GP Website Health Check

Park 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 Park Medical Centre in Chester. Their website can be accessed at:

www.parkmedicalchester.co.uk.

The desk research upon which this report is based was completed on 8 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 Park Medical Centre.

Website Health Check

What is the name of the GP Practice?

Park 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. Buttons on home page for main website functions and info such as appointments, prescriptions service info and a search button with other links including 'contact us'. (This search menu includes opening hours).

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

Yes. Clear buttons and links to most of the main functions. Quite small font used throughout - including the statement on the front page concerning current service provision. There is the option to scroll down to some key information rather than use the buttons.

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. Unable to locate link to google translate or other translation service. As previously mentioned, font size is quite small and may be difficult to read. There are links to general information in different languages on the new patient's page.

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

Yes. There is a health advice button clearly visible on the homepage and this links through to various NHS advice pages. Link to care-hub and mental health self-help and self-referral at bottom of homepage. The care hub links to information about social prescribing with no links to local organisations.

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. Not very easy or intuitive. NHS 111 online is included in the health advice page and the opening hours page which may not be obvious to those using the website. Reference to NHS111 on the appointments section is some way down the page in small type. There is some information about social prescribers but we were unable to locate contact information. No link to Live Well site or any other local services.

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

No. The appointments page is in very small font, a lot of text and confusing to follow with lengthy descriptions of the different types of appointments with the different types of staff. I'm not sure if all patients would read all the text and follow the advice and information. There is information about extended hours services and a button through to making an appointment online (which then requires a log in).

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

Yes. This is displayed on the appointments page and also via the site search button.

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

Yes. Information about the NHS app is displayed on the home page with a link to follow.

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

No. There are links to information about the covid vaccines on the news page but no links to the covid 19 sire were found. There is a link on the homepage to a Covid19 local helpline.

Does the website contain COVID updates and news?

Yes. Focused on the vaccination programme.

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. No information given regarding practice values and aim given and no general site search button to locate.

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

Yes. CQC overall rating and link to the report is given on the homepage.

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

Yes. There is a who's who section of the staff giving qualifications and special interests. No specific phone numbers or contact details other that the main number.

Does the website have a patient feedback facility?

Yes. There is a link to the family and friends test on the home page and a PPG page inviting patients to be part of the PPG.

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

We could find no evidence of this. No information about who to contact was found. There is a general 'contact us' button.

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

Yes. The group is referenced as PPG on the home page. The page provides information about the group, links to their reports and details about their aims and how to join.

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 3 items are on separate pages: There is a location map on the 'new patients ' page. Opening times are given on the home page and appointments page. The address is on the 'contact us' page (via the search button).

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

Yes. Appointments page states that there are telephone consultations available. an e-consult link is located on the 'advice' page - not on the appointments page.

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

This website is difficult to follow - with information that should be grouped together split across different pages (eg the map, address and opening times). It's very difficult to find information about online appointment options. The advice section ranges from links to general health advice to dealing with minor injuries and when to contact 111. Some of the information is via very small print links at the bottom of the webpage or on the search button at the top or side of the home page. Small print throughout the website.

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.