GP Website Health Check

Watling Street Medical Centre, Northwich

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 Watling Street Medical Centre in Northwich. Their website can be accessed at:

www.watlingmedicalpractice.nhs.uk.

The desk research upon which this report is based was completed on 7 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 Watling Street Medical Centre.

Website Health Check

What is the name of the GP Practice?

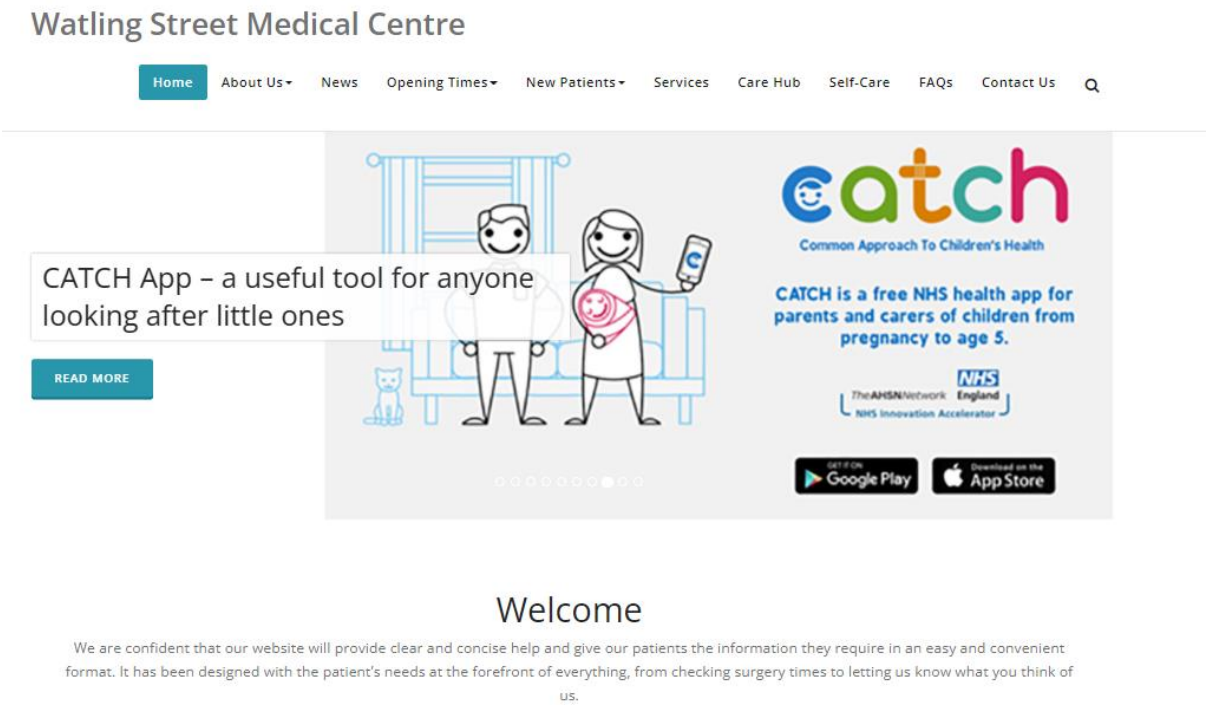
Watling Street Medical Centre

Where is the GP Practice located?

Cheshire West

Which care community is the GP Practice located in?

Northwich



Does the website have a search bar?

Yes.

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

Yes, the website is easy to navigate and uses a clear font of a reasonable size. The language used is clear and concise.

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

There appears to be no facility to change the language of the site or the colours and fonts. However, there are leaflets under new patients in different languages and when using the zoom function the contents of the page adjust to fit the window.

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

Yes, the site provides the Care Hub link.

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 struggled to find NHS 111 information on the website. We could not find evidence of social prescribers or Live Well.

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

Yes, there is some information on appointments when you click on services. However, when you click on appointments on the home page it re-directs you instantly to patient access.

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

Yes, the information is clear about what to do and easily found.

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

We were unable to find evidence of the NHS app, but were able to find the patient access log in.

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

Yes. The NHS links can be found at the bottom of the page.

Does the website contain COVID updates and news?

Yes, via the NHS the news reel on the homepage has information on COVID vaccinations.

Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?

We were unable to find evidence of this.

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

We were unable to find evidence of this.

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

Yes, the rating and report were found from February 2020.

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

Yes, staff members are listed it includes their names and job titles. It does not include a profile or images.

Does the website have a patient feedback facility?

Yes, there is a Friends and Family test on the homepage.

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

We were unable to find this information.

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

No, we found this information using the search facility. We could not find any minutes on the site or how to join. Under How can you get involved the sentence is incomplete and the website linked has been struck through as it is no longer a valid link.

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

We were unable to find evidence of this.

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

Yes. The opening times were clearly outlined with the address and a location map.

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

Yes, it mentions in-person and phone appointments. However, we could not find information on video appointments.

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

Overall, it is relatively easy to navigate with clear font choice and language. On the website some sections seem incomplete such as when the About us section was clicked on. It would also be beneficial to have a translate function to aid accessibility, rather than information leaflets.

Feedback from GP Practice

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.