GP Website Health Check

Hope Farm Medical Centre, Ellesmere Port

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 Hope Farm Medical Centre in Ellesmere Port. Their website can be accessed at:

www.hopefarmmedicalcentre.nhs.uk.

The desk research upon which this report is based was completed on 6 December 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 Hope Farm Medical Centre.

Website Health Check

What is the name of the GP Practice?

Hope Farm Medical Centre

Where is the GP Practice located?

Cheshire West

Which care community is the GP Practice located in?

Ellesmere Port

Does the website have a search bar?

We could not find any evidence of this.

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

Yes, the font choice and formatting is clear. However, the font seems light. There is sufficient content that is easy to read, and easy to locate with the tabs.

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

We could not find any evidence of this.

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

Yes.

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. There is reference to 111 throughout the website, social prescribers and Live Well can be found under listed services.

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

Yes, it can be found easily and it is clearly outlined on the website.

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

Yes, the information is clear, concise and easily located.

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

Yes, the link to patient access can be found easily. We could not find information on the website about the NHS app.

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

Yes, this is easy to find.

Does the website contain COVID updates and news?

Yes.

Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?

We could not find any evidence of this.

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

Yes, this can be found under practice then policies and procedures.

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

Yes, easy to find clear link to the report.

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

Yes, it is nice to see the level of detail. There are pictures and a bit of educational background which adds a personal touch to care. However, a few individuals are missing pictures.

Does the website have a patient feedback facility?

Yes. However, we could not find the compliments feedback form which was said to be at the foot of the page.

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

Yes, this is very clear on the website.

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

Yes, this is clearly explained for expectations and purpose of the group. It does not look like the group is back up and running yet as the last minutes are from July 2018 and the last survey is from 2015.

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

Yes, there are Spotify podcasts, Facebook and Twitter accounts. The podcasts are very recent and provide some really interesting content, this is a fantastic idea.

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

Yes, these could be found on the main home page and the location map at the bottom of the page with the address in the footer of the website.

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

Yes. In person and phone appointments are clearly mentioned on the website. They mention appointments through patient access however without access it is not clear if video appointments are found through this otherwise there is no reference to them on the main website.

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

Yes. The website is clear, concise and logically laid out information. It is easy to navigate, there aren't excessive links crowding the website the links chosen are very relevant. Overall very user friendly and well designed. We really like the practice newsletters and podcasts, and think that is a great idea.

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.