GP Website Health Check

Fountains Medical Practice, Chester

This short report looks at the user experience of GP websites and gives insight to both GP Practices and the public into how easy they are to use to find information, book appointments, and manage medication. This report focuses on Fountains Medical Practice in Chester. Their website can be accessed at:

www.fountainsmedicalpractice.co.uk.

The desk research upon which this report is based was completed on 15 September 2021.

What is Healthwatch?

Healthwatch Cheshire is the local independent consumer champion for health and care services, forming part of the national network of local Healthwatch across England. As part of our core activity we seek the views and experiences of residents of Cheshire East, and Cheshire West and Chester to help inform how health, care and wellbeing services are planned and delivered. The information we gather is then analysed so that we can identify and act upon trends and common themes by presenting our findings to decision makers in order to improve the services people use. We also share people's local views with Healthwatch England who strive to ensure that the government put people at the heart of care nationally.

More about our work can be found at www.healthwatchcwac.org.uk and www.healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for everyone working in the health and social care system. GP Practices have, like others, had to respond to new demands which have caused changes in the way they operate. During this time, feedback received from people across Cheshire illustrates the challenges they have when contacting their GP Practice for advice, information or to make appointments. There is a heightened reliance on digital platforms for the sharing of information between service providers and the public. Websites are for many people their first point of access to information, and it is therefore vital that GP websites are providing accurate and up to date information for their patients. In the context of significant pressures and demands, it is hoped that this piece of work provides useful insight to assist GP Practices.

We carried out a 'health check' of GP websites in Cheshire to assess how easy the websites are to use, how easy it is to book an appointment and order repeat medication, and what signposting information and advice is available. In addition, we wanted to find examples of best practice to be able to share more widely across the primary care sector.

Similar projects have already been carried out by other Healthwatch organisations nationally including North Yorkshire and the East of England.

Methodology

Over a number of weeks between September and December 2021, a team of 16 Healthwatch Cheshire volunteers undertook a 'health check' of all websites of GP Practices in the 17 Care Communities across Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester – a total of 85 GP Practices. The volunteers acted as 'mystery shoppers', in the role of members of the public. To avoid preconceptions, volunteers did not evaluate their own GP's website.

The health checks involved asking 24 questions and providing answers to these questions to reflect positives and areas for improvement on websites.

Volunteers were asked to answer the questions as if they themselves were a patient who wanted to find the information on each website. It was recognised that one volunteer might answer differently to another: this represents the variation that members of the public might demonstrate when visiting their own GP website.

Similarly, if a volunteer was unable to find information on a Practice website – this represents a member of the public not being able to find the information they need. Such instances highlight a need for website improvement in terms of accessibility or clarity of navigation.

We adapted questions developed by Healthwatch colleagues in the East of England to reflect current national circumstances and issues raised by our ongoing work in Cheshire. We asked the following questions:

- What is the name of the GP Practice?
- Where is the GP Practice located?
- Which care community is the GP Practice located in?[1]
- Does the website have a search bar?
- Is the website accessible (simple and easy to use, with clear fonts and language)?
- Is there the facility to change to a language other than English or support for the partially sighted?
- Does the website have links to self-care and support organisations for health and wellbeing?
- Was it easy to find the information you needed? This will include at least: 1) Link to NHS 111 First. 2) Social Prescribers linked to GP Practice. 3) Local Authority Live Well website.
- Is it easy to access information on services and make an appointment?
- Does the GP Practice detail out of hours advice for use of NHS services?
- Is there a link for patient log-in and for downloading the NHS app?
- Is there a link to the NHS COVID-19 advice site?
- Does the website contain COVID updates and news?
- Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?
- Are the GP Practice's values and aims clearly outlined?
- Is the GP Practice's latest CQC rating and report detailed and linked?
- Does the website contain key contact information for staff, (incl. staff profiles)?
- Does the website have a patient feedback facility?
- Is it easy to find out how to make a complaint?

[1] Care Communities aim to bring together people living, working or involved in an area to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents.

- Does the website contain current Patient Participation Group (PPG) information?
- Are there social media links (e.g. for patients/users to share useful information from the GP website on their social media platforms)?
- Does the website detail Practice opening times, location map and address?
- Are there options of in-person, phone, or video appointments?
- Your overall opinion of the website, how logical is it, is it easy to navigate, is it user-friendly?

Our volunteers found many great examples of GP websites providing crucial information and support for members of the public in Cheshire, but also examples of areas in need of improvement. Reports will be published on our websites, and shared with GP Practices and our wider range of health and care partners.

The following pages provide our 'health check' on the website of Fountains Medical Practice.

Website Health Check

What is the name of the GP Practice?

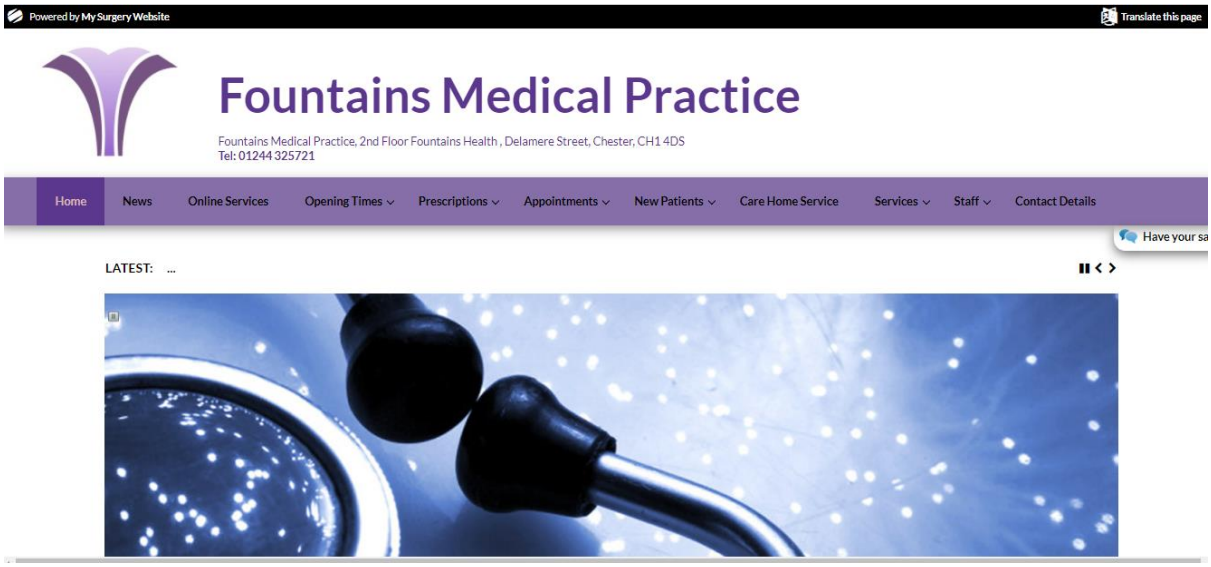
Fountains Medical Practice

Where is the GP Practice located?

Cheshire West

Which care community is the GP Practice located in?

Chester Central (City Centre)



Does the website have a search bar?

No. However, there is an extensive list of tabs which allow for ease of searching the website.

Is the website accessible (simple and easy to use, with clear fonts and language)?

Yes, the information on the website is concise and clear with headings which allow the information to be found quickly. The font choice is clear but a larger size would be easier to read, although this can be amended when zooming in and works really well. Links are found easily on the website as they are in different colours and underlined. I appreciate the nice use of graphics on the pages making the website more visually appealing.

Is there the facility to change to a language other than English or support for the partially sighted?

Yes, at the top of the page there is the option to use the translate option which uses Google. At first, we could not get this to work if cookies were not accepted. At the bottom of the page is a section called Accessibility which says that the My Surgery website should allow the change of colours and contrasts etc. I could not figure out how to do this though. The zoom function for the screen works great where information stays central to the page. It is great to see an email to make accessibility requests on the page.

Does the website have links to self-care and support organisations for health and wellbeing?

Yes, there is self-help information links to NHS choices and information leaflets. There is also the mention of self-referral to social prescribers and low level mental health counsellors.

Was it easy to find the information you needed? This will include at least: 1) Link to NHS 111 First. 2) Social Prescribers linked to GP Practice. 3) Local Authority Live Well website.

Yes. We found information on NHS 111 under the 'when we are closed' section, but we think this would be useful on the homepage as well. We like that you can self-refer to the social prescribers or low-level mental health counsellors rather than having to go through the GP. We could not find the Live Well website; which would be useful under the self-help section.

Is it easy to access information on services and make an appointment?

Yes, this is clearly under a tab which states some of the main clinics. The website clearly advertises the use of the NHS app on the main homepage. Under the appointments tab there is clear access to the online appointment system which takes you to patient access. The information on appointment bookings and timings is very clear and comprehensive.

Does the GP Practice detail out of hours advice for use of NHS services?

Yes, it is very clear how to book an out of hours appointment and using pharmacies. This page does mention NHS 111 under the pharmacy first section. It is also very clear on when the surgery is open and when you can ring.

Is there a link for patient log-in and for downloading the NHS app?

Yes, this is very clearly found as an image on the home page. Also under other relevant sections such as book an online appointment takes you to patient access.

Is there a link to the NHS COVID-19 advice site?

Yes, it is found on the home page.

Does the website contain COVID updates and news?

Yes, this is under the news tab and has many links to different news articles of relevance and NHS COVID website. In addition to a nice image about COVID in the 'GP what to expect' section, which acknowledges people's potential aversion to following COVID precautions and explains why it is important.

Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?

We could not find evidence of this.

Are the GP Practice's values and aims clearly outlined?

We could not find evidence of this.

Is the GP Practice's latest CQC rating and report detailed and linked?

We could not find evidence of this.

Does the website contain key contact information for staff, (incl. staff profiles)?

Yes, the staff are listed but it would be nice to see pictures and a little about them to provide a more personal feel.

Does the website have a patient feedback facility?

Yes, it is very clear what the purpose of the patient participation group is and the instructions for how to join is a clear and a simple process.

Is it easy to find out how to make a complaint?

No, we could find a send us your comments or suggestions section which says 'this form is not for official complaints', but could not see what you need to do in this case.

Does the website contain current Patient Participation Group (PPG) information?

Yes, there is a section on the patient participation group. However, I could not see whether this was up-to-date or any outcomes of previous meetings.

Are there social media links (e.g. for patients/users to share useful information from the GP website on their social media platforms)?

We could not find evidence of this.

Does the website detail Practice opening times, location map and address?

Yes, the website has opening times, it includes the address but we could not find a location map on the website.

Are there options of in-person, phone, or video appointments?

Yes. The website mentions phone and in-person appointments but it is not clear if they offer video appointments.

Your overall opinion of the website, how logical is it, is it easy to navigate, is it user-friendly?

Overall, the website is user friendly; it is clear and concise and reasonably logical for finding information that you want to find. I think adding a search bar could help address finding certain things that are not clearly under a tab. The further information at the bottom of the website is great, however some of this information such as alcohol questionnaire, your health etc. could be more noticeable in a tab at the top. Less important/ frequently used information such as GP earnings, practice policies are great being in this section.

Feedback from GP Practice

Next Steps

The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have seen enormous pressure placed on GP Practices across the UK. They have been required to significantly adapt ways of working within very short time scales. Times like these present challenges but also opportunities. GP Practices have had to work much harder with often reduced workforces, delivering online and phone consultations in place of face-to-face appointments.

It is in this context that we have undertaken this work, to highlight a simple, yet very important, area for improving patient experiences. Our volunteers found many great examples of GP websites providing crucial information and support for members of the public in Cheshire, but also examples of areas in need of improvement. Later this year, we will revisit this work to report on any changes that have been made as a result of our findings.

Healthwatch Cheshire will disseminate our reports to all GP Practices involved in this study, NHS Cheshire CCG, and partners throughout the Cheshire Care Communities. We will continue to gather feedback from the public regarding their experiences of GP Practices more widely, and use this to identify areas of good practice and of concern.