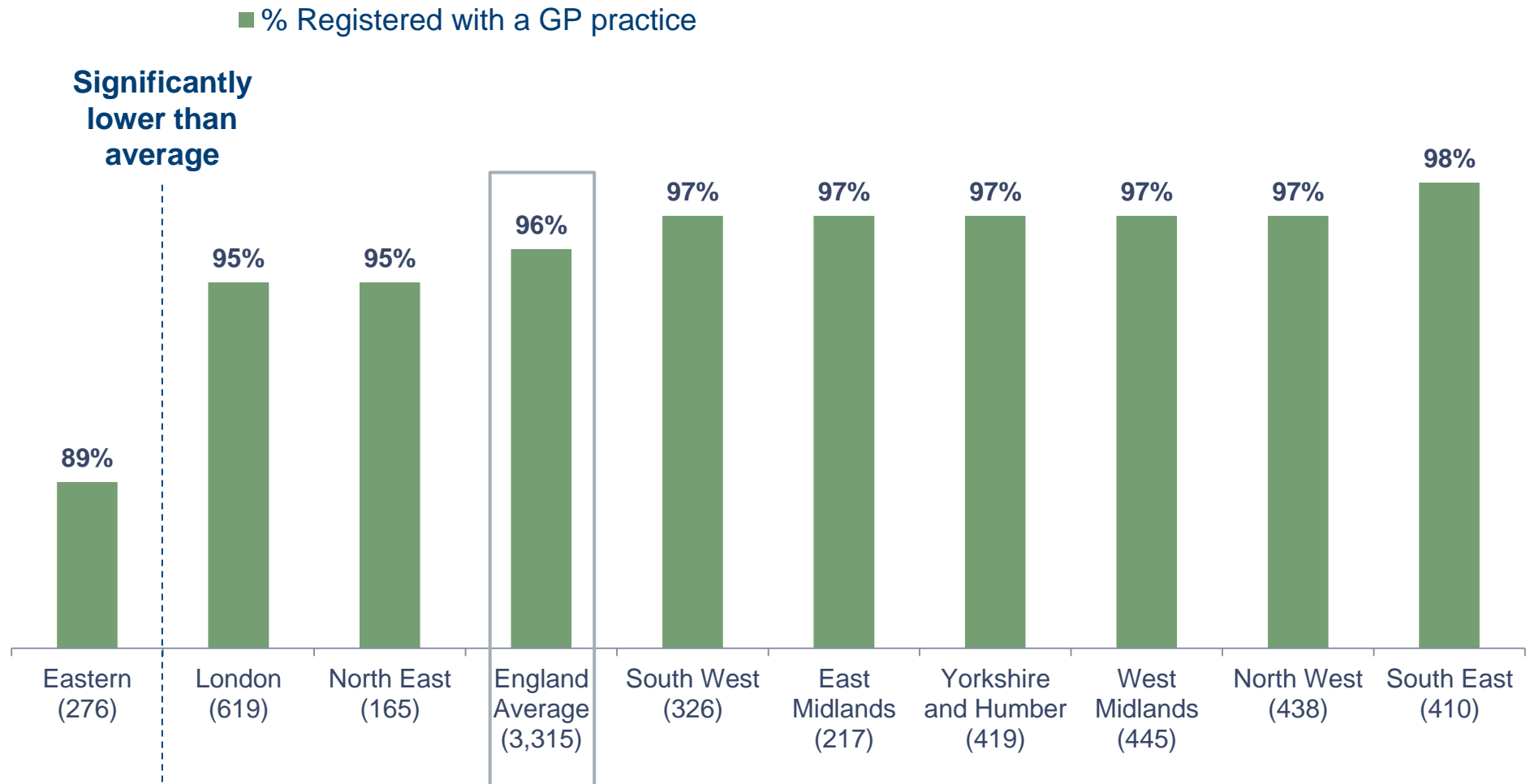
■ Recommendations

Appendix



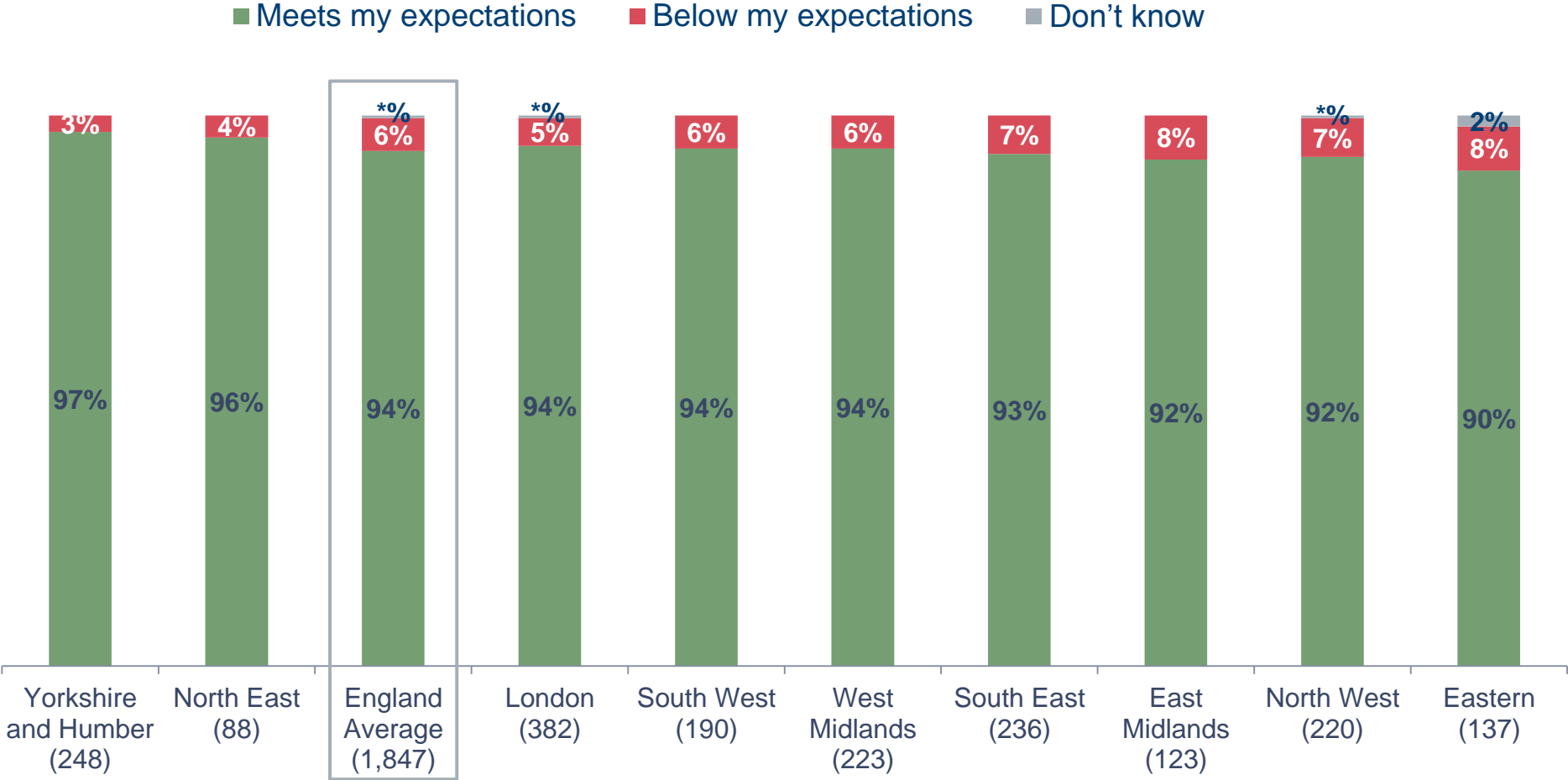
Variation by region in patients currently registered with a GP practice

Q1. Are you currently registered with a GP practice?



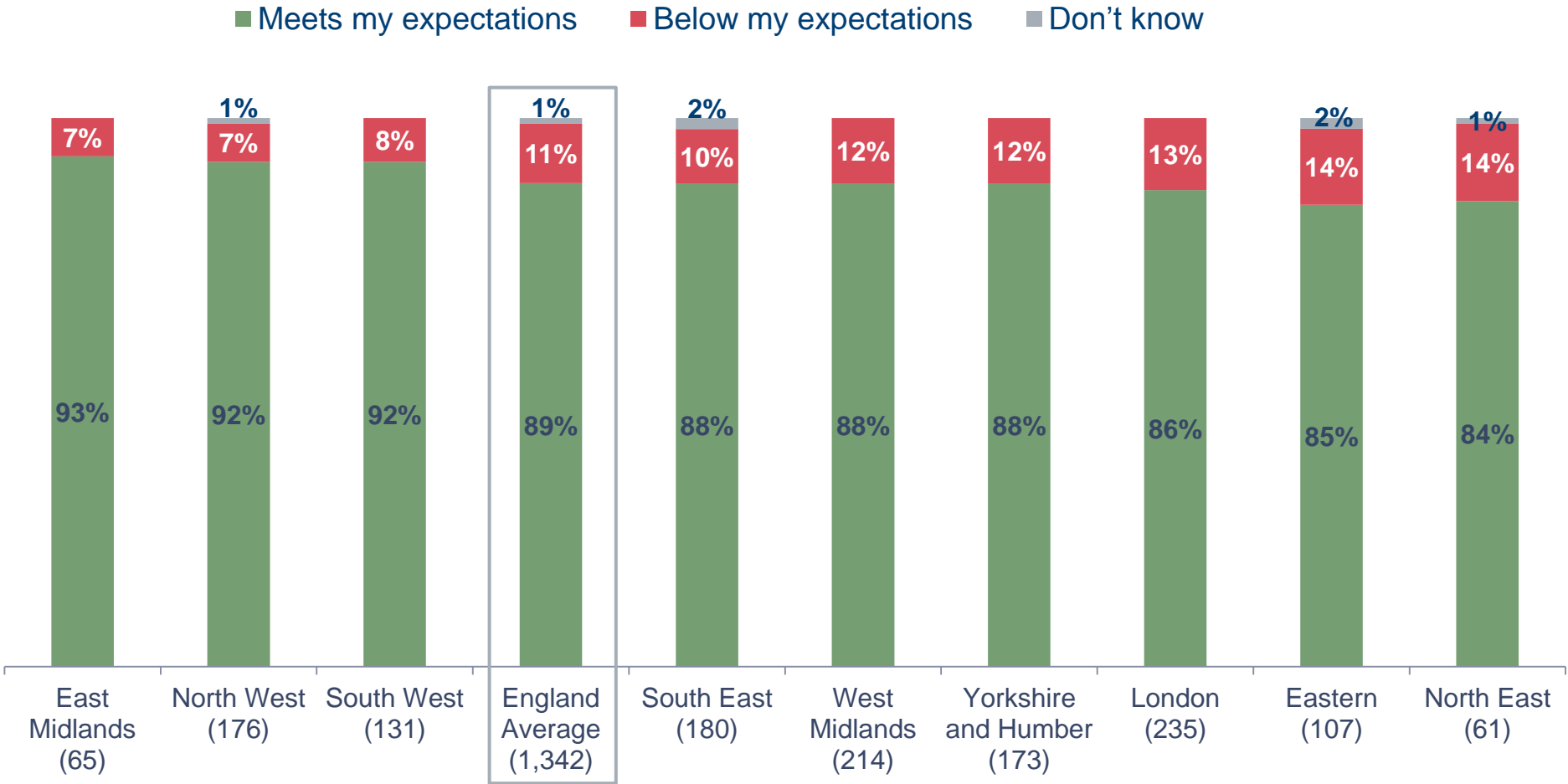
Variation by region in whether location of GP practice meets expectations

Q1B. To what extent, if at all, does your current GP practice meet your expectations? Close to home



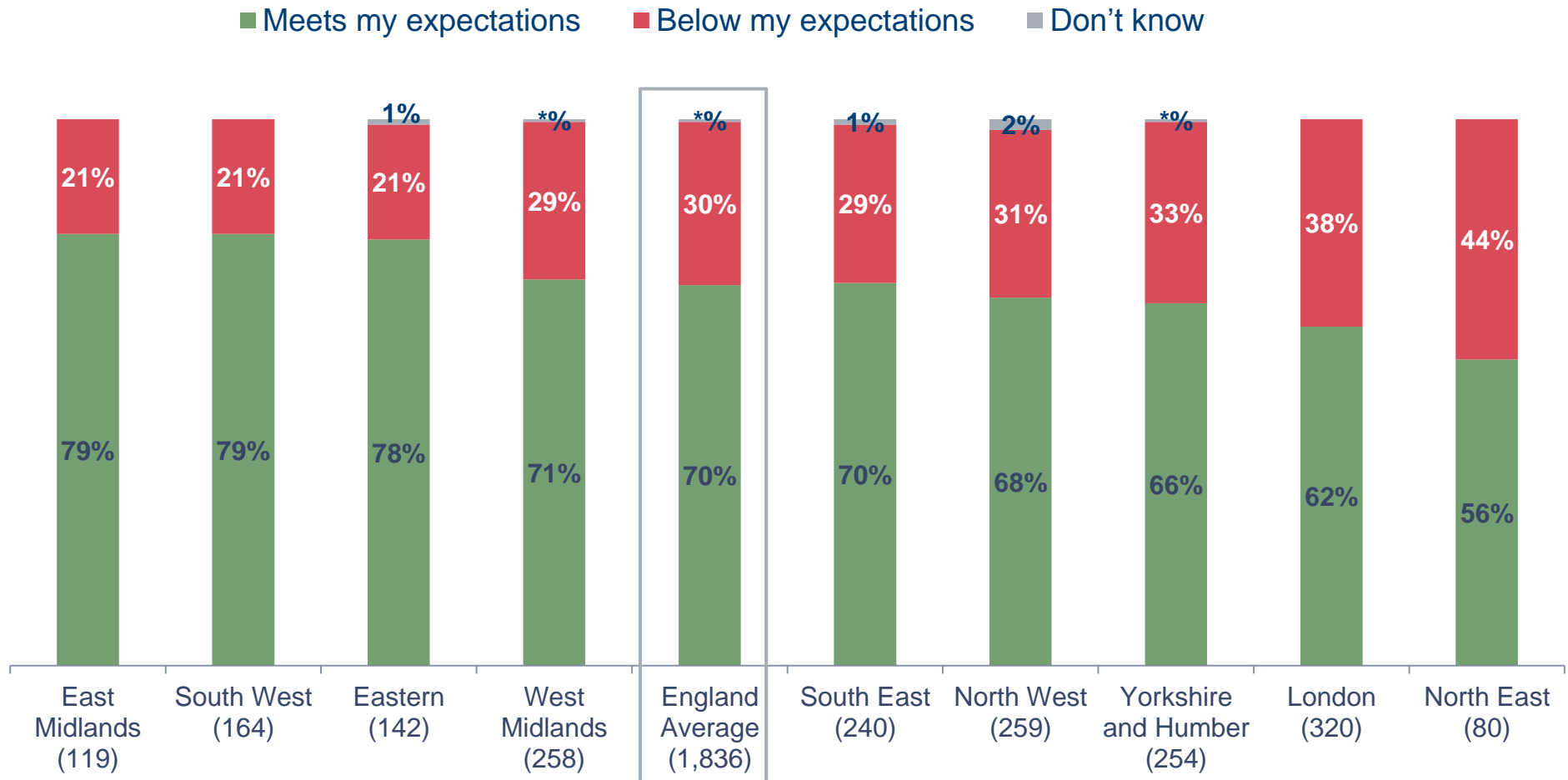
Variation by region in whether quality of diagnosis and treatment at GP practice meets expectations

Q1B. To what extent, if at all, does your current GP practice meet your expectations? Good quality of diagnosis and treatment



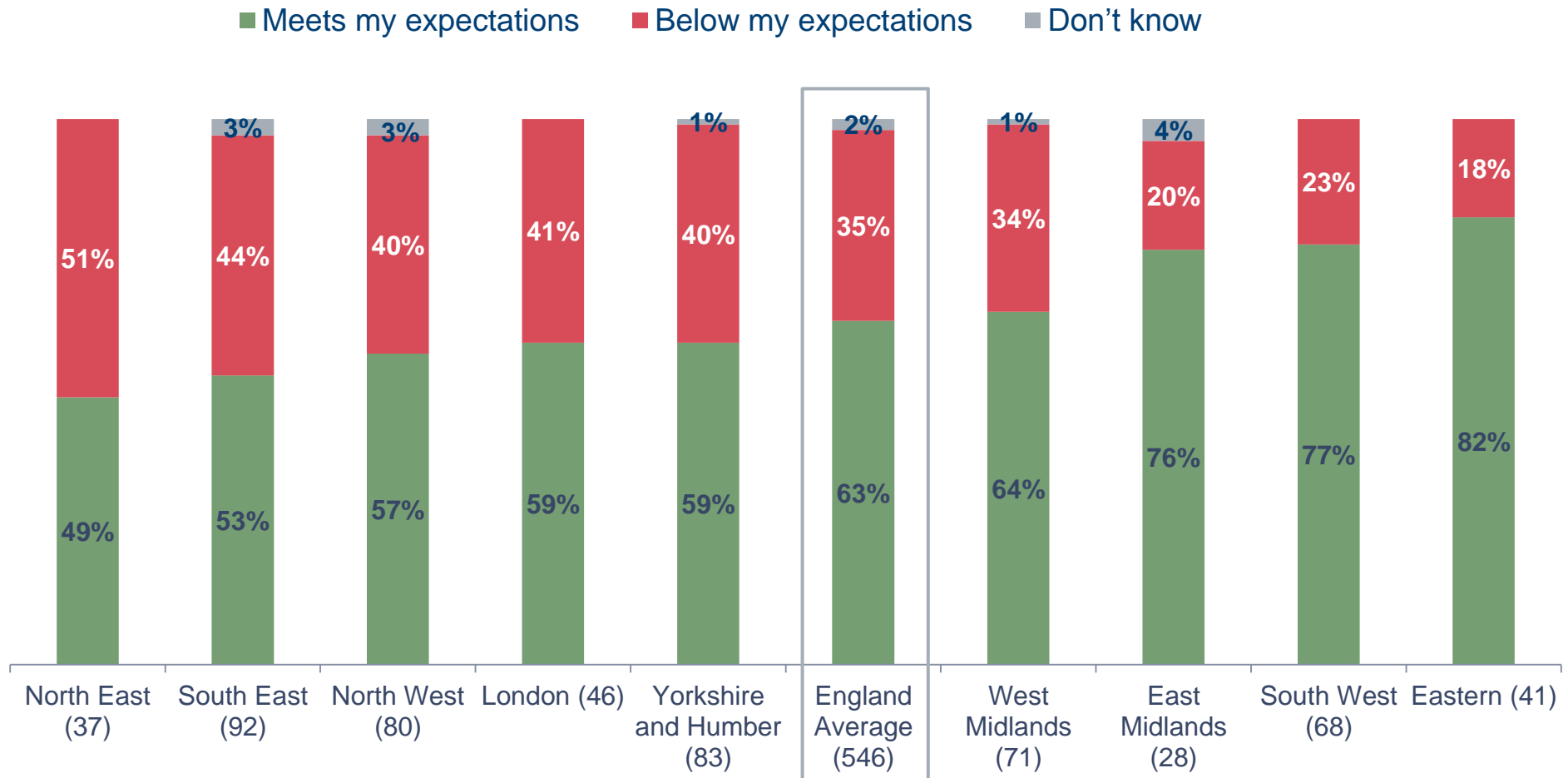
Variation by region in whether ability to make an appointment at GP practice meets expectations

Q1B. To what extent, if at all, does your current GP practice meet your expectations? Easy to get an appointment



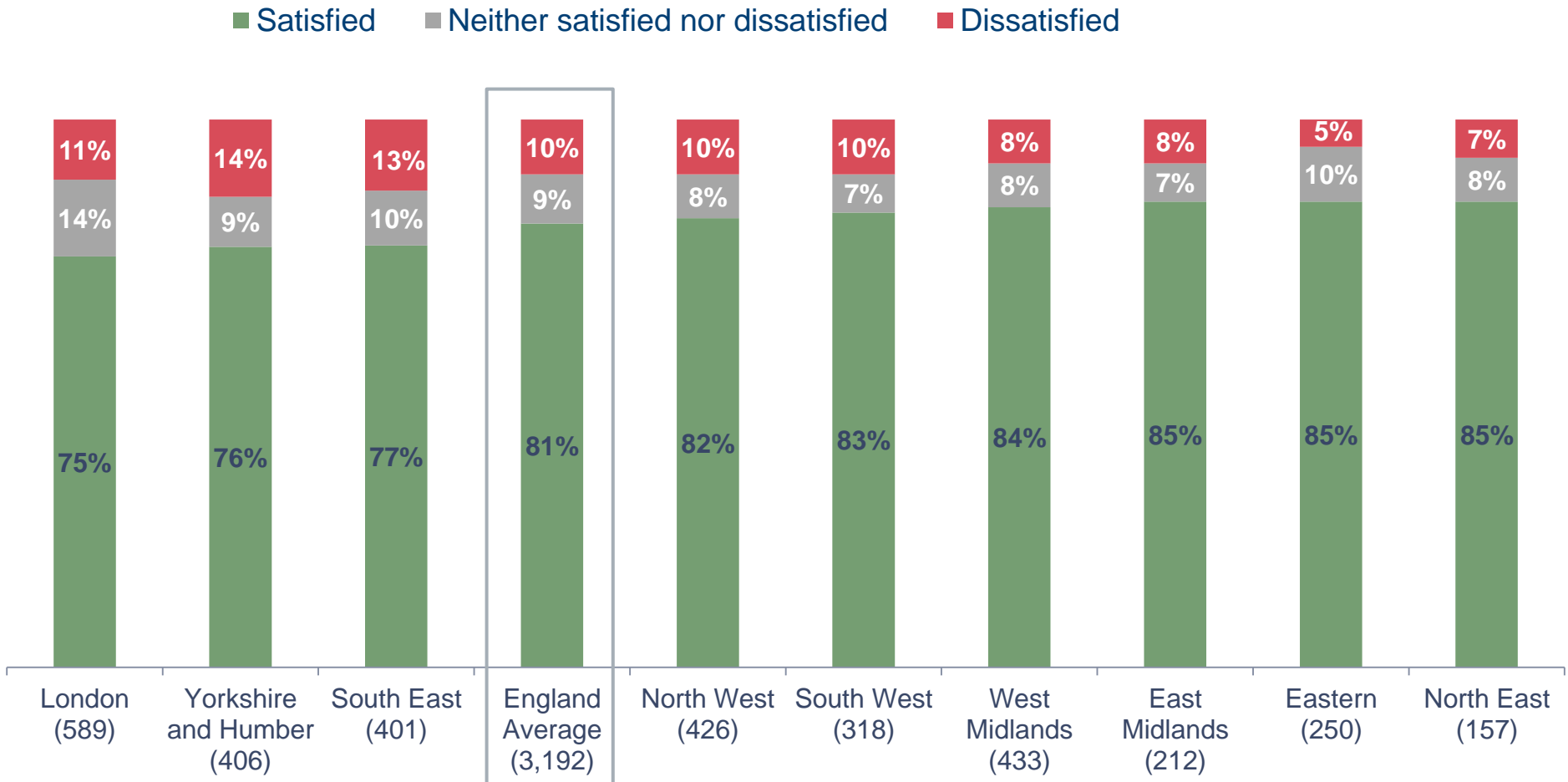
Variation by region in whether continuity of service at GP practice meets expectations

Q1B. To what extent, if at all, does your current GP practice meet your expectations? Can see the same doctor every time



Variation by region in how satisfied patients are with their current GP practice

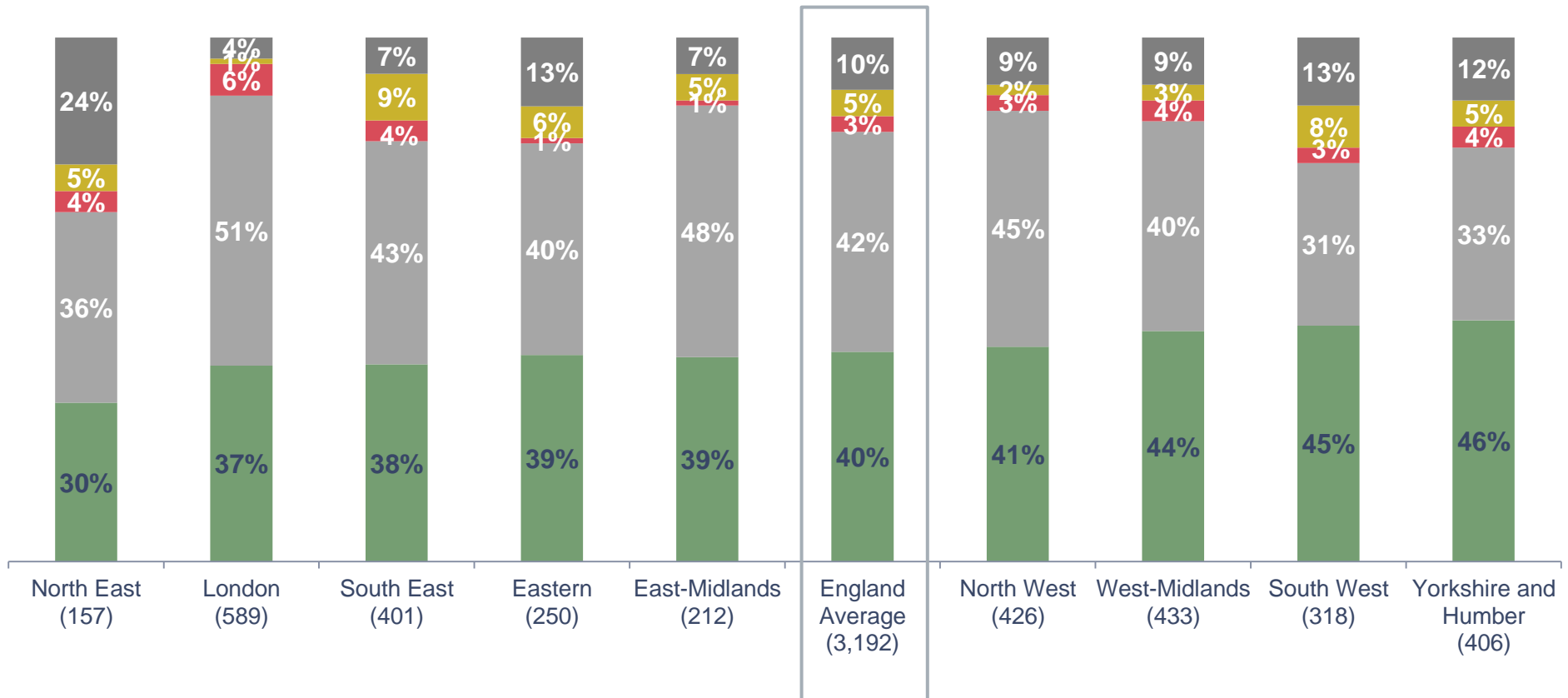
Q21/Q36. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your current GP practice?



Variation by region on how patients describe their GP practice

Q19/34. How would you describe your GP practice relative to other practices in your local area, would you say it was...?

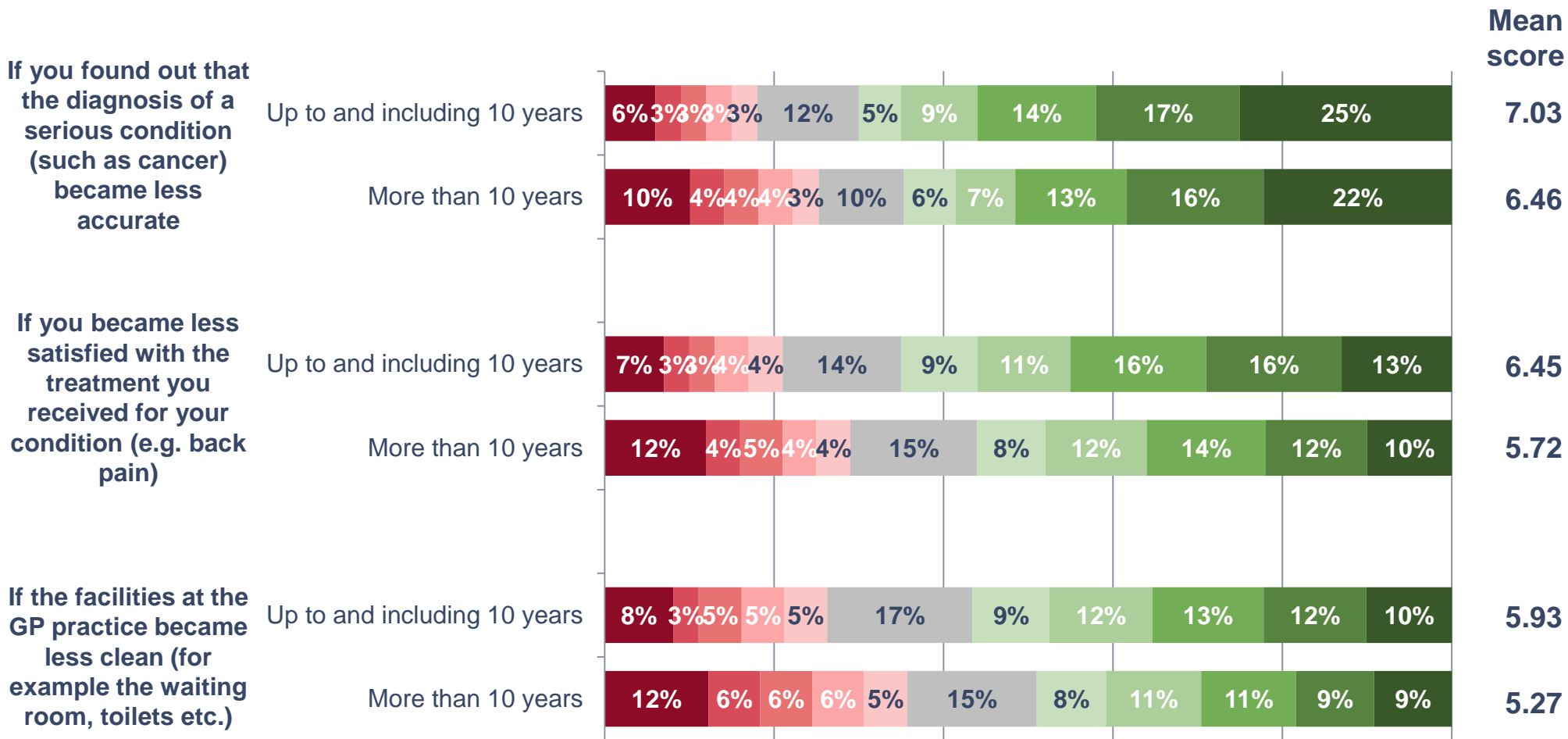
■ Above average ■ Average ■ Below average ■ There are no other GP practices in my local area ■ Don't know



A reduction in the quality of diagnosis (for a serious illness) and dissatisfaction with care are the reasons people say they would be most likely to switch GP practice for

Q25/Q40. I am going to read out a number of situations. For each please tell me how likely or unlikely you would be to move to a different GP practice as a result.

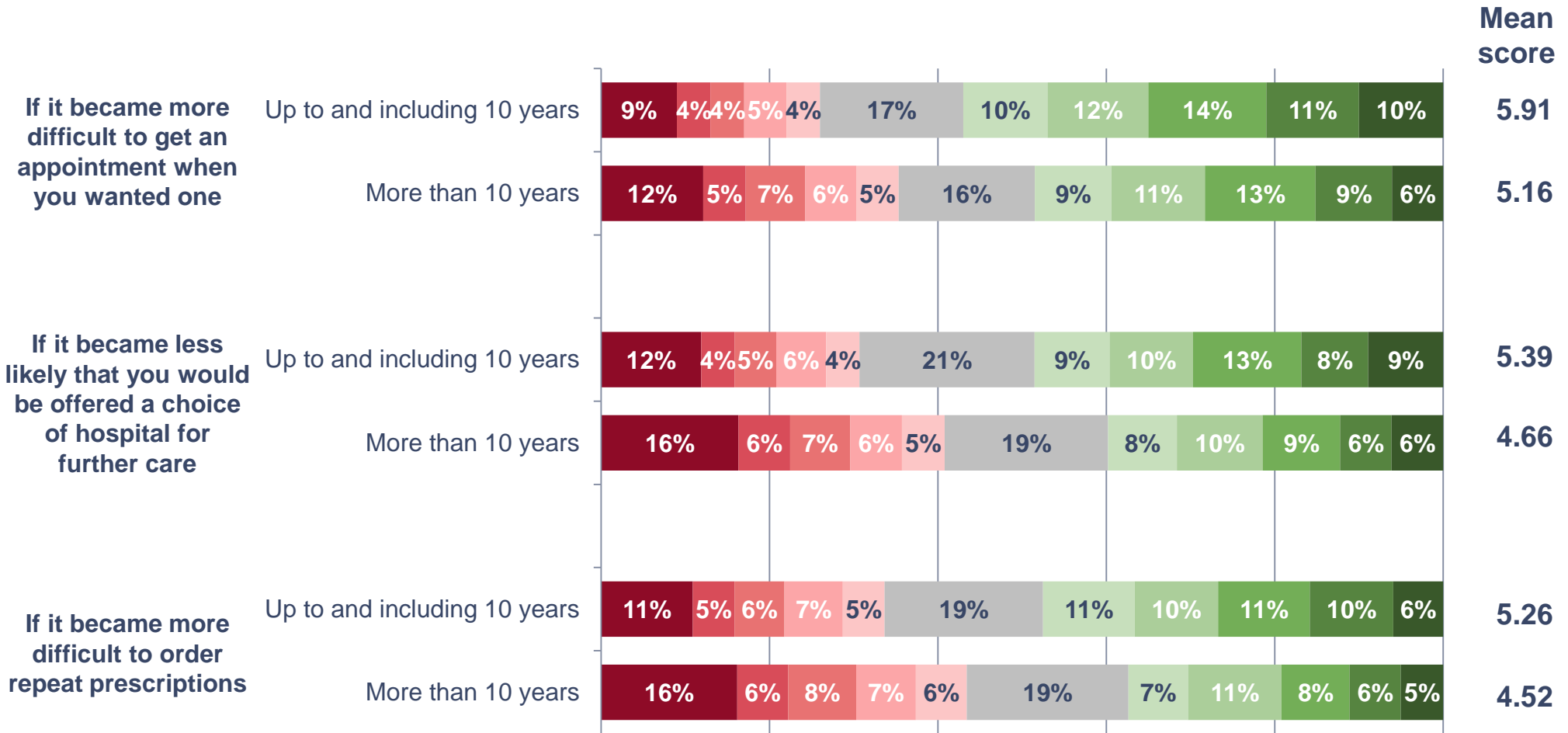
0 = Very unlikely to move to a different practice 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 = Very likely to move to a different practice



Availability of appointments, less choice of hospital care and difficulty in getting repeat prescriptions are less likely to make people switch GP practice

Q25/Q40. I am going to read out a number of situations. For each please tell me how likely or unlikely you would be to move to a different GP practice as a result.

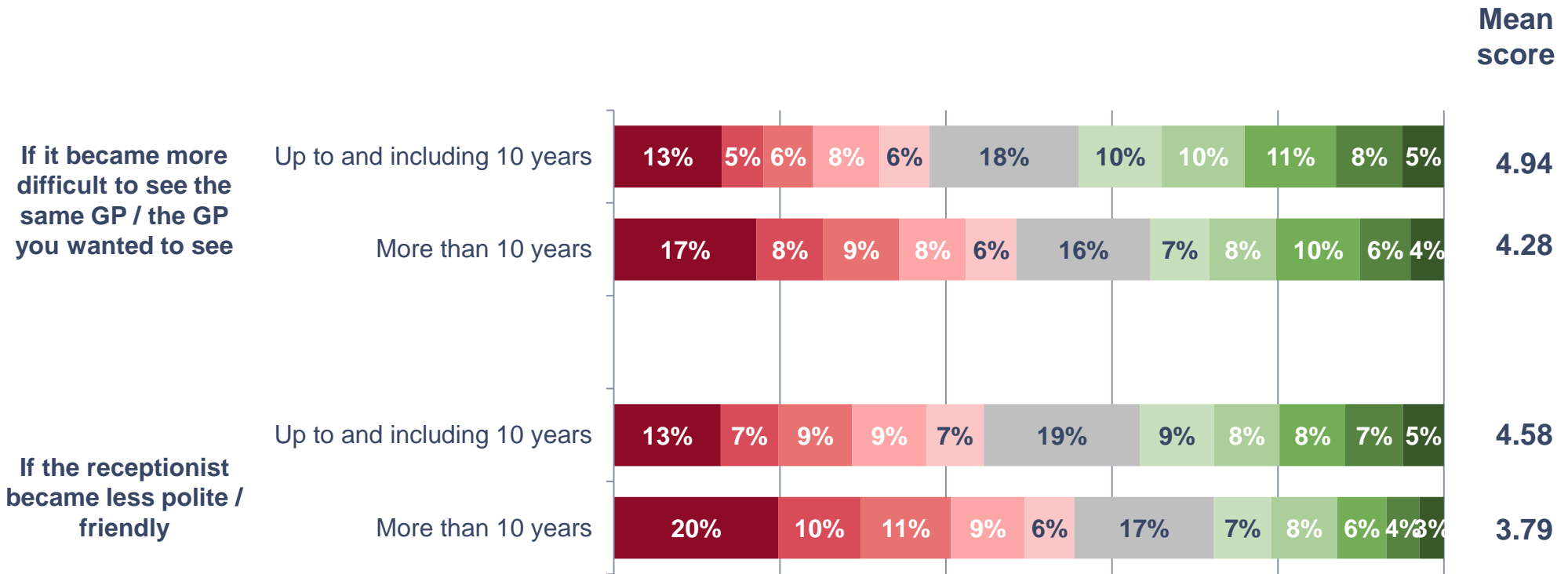
0 = Very unlikely to move to a different practice 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 = Very likely to move to a different practice



As are continuity of seeing the same GP or the politeness of the receptionist

Q25/Q40. I am going to read out a number of situations. For each please tell me how likely or unlikely you would be to move to a different GP practice as a result.

0 = Very unlikely to move to a different practice 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 = Very likely to move to a different practice



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