GP Website Health Check

The Helsby & Elton Practice, Helsby

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 The Helsby & Elton Practice in Helsby. Their website can be accessed at:

www.helsbyandeltonpractice.nhs.uk.

The desk research upon which this report is based was completed on 7 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 Helsby & Elton Practice.

Website Health Check

What is the name of the GP Practice?

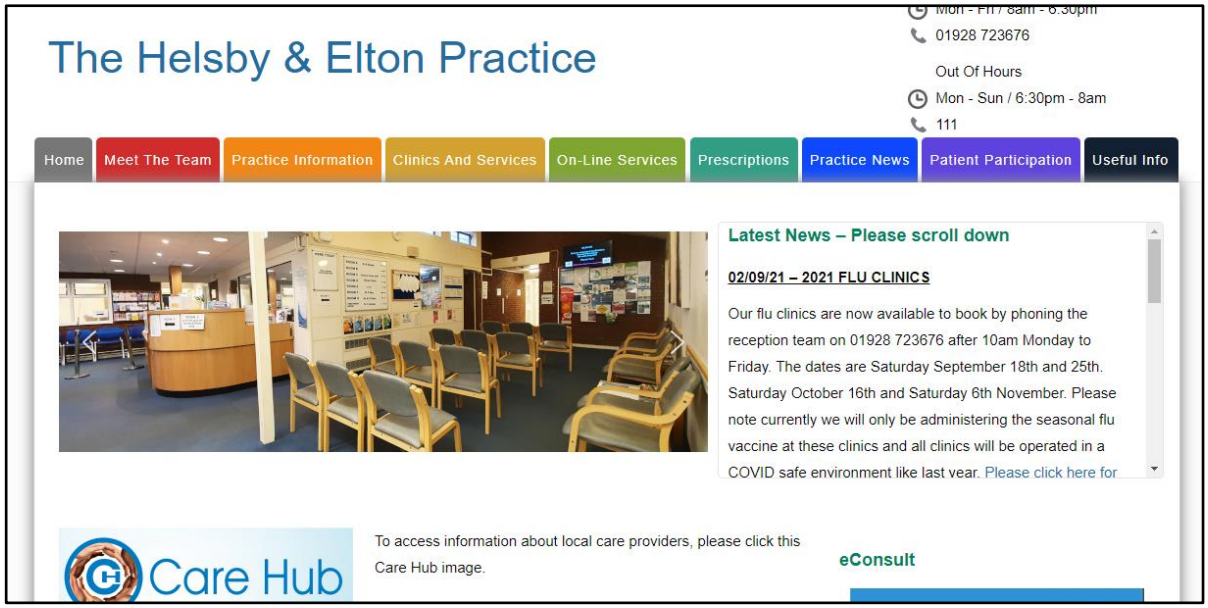
Helsby & Elton Practice

Where is the GP Practice located?

Cheshire West and Chester

Which care community is the GP Practice located in?

Frodsham, Helsby and Elton



Does the website have a search bar?

We could find no evidence of this.

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

Yes.

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

We could find no evidence of this.

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

Yes. Under the “Clinics and Services" tab, there is a link to "How to Treat Common Ailments". In addition to this, on the website's home page, there is a clickable "Care hub" image which enables users to find local care providers by selecting the category of care required and selecting a suitable care provider from the list of available care providers. There is also a very useful search bar under "Find care providers" which facilitates quick access to relevant information.

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.

Although this information was available on the website, it was not always easy to find, e.g. the Link to the NHS 111 First information was not on the home page/first page, instead, the home page mentioned NHS 111 in the context of it being the surgery's out of hours number. Information on the Live Well website was not in a visible or obvious place. It was only found after performing a random search by using the search bar for finding care providers within the Care hub. Information on social subscribers linked to the GP practice is easy to find via the clickable "Care hub" image and also via the "Useful info" tab.

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

Yes. 1. On the home page, there’s a clear, clickable e-consult image which gives access to GP online consultation services.
2. On the home page, under the practice information tab at the top of the screen, there is information on how to make an appointment - either online (a link is provided; however, the 24 Hour Online Booking System for GP Appointments is currently suspended and has been replaced by a phone triage process) or by phoning the practice. There is also information on opening times for Helsby Health Centre and Elton Surgery.
3. There is information on what to do when the surgery is closed – this covers information on the NHS 111 service, the General Practice Extended Hours service and the 999 service (for immediate, life-threatening emergencies).

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

Yes. Under the "Practice Information" tab, there is comprehensive information on "What to do if the Surgery is Closed".

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

On the home page, there is no link for patient log-in or for downloading the NHS app, however, under the "Online Services" tab, there is a link to the e-consult service which (if online consultation is selected) gives the option to either log in via the NHS log-in or to continue without NHS log-in (with the option to register for NHS log-in at the end). It would be helpful if the links for patient log-in and downloading the NHS app were in a prominent place on the website's home page.

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

Yes.

Does the website contain COVID updates and news?

Yes. This information is available on the website's home page.

Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?

Yes. This information is available under the "Care Hub".

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

No. The Practice's philosophy is mentioned, however, values and aims are not clearly stated.

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

Yes. It would help to have the CQC rating and reports in one place. Currently, the CQC Inspection Report for the inspection carried out on 31 August 2016 is available under the "Practice News" tab while the report for the CQC inspection carried out on 28 February 2017 is available under the "Practice Information" tab.

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

No. Under the "Meet the team" tab, there is a list of names and job roles for doctors, nursing staff and the admin. team, however, there are no accompanying photographs and there is no contact information for key staff.

Does the website have a patient feedback facility?

No. There is no obvious link or information on how users can provide unsolicited feedback, however, there is evidence from the "Patient Participation" tab showing that patient surveys have been carried out in the past, with the most recent one being from 2014. It is concerning that the website shows no evidence of recent patient surveys. It would be desirable for the website to have clear information on how service users can provide feedback.

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

Yes. Under "Practice information" there is information on "Making a Complaint".

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

The most recent minutes available are from the PPG meeting held on Tuesday 17 September 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.

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

Yes.

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

Yes. The website is simple and basic. We feel that user experience would be enhanced if the website used user-friendly font, was less cluttered, made better use of graphics and smart icons, provided quick clickable links to key information (e.g. patient log-in, booking an appointment, user feedback and how to raise a complaint, CQC rating and report, etc.), used less text, was more intuitive, had a search function on the home page and social media links, among other things.

Feedback from GP Practice

No feedback was received at the time of publication.

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.