GP Website Health Check

Laurel Bank Surgery, Malpas

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 Laurel Bank Surgery in Malpas. Their website can be accessed at:

www.malpassurgery.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 Laurel Bank Surgery.

Website Health Check

What is the name of the GP Practice?

Laurel Bank Surgery

Where is the GP Practice located?

Cheshire West

Which care community is the GP Practice located in?

Rural (Tarporley, Malpas, Ashton, Farndon, Tattenhall, Kelsall, and Tarvin)

Patient Communications

Malpas Surgery is switching to a new telephone system on Thursday 4th November 2021. As a patient, you will notice a change to our pre-recorded messaging and a call queue whilst waiting to speak to one our team.

We will also be recording all inbound and outbound reception calls for training and monitoring purposes. Telephone Consultations with clinicians and calls to our Dispensary will NOT be recorded. For further details, please see our Privacy Notice and Call Recording Policy.

Please note, our telephone numbers will NOT change.

Does the website have a search bar?

No. However, the tabs on the home page look comprehensive.

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

The site is easy to use but the font is small and some sections contain a lot of information. We was able to increase the size of the page on an ipad but could not do this on a laptop. There is a section on learning disabilities and has a lot of easy read guides about general health issues but there is no easy read guide on the practice. There is no guidance for Non-English speaking people.

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. There are a number of sections under services that contain lots of information and links but these are not labelled as self-care and the information is not really presented in an age appropriate or attractive way for example the teenage health section. The home page could describe generally what can be found on the website and emphasis could be given to the role that self-care and support from other organisations can play in 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.

We found information for NHS 111 in two different sections but this was not very prominently placed. We could not find reference to Social Prescribers or Live Well and there was no search facility to use.

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

Yes. The website contains information about how to make an appointment and what services are available. I could not determine whether this information was up-to-date or whether the appointment system works well in practice.

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

Yes, the information is comprehensive but it is in a small font and there is a lot of information to read. The layout of this could be improved.

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

We could find no evidence of a link to the NHS app. There is a link to patient access.

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

Yes. This can be found on the homepage there is some FAQs about COVID-19 with links to government website and NHS advice.

Does the website contain COVID updates and news?

Yes, but the information is limited.

Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?

Yes, the information is very limited there is no link to Healthwatch or information about what they do. They have provided the Healthwatch number under complaints and concerns.

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

No, there is no description of the values or aims.

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

Yes.

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

There are profiles for all staff but no contact details.

Does the website have a patient feedback facility?

Yes, there is a section on comments and complaints and that they invite feedback. However, there is no immediate feedback facility available on the site.

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

There is a section on complaints in the patient information section, some people may not expect to find this under this section and a search facility would help with this.

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

Yes, the last minutes on the site are from October 2019 with no information to say what is happening now.

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, it mentions e-consult, telephone and video appointments are available.

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

The practice has set out to provide a lot of good quality information, but we feel that the site could be improved by developing it from the patient's perspective. A search facility would definitely help.

Feedback from GP Practice

Thank you to the Healthwatch Cheshire Volunteers for taking the time to review our website and give a detailed critique. We are pleased that most of the information you would expect to see online is available to our patients.

We are currently working with a web-designer to reshape and simplify our home page, making it more user friendly and accessible. We hope to incorporate several the points raised in the Healthwatch report including a search facility, social media links and direct links to the NHS COVID-19 pages.

Edward Rigby - Practice Manager

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.