GP Website Health Check

The Knoll Surgery - Princeway, Frodsham

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 Knoll Surgery in Frodsham. Their website can be accessed at:

www.theknollsurgery.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 The Knoll Surgery.

Website Health Check

What is the name of the GP Practice?

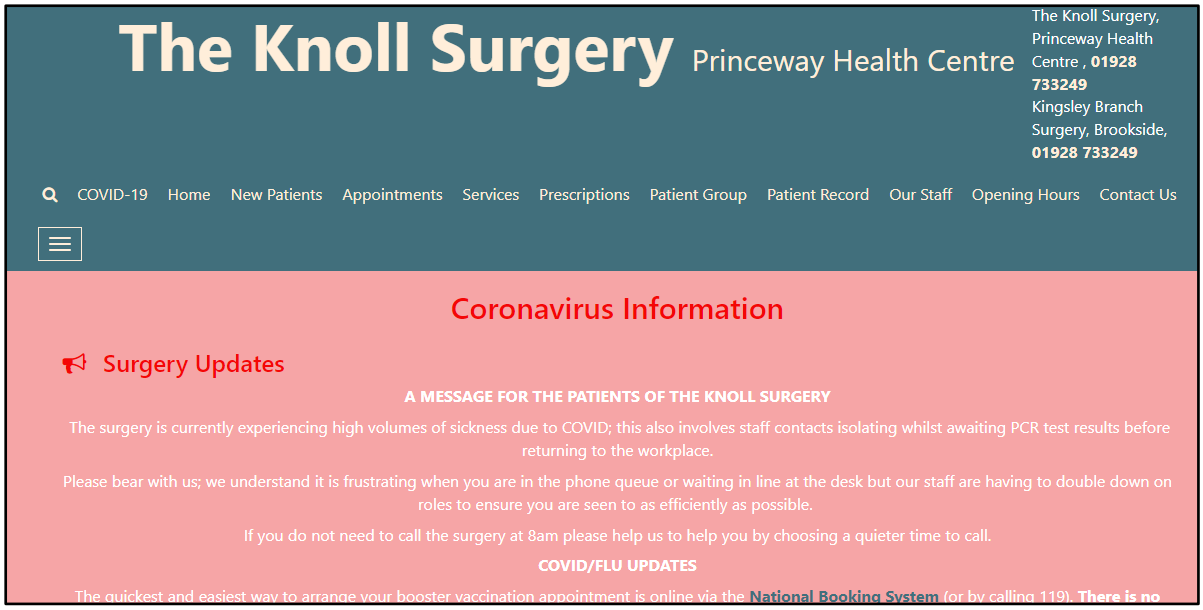
The Knoll Surgery

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?

Yes.

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

Yes. Great use of graphics and smart icons which helps reduce clutter and gives a pleasant experience. On a related note, however, the "View our vacancies" icon in the middle of the home page appears to be rather imposing and in a random place. We feel that the vacancies tab would be better off added to the line of tabs at the top of the homepage, perhaps adjacent to the "Contact us" tab. This would help to make the homepage look less cluttered.

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 is a "Further information" section at the bottom of every page. Among other things, this has a link to a "Health advice" page which gives advice on a wide range of health-related topics. On the home page under the "Services" tab there is a link to "Well-being services". This can also be accessed via the "Wellbeing and Social Prescribing" clickable icon on the home page. Additionally, the home page has a link to "Live Well Cheshire West" as well links to the "Care hub" and to "Early Help and Prevention Service". It is worth mentioning that the "Self-Referral Services" link (accessed via the "Services" tab is currently not clickable hence users cannot access this information currently.

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. Under the "Opening hours" tab there is a clickable link to NHS 111 online. Under "Contact us", the NHS 111 number is also listed. On the home page, there is a clickable link to "Wellbeing and Social Prescribing" and also a link to "Live Well Cheshire West

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

Yes. There is a "Services" tab and an "Appointments" tab.

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

Yes. There is an "Opening hours" tab with comprehensive information on opening hours, how to access medical help when the surgery is closed and about the NHS 111 service. Further information is also available under the "Appointments" tab, including information on the GP Extended Hours service.

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

Under the "Appointments" tab there is a clickable link to "Make an appointment online" which then prompts "Patient Access" log-in. Under the "e-Consult" link on the home page, there is an option for patient log-in via the NHS log-in and an option to register for NHS log-in if one wishes to do so.

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

Yes. When one accesses the website for the first time, a pop-up window with COVID-19 advice comes up. It is worth mentioning that once this pop-up window has been closed down (which is necessary as one wouldn't be able to access the rest of the website, otherwise), the information is then lost during that session. It may be useful for the GP practice IT team to explore ways of making this vital information a permanent feature on their website (in addition to the pop-up window) by also adding this vital COVID-19 information to the "COVID-19" tab.

Does the website contain COVID updates and news?

Yes.

Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?

No. There is no direct link, however, by searching for Healthwatch under the "Care Hub" link, a link to Healthwatch Cheshire West was found.

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

We could find no evidence of this.

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

Yes. The homepage shows the CQC rating with a link to the report.

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

Yes. It is good that there are photos of staff. There was no information about their areas of interest and any specialist qualifications.

Does the website have a patient feedback facility?

Yes. There is a "Have your say" section on the homepage which allows users to input comments/feedback.

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

Yes. There is a "Complaints" tab under "Services".

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

Yes. There is a "Patient Participation Group" tab on the home page. The most recent minutes are from the meeting held on the 4th February 2020.

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 easy to navigate, user-friendly and intuitive with effective use of images. The "search" function on the home page makes it easy for users to quickly search for specific information. Addition of social media links would facilitate sharing of useful information from the GP website by service users and would also facilitate real-time two-way communication between the practice and the service users.

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.