GP Website Health Check

Heath Lane Medical Centre, 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 Heath Lane Medical Centre in Chester. Their website can be accessed at:

www.heathlanemedicalcentre.co.uk.

The desk research upon which this report is based was completed on 6 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?
- Does the website contain current Patient Participation Group (PPG) information?

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

- 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 Heath Lane Medical Centre.

Website Health Check

What is the name of the GP Practice?

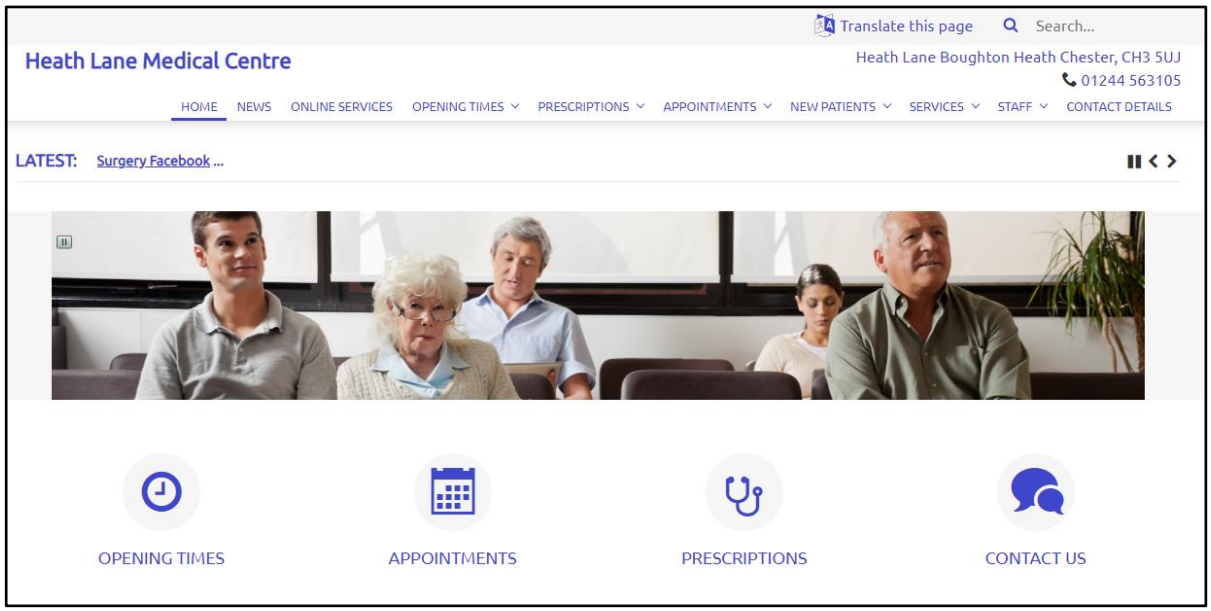
Heath Lane Medical Centre

Where is the GP Practice located?

Cheshire West and Chester

Which care community is the GP Practice located in?

Chester East (Christleton, Littleton, Huntington, Boughton, Upton, Hoole, Mollington, Mickle Trafford)



Does the website have a search bar?

Yes. There are various categories across the search bar - which probably cover most areas of enquiries. there is also a search button for anything that is not obviously covered in the search bar.

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

Yes. There are clearly visible buttons for opening times, appointments, prescriptions and a general contact us button - which are all easy to navigate and will cover a lot of enquiries. The information is clear and not overcomplicated. The font on the pages is quite small and this might present difficulties for some. the information sheets for non-English speakers are archived and although they can be opened, they may not be current. there are some photographs to illustrate the text, but not many - the pages appear quite 'text heavy'.

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

Yes. The pages can be translated via Google translate and this works effectively. There is no facility on the website to change the page for partially sighted.

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

Yes. There are contact details for social prescribing and a Wellbeing Co-ordinator. the links to general health advice with links to other information and websites are at the very bottom of the website page and could be easy to miss. The links include self-help, minor illness advice, long term conditions advice and family health (by age band and gender).

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.

No. Information about NHS111 is via the surgery opening times button and could be difficult to find - something on the 'front page' of the website would be helpful. No direct link included to the Live Well website (although there are links as mentioned before to other sources of information and advice). There is information about social prescribers and a contact phone number.

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

Yes. There are buttons which navigate information about services and appointments. Online appointments can be made via the website. There is a lot of useful information about contacting for urgent appointments and the process in place for triaging. There is information and a link to a recently added e-consult service.

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

Yes. The opening hours page includes information about NHS 111 and use of 999 for genuine emergencies. There is information about the GP extended hours service in the appointments page.

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

No. There is not a log in for the website. and no details about links to the NHS app. There is a link through to a site called Patient access which can be used for ordering repeat prescriptions which patients do register for, and sign in.

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

Yes. The link to the NHS Covid site is on the news page of the website and a patient would have to scroll down this page to find the relevant link.

Does the website contain COVID updates and news?

Yes. On the news page - which appears to updated regularly.

Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?

We could find no evidence of this.

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

We could find no evidence of this. A statement of vision of values couldn't be found. there is an open letter on the home page regarding commitment to maintaining services during the pandemic and this has been updated recently.

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

Yes. There is a link to the CQC report at the bottom of the webpage.

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

Yes. There is a staff section with photographs and short profiles of the staff.

Does the website have a patient feedback facility?

Yes. There is a 'have your say' section on the home page with links to friends and family test, patient participation groups and a 'contact us' link.

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

Yes. There is a comments and suggestions form included on the site with an accompanying message that complaints should be directed to the practice manager and via a phone call.

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

No. There is comprehensive information about the PPG but the most recent minutes on the website are dated October 2019.

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 find no evidence of this.

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

Yes. All information is clearly presented.

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

Yes. This includes a recently launched e-consult service.

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

Yes. The website works effectively for probably the majority of patient enquiries - e.g. appointments, prescriptions and so is satisfactory. There are some key links to information at the bottom of the webpage which could be easily missed - especially self-help and information. A number of services have to be contacted via phone (e.g. social prescriber) and the website seems to be updated regularly including a news section and newsletter.

Feedback on 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.