

Is the patient medicines helpline providing appropriate and timely advice?

Introduction

Oxford University Hospitals patient medicines helpline has operated for over 10 years. With increasing NHS pressures, more patients are using the helpline for medication queries.

Aim: To audit the advice provided by the patient medicine helpline and review the timeliness of advice

Objectives - review the suitability of advice provided by the helpline
-evaluate the timeliness of advice provided across the financial year
-identify areas for improvement in service delivery and staff training

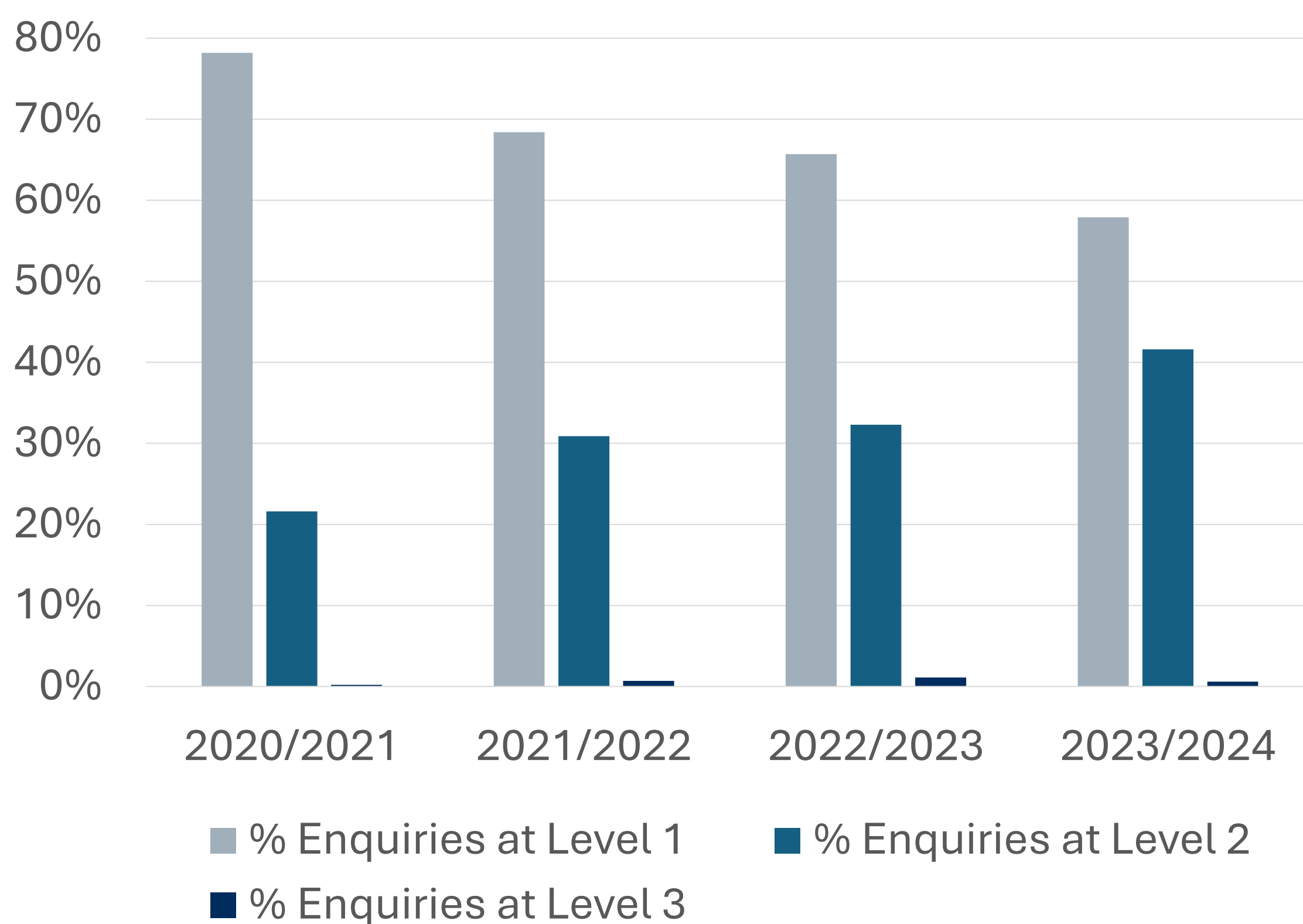
Method

The timeliness of 707 enquiries from the 2023/24 financial year were audited against target timeframes.

A stratified sample of 30 patient enquiries from 2023/24 was obtained. The sample was stratified proportionate to the complexity of the 707 enquiries, with 58% being level 1, 41% level 2 and 1% level 3. The enquiries were evaluated for suitability of the advice provided. For enquiries where the outcome was to contact primary care, the enquiry was reviewed by a GP. The percentage of enquiries at each level of complexity was also compared with each financial year from 2020/21.



Changes in Level of complexity of enquiries



Key findings

Compared to 2020/21, the percentage of more complex level 2 enquiries increased by 20%.

97.8% of the 707 enquiries were answered within the agreed timeframe.

Of the 30 patients in the stratified sample, most were answered to a high standard. There was however a theme of a lack of in-depth questioning identified and inappropriate signposting to primary care.

40% of enquiries resulting in a referral to primary care were inappropriate as determined by a GP. E.g. referring a patient to GP for further supply of dalteparin after surgery which is non-formulary in the ICB.

What's next

1. Use resources such as NHS A to Z and the CPPE course on minor ailments to obtain information around safety netting.
2. To include prompts around duration, severity, red flags and safety netting in the patient helpline template on UKMI.
3. To address the national training gap for differentiating between side effects and symptoms specifically for patient helplines.

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