GP Website Health Check

Upton Village Surgery, 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 Upton Village Surgery in Chester. Their website can be accessed at:

www.uptonvillagesurgery.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 Upton Village Surgery.

Website Health Check

What is the name of the GP Practice?

Upton Village Surgery

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. Main buttons and links to key pages across top of homepage and extensive menu including general 'search' on the side of the homepage.

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

Yes. Font is quite small but illustrations and pictures are used on the main menu which is simple to follow. Quite a lot of information is on linked documents in PDF.

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

Yes. In the quick links on the side menu. Links to some general information for new patients in different languages.

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

Yes. The side menu on the home page has links to various support organisations with local links and phone numbers. Also, some information to health and wellbeing information but this doesn't appear to be 'local'.

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. Opening times page includes information about NHS111 and an NHS logo at the foot of the homepage There is no mention of social prescribers. The site links through to a general NHS Live Well site - no a local authority site or local support services / organisations.

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

Yes. The appointments button leads to options for a range of appointment options: e.g. e-consult, out of hours, telephone advice.

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

Yes. There is information about the extended hours service and 111 via the appointments page menu bar and also via the opening times menu bar.

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

No login service apart from those who use e-consult or patient access UP for repeat prescriptions.

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

Yes. The homepage includes a link to further Covid info and news and a link to government information.

Does the website contain COVID updates and news?

Yes. Brief note from the practice update on the homepage and links to further covid information page which is extensive and detailed.

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?

Yes. Mission statement in practice policies page along with other policies which underpin the practice values such as privacy, complaints, zero tolerance.

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

Yes. Link to the report included and CQC leaflet 'what to expect from your GP Practice'.

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

Yes. names, qualifications and special interests given. There are separate contact numbers for general enquiries and appointments given.

Does the website have a patient feedback facility?

Yes. Link on side menu to friends and family test. Also, information about PPG and invitation to join.

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

No. The complaint form is within the practice policies page on the website and explains the procedure for complaints - may not be very easy to locate.

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

Yes. Refers to the group as 'our patient group' not PPG acronym. There is an email address or can be contacted via reception. Most recent survey is 2019 and main findings are clearly presented.

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 is a 'visit us on facebook' button at the top of the homepage.

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

Yes. Opening times are clearly stated and address and phone number are at the top of the home page. The only map is in the new patient's section and shows the practice boundary.

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

Yes. E-consult is available as are telephone appointments as well as in person appointments. Repeat prescriptions can be ordered via patient access UK.

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

Yes. The website is quite easy to navigate - the home page is set out well with a series of clearly depicted links to the main website pages each with several tabs which are easy to navigate. A more extensive menu bar on the side of the home page links to further pages / options. there are lots of links within the pages to more detailed information. The text is generally quite small throughout but key pieces of information such as opening times are in bold font and use of spacing helps.

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.