GP Website Health Check

Witton Street Surgery, 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 Witton Street Surgery in Northwich. Their website can be accessed at: www.wittonstreetsurgery.nhs.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 Witton Street Surgery.

Website Health Check

What is the name of the GP Practice?

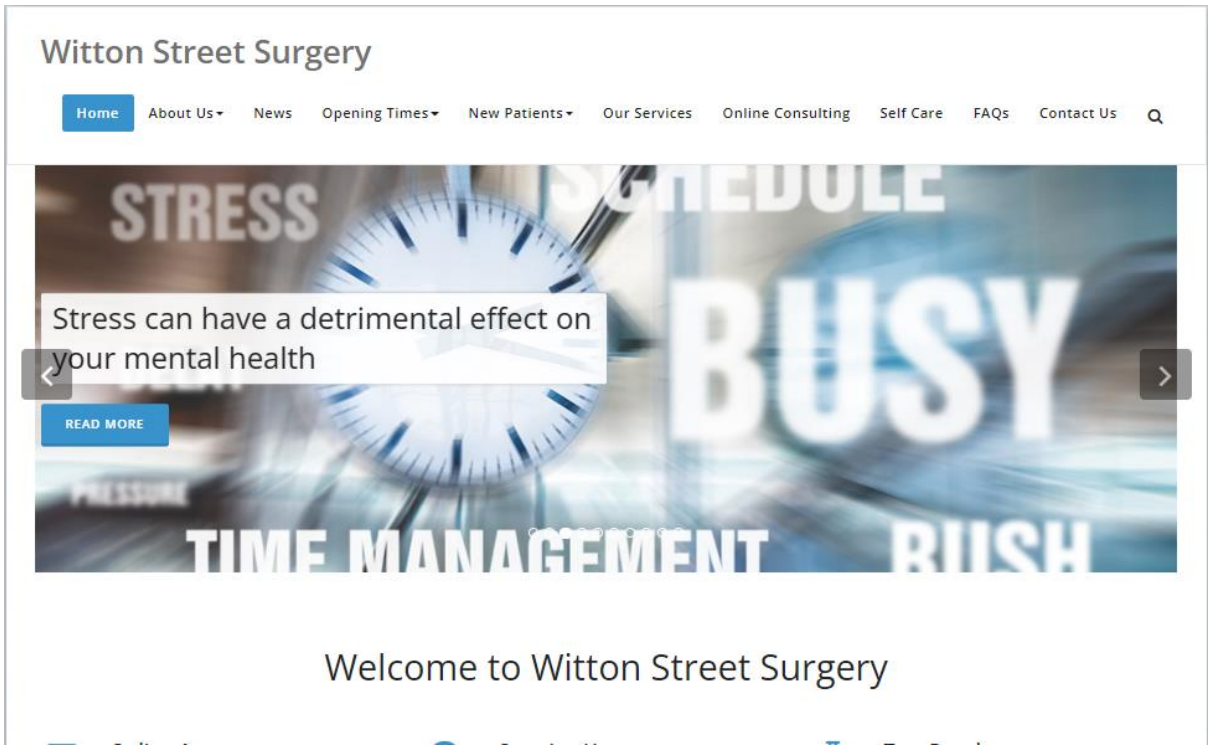
Witton Street Surgery

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, it is mostly the same layout as other Northwich surgeries.

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

Yes.

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

No, the site does not have a link under 'New patients' for non-English speakers linking to information sheets as other Northwich GP websites have, nor is their a translation tool.

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

No, the Care Hub tab is not available for patients.

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, the link to call NHS 111 is at the bottom of the homepage. I could not find reference to social prescribers or Live Well.

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

Yes, patient access is the only online option.

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

Yes, it tells you to call NHS 111.

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

No, but this would be beneficial in addition to Patient access.

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

Yes, via the NHS links at the bottom of the page.

Does the website contain COVID updates and news?

Yes, through the NHS website.

Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?

We could not find evidence of this.

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

We could not find evidence of this.

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

Yes, March 2020.

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

Yes, there is limited content the information that can be seen is names and job function.

Does the website have a patient feedback facility?

We could not find evidence of this.

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

No, you are advised to contact the Operations Manager or leave a note in the suggestions box in reception.

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

We could not find evidence of this.

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 not find 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, via patient access or by phone. I am not sure about video calls.

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

No, the website misses a lot of information compared to other local GP websites despite using a similar template, such as accessibility options for non-English speakers, links to the Care Hub, PPG information, the complaints process, and how to leave feedback.

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.