

Waiting for treatment: can the NHS recover?

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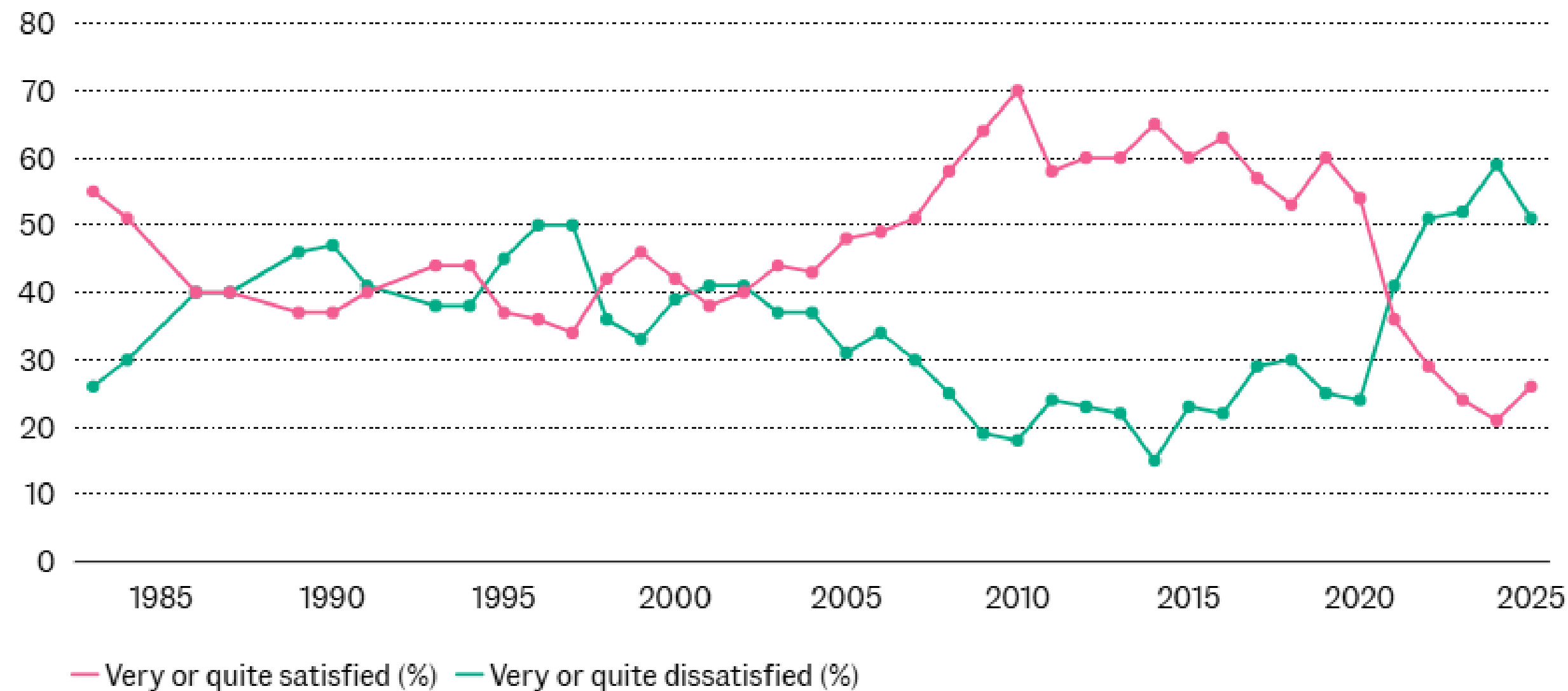


The chapter

Uses BSA's unique 40 year collection of data on public attitudes towards NHS together with an analysis of NHS policies and performance to address two questions:

1. Are the sources of the public's dissatisfaction the same now as those facing New Labour in 1997?
2. How did New Labour turn things around – and what lessons might there be for the current Labour government?

Satisfaction with the way NHS runs, 1983-2025



Source: British Social Attitudes. In 1996, 50% were dissatisfied; 34% satisfied. In 2023, 52% were dissatisfied; 24% satisfied.

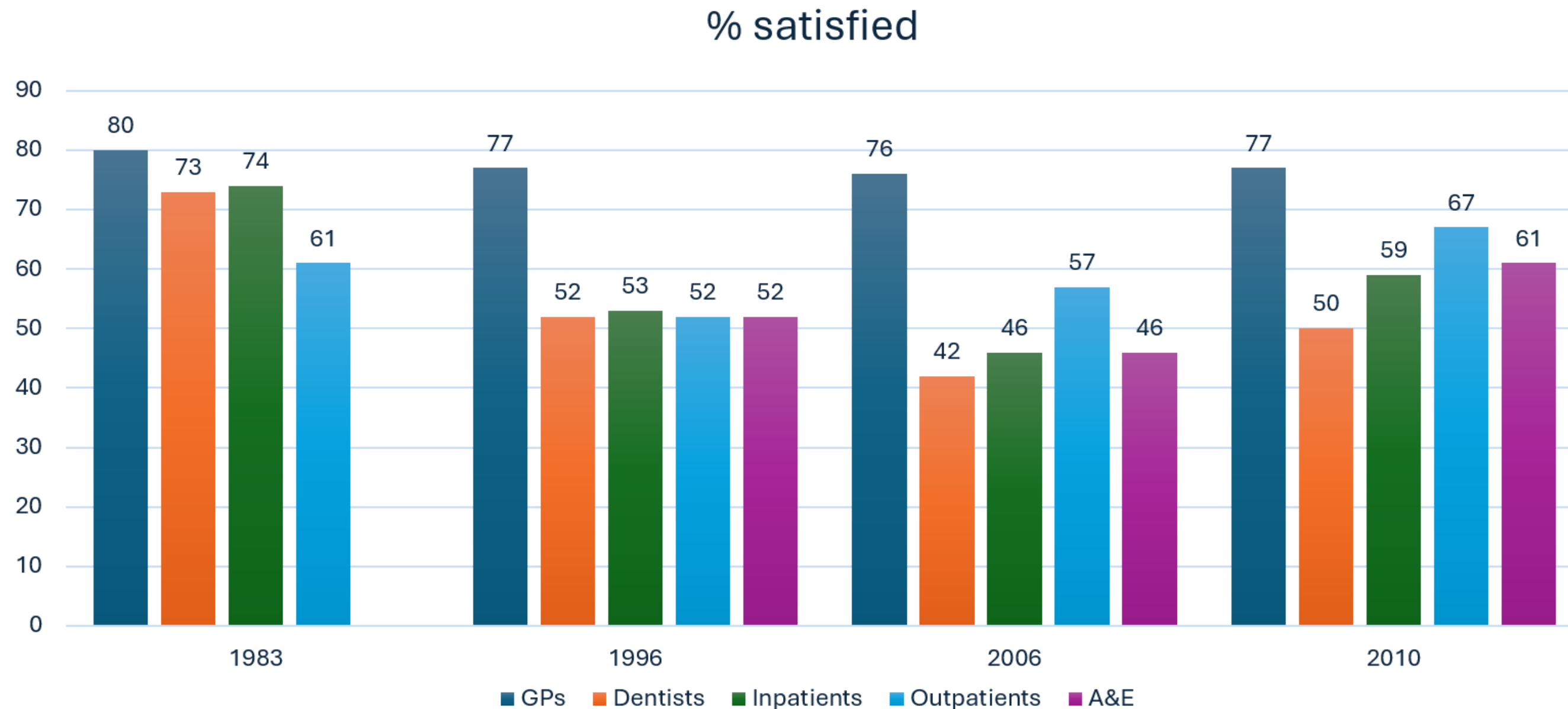
The problems facing New Labour

- Increased waiting lists and times for hospital based (inpatients/outpatients) elective care
- Slightly worsening trend for waiting time in A&E
- Static number of GPs and little growth in hospital doctors
- Need for social care reform

What New Labour did

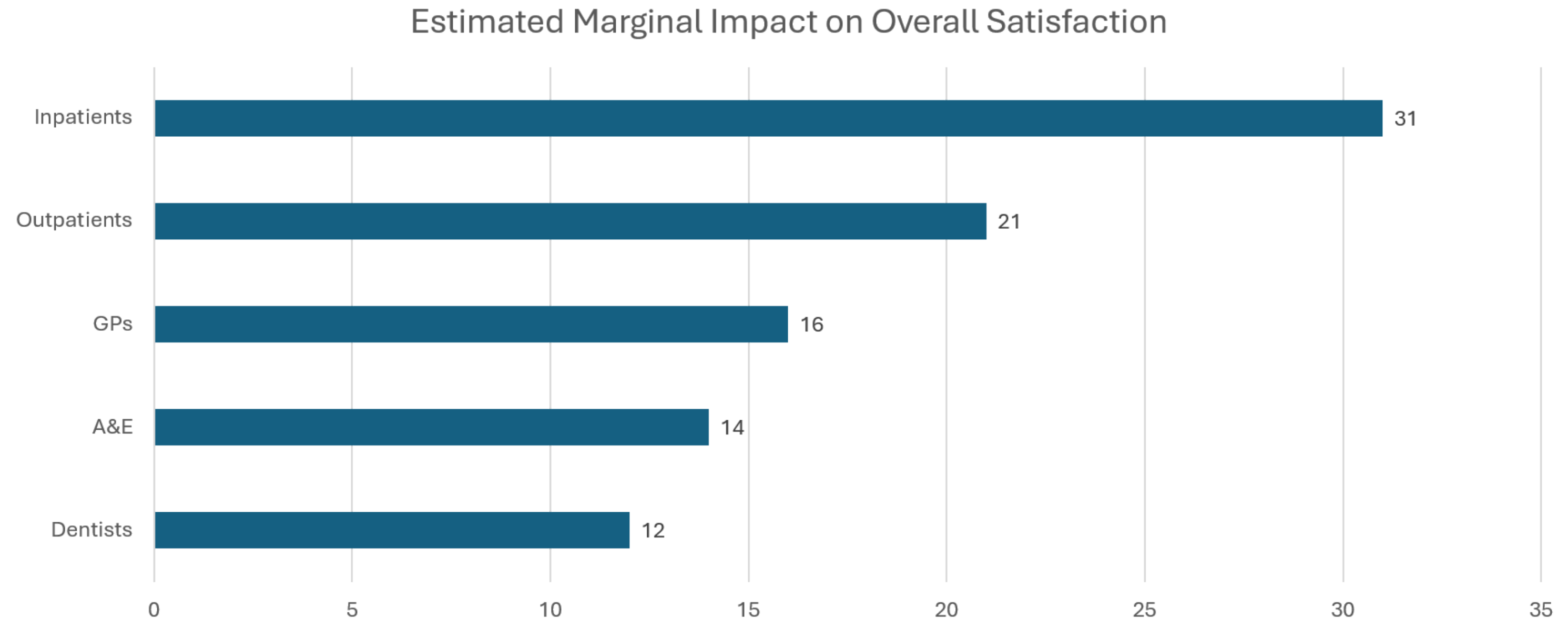
- 'Terror and targets' for all services
- Internal market and patient choice
- Substantial year on year real increases in funding
- Expansion of hospital medical workforce – much of it via migration
- Increase in GPs
- Waiting lists & times fell

Satisfaction with particular services, 1983-2010



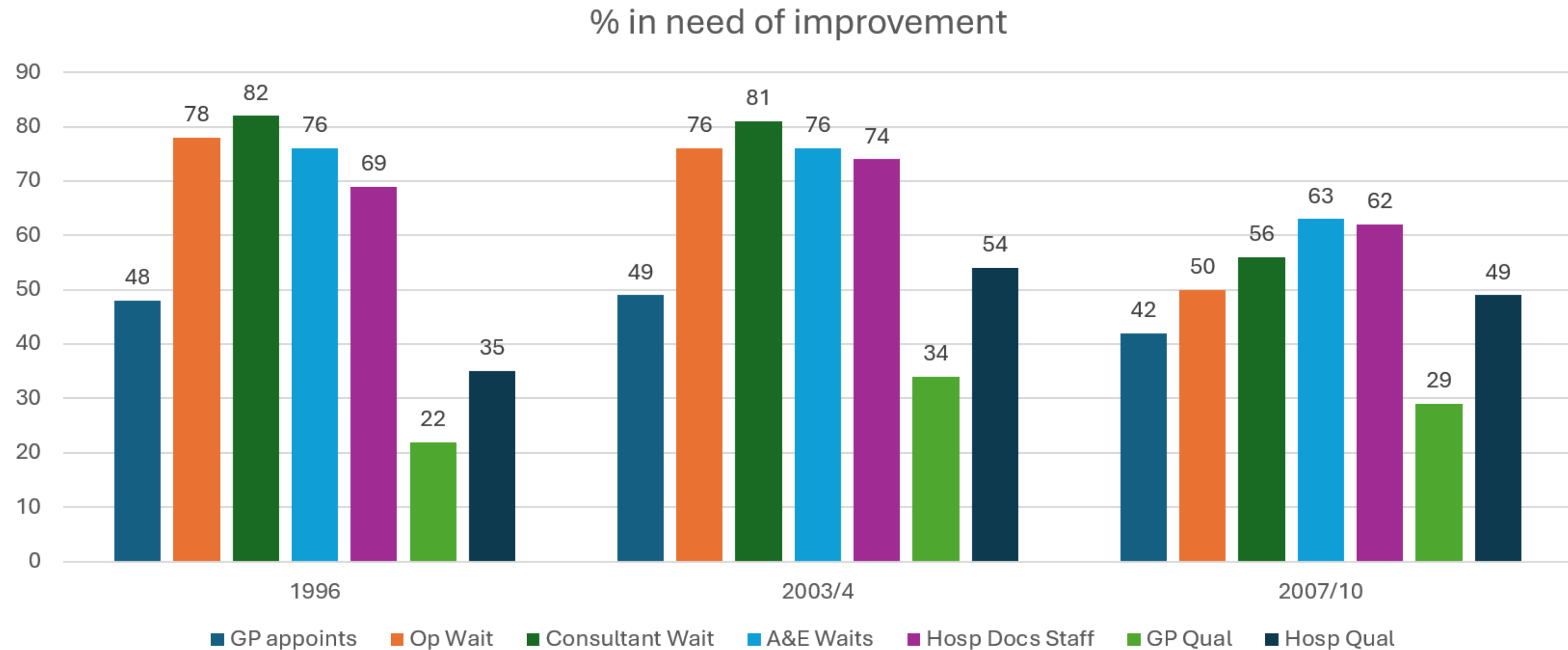
Source: British Social Attitudes. First reading for A&E is 1999.

Which services mattered most to overall satisfaction?



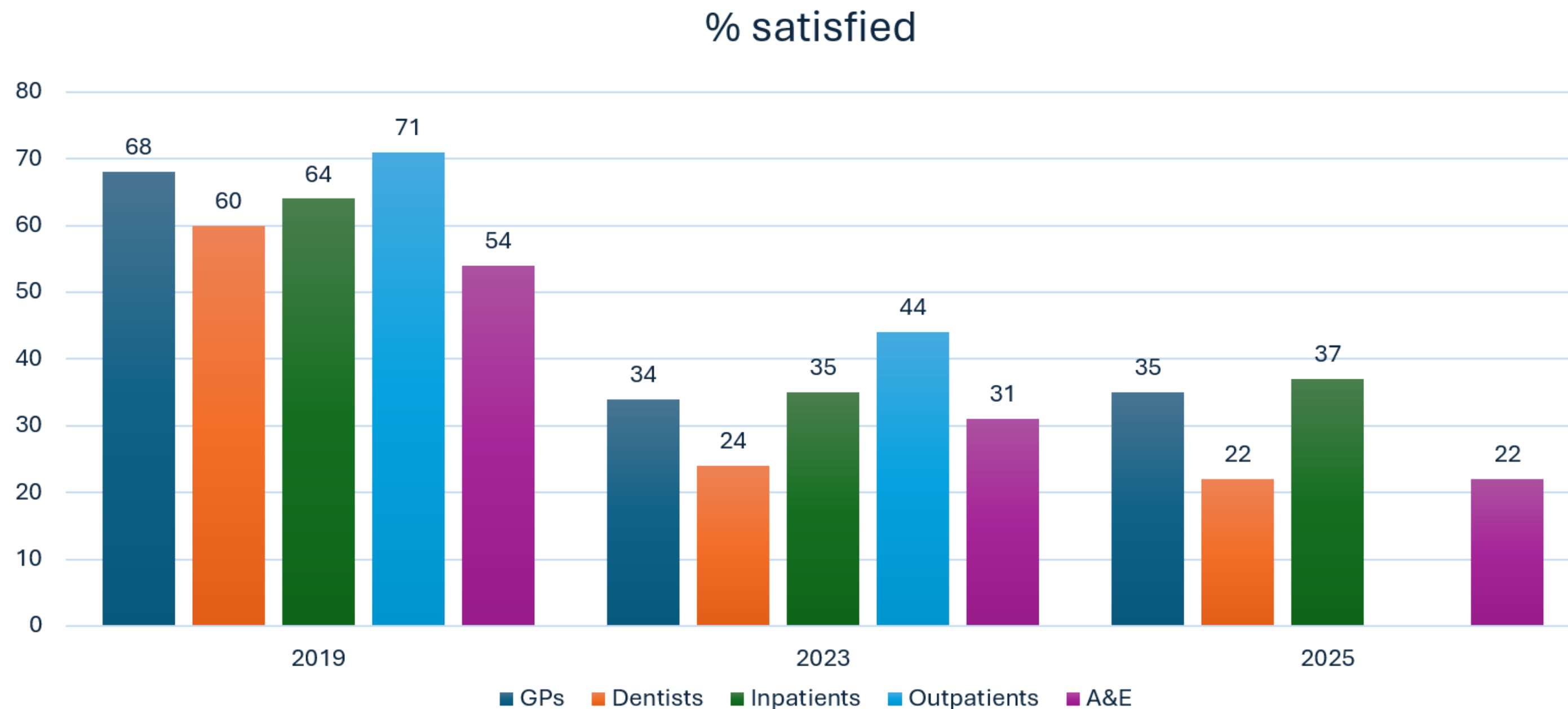
Data are for 1999. Estimates derived from a logistic regression with controls for age, gender, party support, UK country, and income.

Aspects of NHS in need of improvement, 1996-2010



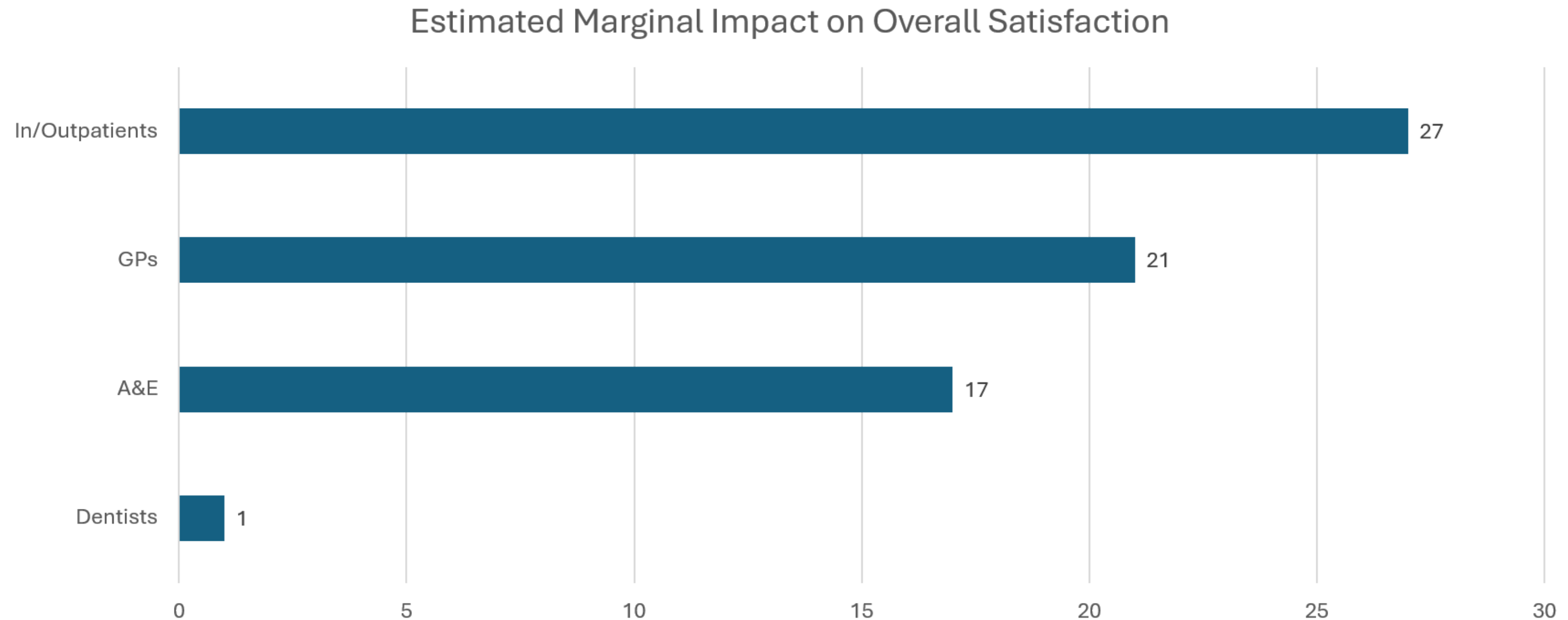
Source: British Social Attitudes

Satisfaction with particular services, 2019-25



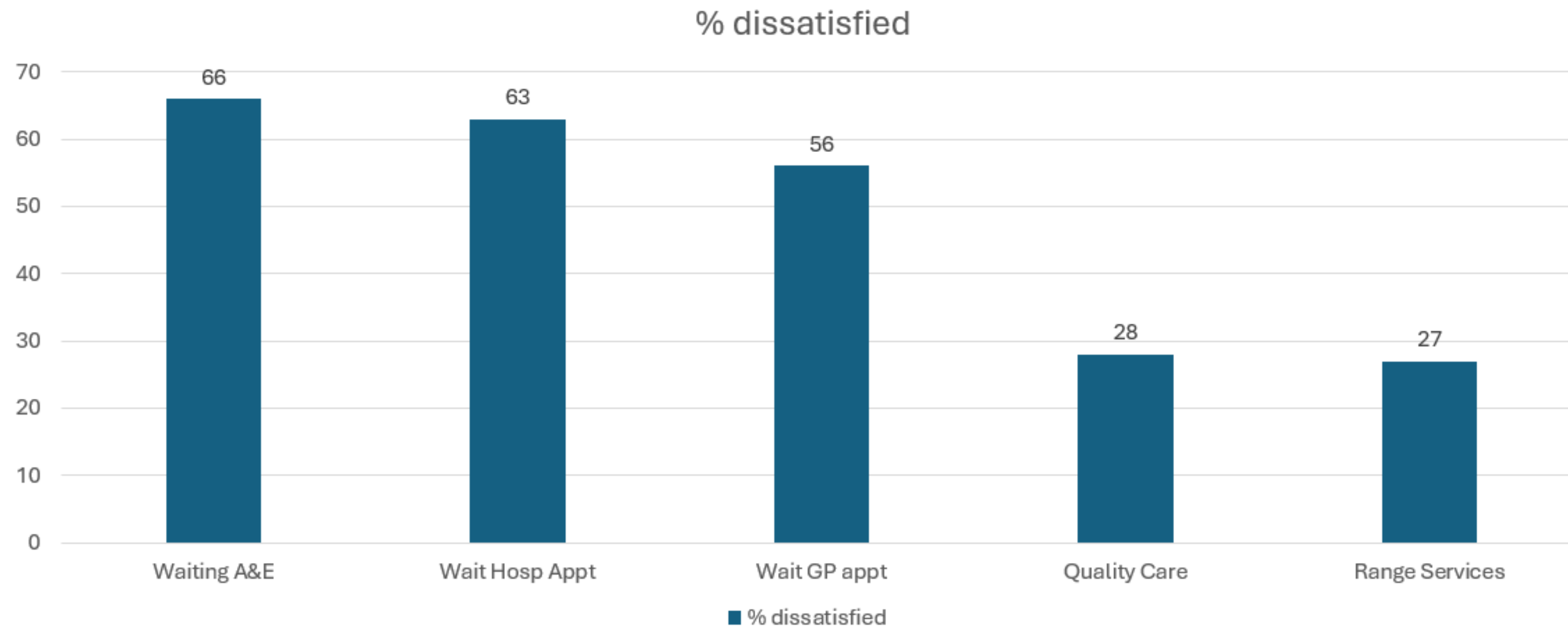
Source: British Social Attitudes. 2025 reading for Inpatient is for being in hospital as an in-patient or outpatieny..

Which services matter most to overall satisfaction now?



Data are for 2025. Estimates derived from a logistic regression with controls for age, gender, party support, UK country, and income.

Dissatisfaction with aspects of NHS performance now



Source: British Social Attitudes. 2025 survey except Range of Services/Treatments, 2024 survey

Why the challenge this time is more difficult

- Albeit though once again focused on length of waiting, high levels of dissatisfaction now more widespread across the NHS
- Shock of the pandemic – high waiting lists & productivity not recovered
- Fiscal constraint
- Ageing (less healthy) population
- Reliance on migrants less politically acceptable
- High ratio of population to GPs.
- Longer A&E waits
- ‘Terror and targets’ may not work a second time

Thank you

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