



Review of GP Websites

April 2021

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Introduction

Background information

A GP website should be a useful source of information for existing and potential patients, providing key details on each practice and the range of services offered. The site can also provide links for patients to other useful sites both within the local area and nationally.

During the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, patients have been advised not to visit GP surgeries due to social distancing. Therefore, it has become more important that patients have access to reliable and up-to-date information from their GP practice.

In the past we have received feedback from local residents who've had difficulty accessing information from their GP surgeries. People have told us they can't easily book appointments online, and they've not been told about services such as GP Extra. Residents also told us that GP practices don't often ask for feedback on services received, and they're not aware the Patient Participation Group each practice has, or how to get involved. We've also been told it's difficult to raise a concern or make a complaint because information on the process is not made easily available.

We wanted to know how easy it would be to find current information on GP surgery websites, how to access GP services, receive the latest information on making appointments and how to keep safe and well during the pandemic.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our dedicated volunteers for their support. Much of the initial work on this project was done by a team of highly skilled and dedicated volunteers who gave us substantial amounts of their time. In particular we'd like to thank Owen Ashworth, Ashley Ballard, Paul Cooke, Sue Connolly, Chris Grice, Ana Laycock, Diane McCormick and John Parle.

What we did

We designed an online survey for our volunteers to complete while visiting the websites using a set of key questions.

1. Is the website up to date?
2. Is there current Covid 19 advice?
3. Is there a link to the NHS Covid 19 advice site?
4. Is there advice for Cancer Patients?
5. Is there a link to the Macmillan Covid 19 web page?
6. Are there any links to Cancer Support Groups?
7. Are there clear details on new patient registration?
8. Is there information/links to the local Healthwatch?
9. Is there information on how to make a complaint or give feedback?

The review was carried out by 8 volunteers and 4 Healthwatch staff members between 10 December 2020 and 15 January 2021.

All 14 GP websites were visited by at least two of our volunteers. We ensured that each volunteer was not responsible for checking their own GP practice website. We felt this provided the necessary impartiality required, for a fair and transparent collection of information.

Our Healthwatch volunteers are of differing ages, they are reflective of general members of the public in their varying knowledge, experience and skill when searching for online information and they used different types of device to carry out the task: computers, tablets, phones.

Their aim was to find information that a patient might need without having to make a telephone call to the practice.

Context

The information we have retrieved is only a small indication of the data stored on the GP websites and was only assessed during the times we have indicated. We recognise there may have been changes on some websites during or since our audit has been completed. We additionally acknowledge the changes to Covid-19 (new variants) and the additional national lockdown which commenced late December 2020.

This survey was also used to see if all 14 GP Practices within Halton were meeting the new government accessibility requirements which needed to be met by 23rd September 2020. These requirements are driven by the need for organisations to meet the 2018 website and mobile app accessibility regulations¹.

All GP practices must adhere to, include publishing, and regularly reviewing, an accessibility statement on the level of accessibility across the site. They must also acknowledge, if there are perceived barriers within the statement, how patients can contact the website owner if they encounter problems.

We understand that some GP Practices manage their own website content, whilst others receive external support from specialist GP website businesses. We acknowledge that throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, GP practices, alongside the NHS have been trying to ensure that they are positioned to react effectively.

We believe providing current and accurate information during this pandemic is an essential contributor to this effort.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps>

Findings Summary

From the information collected, it is apparent there are varying differences in the structure, quantity and quality of information listed on each website.

While we acknowledge the pandemic has potentially altered the priorities for some GP practices to continue to update and to always maintain the most current information, at the time of our audit, keeping websites up to date has obviously not been a priority for some GP practices for quite a while

- 👉 All websites clearly displayed opening times
- 👉 It was easy for our volunteers to find out how to make an appointment on all websites
- 👉 Half of GP practice websites checked did not have a Covid-19 pop up screen with the latest guidance for the public
- 👉 Two practice sites offered no alternative language options on their websites. On sites which did offer different languages it ranged in number from just two alternative languages up to more than 100
- 👉 Volunteers felt it was often a game of hide and seek as to where information would be displayed
- 👉 Just 2 websites had any information/advice available for cancer patients on potential changes in their cancer care or treatment due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Just 2 sites offered any information or links to local cancer support organisations
- 👉 None of the websites checked detailed specifically how homeless people could register with a practice
- 👉 Only 2 websites had information on both Healthwatch and the Healthwatch Advocacy service. Both of these had incorrect contact details on the Advocacy service. Volunteers found it difficult to easily find information regarding Healthwatch or the Complaints advocacy service
- 👉 Seven of the 14 websites did not clearly describe care navigation or its role
- 👉 Just 6 out of the 14 websites clearly explained their practice boundaries
- 👉 All websites requested some form of ID information for patients to be registered
- 👉 None of the websites checked provided information on the Primary Care Networks

Our survey reflects that many people have been able to access the relevant information they required to help them stay safe and well, despite the varied and differing layout and content of each individual website. The majority of websites did a fine job of providing the basic information need by a patient; opening times and how to contact the practice. Beyond that our volunteers reported a variance in the quality and quantity of information available.

Some GP practices appear to have thrown everything into their websites without any real thought of making it easy for patients to find what they may be looking for. Others have presented sites that are easy to navigate and view, but often with sections of information that are not maintained well enough to keep them up to date and informative.

We have also noted that some websites have been overhauled since our volunteers carried out their visits in December and January. While this has improved the look navigation of these sites, at first glance they appear to have carried over much of the incorrect information from the previous versions of their sites.

Recommendations

We have reviewed all the data from our volunteers and have identified the following as areas which could benefit from improvements.

Accurate, up to date and easy to understand information

During the pandemic we understand that updating and improving websites may not have been a highest priority for many GP practices. What we found though were many sites that have clearly not been maintained and updated for much longer than the past year. As a point of communication with the patient a website can't be treated as a glorified noticeboard with a post and forget attitude.

We recommend that the GP practices review their websites regularly to ensure the information provided to patients is relevant and up to date.

Although it was encouraging to note most volunteers could find information regarding self-care and support organisations for health and wellbeing, we would still recommend that these pages and links are checked for accuracy.

It would be beneficial to review the sites again in six months time to see how the sites have been updated and refreshed.

Patient registration / Homeless patients

We recommend that information is made available to explain how people can easily register with a GP practice. Practice boundaries should be clearly explained on each website with clear information provided on how to register, with links to online forms where possible. Clear information about the registration requirements should be given which should meet the NHS/BMA guidance.²

We recommend all GP practices adopt the CQC guidance on registering homeless patients and include this information within their websites³.

Languages / formats

We noted that many of the websites visited provided several options for differing languages and formats. However, it would be helpful if these links and / or options were tested regularly, as a number were unavailable at the time of the survey. A couple of websites were also limited in the languages they supported, again this would be helpful if websites were more consistent or uniform with the support they offer.

Links to self-care

If information on other local healthcare and community services is to be included on GP websites then it should be up to date and have working links.

Complaints and Feedback

Practices need to be more uniform and consistent in their approach to complaints. We would like GP websites to offer clear, visible and concise information to make it easy for patients to understand how to raise their concerns, leave feedback and support them in making a complaint should they need to.

² <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/gp-practices/managing-your-practice-list/patient-registration>

³ <https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/gps/nigels-surgery-29-looking-after-homeless-patients-general-practice>

Patient Participation Group (PPG) information

We were encouraged that a large proportion of the GP websites reviewed highlighted their PPG group, listing what they were and how to join. However, we recommend that the details of previous meetings are updated to always reflect the last meeting, including highlighting if these meetings have been postponed due to the pandemic or other reasons.

Healthwatch Halton and Advocacy Support

Healthwatch Halton has a statutory role to drive improvements in health and social care by gathering the views and experiences of patients and the public and making people's views known. It was disappointing to note the lack of information on Healthwatch.

As the independent champion for people who use health and care services within the Halton area, we would encourage all local practices to include contact details and a link to Healthwatch Halton within their website, with a summary of what we do and how we can help patients and carers find information about local health and care services. All GP practices can have access to our free Patient Feedback Widget which helps services collect and listen to the experience of their patients by placing our patient feedback tool directly on their website.

We also provide the independent NHS Complaints Advocacy service for Halton residents. This service is free, confidential and independent service which is available to all residents of Halton. Details of the Advocacy service should be provided on all GP websites.

PCNs (Primary Care Networks) and NHS Halton CCG

Many of our volunteers struggled to find any explanation of the Primary Care Network and Halton CCG during their website visits.

There may be a valid question as to whether this information would be relevant to a lot of patients viewing their GP website. If a practice chooses to include information on the role of the Primary Care Networks and the Clinical Commissioning Group on its website it needs to be up to date and correct.

eConsult

It would be helpful if the reasons and benefits of using eConsult, the online consultation platform, were made clearer. It appeared to be labelled in different ways across the sites.

Feedback & Findings

This section follows the questions that volunteers used, using yes and no choices, and allowing for some free text comments.

How did you access the website?

We asked volunteers to let us know what system/device they used to visit the website.

Each GP practice website was visited by at least 2 of the volunteers.

28 visits were carried out using a laptop or desktop computer. 10 were visited using a Smartphone, with the remaining 2 checks carried out using tablets/iPads.

The remit of this survey was to access websites from differing devices: Computer / Laptop, Smartphone, iPad / Tablet. The aim was to replicate the differing devices used by the people across our community, recognising that many residents may not have access to their own laptop or computer. We checked the ease with which key information was stored, accessible and legibility on all devices.

Our volunteers came across no issues when viewing sites using different devices.

Our volunteers said...

'The website layout looked very clean both on the computer and on an iPhone. The layout adapted to screen size and browser width. This is very helpful'

Is there evidence on the website of when it was last updated?

Our volunteers found details of when sites were last updated on 10 of the 14 sites. While this may seem positive, on many sites this was just the copyright symbol and date on the home page. Very few sites provided a date on news article or other possible time critical information.

One volunteer said,

Another website listed the latest news article as 24th of September.

Our volunteers said...

'I'm not sure how up to date the info is on District Nurse contact as it details Widnes Walk-in Centre info. Out of date Care at the Chemist scheme too.'

'It isn't obvious on first glance. The home page has a news section which lists 5 articles. No date is shown when choosing any of these articles.'

Does the site have a Covid-19 “pop-up” window which show the latest guidance?

During the original phase of the pandemic, most GP surgeries were difficult to access physically. This was mainly due to the social distancing restrictions and although surgeries were still accepting calls, for many patients the main source of GP contact and knowledge sharing regarding the Covid pandemic was sought from their own GP website.

It was interesting to note that our volunteers found that only half of sites displayed a pop-up window.

Most of these sites displayed a pop-up box as soon as you opened the website, which needed to be closed to progress further. A few were found to have completely disappeared when going back to look at the information (even when closing the browser and re-entering the site) whilst other continued to pop up and move around the site making other areas difficult to view. The loss of the pop-up box was problematic, especially if the remaining site offered little Covid-19 information or guidance.

Does the website include a link to the Government's or NHS Covid-19 website?

Our volunteers recorded that seven websites didn't carry a link to the latest Government/NHS Covid website.

Our volunteers said...

'Up-to-date information on Coronavirus is available here but the link sends you back to the same page, talking about the surgeries Covid measures not Gov or NHS info.'

'The only coronavirus information I found was under 'Reception Enquiries' menu. This shows information on prescriptions, and advises repeat prescriptions are ordered when 10 day's supply remains.'

'I found Covid information on the "News" page. Dated 01.09.20 - out of date (checked 11.12.20). Dated 28.07.20 - out of date. Dated 28.08.20 - out of date.'

Does the website contain any information/advice about for cancer patients changes or details of changes in cancer care during Covid-19?

The majority of volunteers said they had been unable to find specific cancer information or advice, with just two sites having details of changes to services during Covid-19

Those sites that did have general cancer information varied in the quantity and quality of advice.

Our volunteers also highlighted issues finding the advice that was available also as it could be located in different sections on each website.

Our volunteers said...

'There is a useful link section for Cancer patients to Macmillan and Cancer Research but no reference to changes in cancer care during Covid-19.'

'I could not find specific information. The closest to it was a post on cancer awareness month stating that they have a cancer support information desk in their reception which they say provides up to date information.'

Is there a link to the Macmillan Covid-19 web page?

Our volunteers reported that 10 out of the 14 sites did not appear to have links to the Covid page of the Macmillan Cancer Care.

Our volunteers said...

'There is a link for Macmillan general website, but this link is on a webpage which is in a sub-menu webpage called 'Self-Help Centre', and you cannot search for it. To get to the Macmillan Covid-19 webpage, you have to find it on the Macmillan website.'

Our volunteers commented that links to the general Macmillan website were found under a number of different headings on different websites such as 'long term conditions' and 'health and wellbeing'.

It was disappointing to see that there was generally a lack of information or advice on possible changes to cancer care due to the Covid-19 pandemic,

Are there links to cancer support groups?

Volunteers couldn't find links to or information on cancer support groups on 6 of the 14 websites. On 3 of the other sites there was a mixed response, with some volunteers able to find information and some not. There were 3 sites on which volunteers said they were easily able to find links to local cancer support groups.

Our volunteers said...

'Quite a few links. Very good'

'Not that I can find. There are lots of links to useful sites and information, but nothing specifically on Cancer.'

There is a link to Healthtalkonline which doesn't work. It needs to be updated to <https://healthtalk.org/cancer/overview>. The 'Cancer Overview' link is also not working. There are no links to local support groups like Widnes & Runcorn Cancer Support.

Is there information on how homeless people can register at the practice?

Our volunteers were unable to find any information providing specific guidance for homeless people needing to register with a GP surgery.

A couple of sites referred not specifically to homeless people but mentioned temporary resident registration lasting 3 months and emergency treatment available for 14 days.

Our volunteers said...

'There is information on how Non-English Speakers can register but all the links lead to a 'This item has been archived' message on gov.uk'. (see photo below)

'It says proof of address is needed'

'You need 2 address IDs.'

The GMS1 RegistrationForm linked to through the website needs to be updated. It appears to be from 2002! - (https://www.ssphealth.com/images/files/GMS1_002.pdf). The latest version was updated in August 2019 -

'I did like the fact there was a link, (<https://www.ssphealth.com/register-with-a-doctor?practice=49>), to complete an online form to start the registration process.'



Is there a catchment area / practice boundary clearly explained on the website?

Since 2015, all GP practices in England have been free to register new patients who live outside their practice boundary area.

This stipulates you can register with a GP practice in an area which is more convenient for you, such as a practice nearer to your work or closer to your children's schools. This hoped to provide greater choice and aims to improve the quality of access to GP services.

These arrangements are voluntary for GP practices. In reality this system hasn't worked well.

If the practice has no capacity at the time, or feels it is not clinically appropriate or practical for you to be registered so far away from home, they can still refuse registration. The practice should explain their reason for refusing your registration in writing.

Five of the 14 websites had details of their boundaries, generally stating 'all of Widnes', 'Runcorn' or any WA7 postcode. One site displayed a google map with a shaded practice area with the option to enter in your post code. This wasn't completely accurate when we tried it. Another site displayed a black and white map which was illegible and had no option to be enlarged

Our volunteers said...

'The only information on registering with the practice requests patients obtain the relevant forms from the reception desk at the surgery. Not helpful!'

'I feel it's slightly hidden as it's under the 'About Practice' menu.'

'It just says "We can quickly tell if you are within our practice area from your address.'

'It mentions practice area on the homepage but when I click to find out what it is, it comes up with a blank space where a picture/map should be. To me this is not clearly explained.'

Everyone is welcome in
general practice

NHS

OPEN

NHS

I have the right to register and receive treatment from a GP practice

I do not need a fixed address.

I do not need identification.

Anyone in England can see a GP.

Find out more
www.nhs.uk/register

Are practice opening times clearly displayed?

Our volunteers were able to locate practice information including opening times on all GP practice websites, although not always easily.

Our volunteers liked the websites that displayed the practice opening times on the home page or had a menu option on the home page which went to practice information.

Our volunteers said...

“The opening times are clearly shown on the home page. The extended hours are shown under the ‘about the practice’ menu and the ‘Extended Hours Access’ Menu. ‘At xxxx Practice we offer Extended Hours access to all our patients every Wednesday from 7am to 8am. Please book online or speak to a member of the reception team to make an appointment.’

‘Practice opening times are under the ‘Patient Hub’ menu. Not helpful!’

Was it easy to find out how to make an appointment?

Covid-19 social distancing restrictions have limited the number of ‘face to face’ appointments and led to an increase in the use of remote consultations. This is a significant shift in the way GP services are being provided. Different ways to consult with health professionals – such as via phone, video and e-consult – are now on offer.

Our volunteers reported that it was generally easy to find the information on making appointments via their pc, laptop or tablet

We did have some concerns raised by volunteers looking at websites using their smartphones, with one saying, *‘On my computer it was easy to find. On my phone not so easy. Viewing the site on a phone you would need to know that ‘Online Services’ tab opens up to show another range of options.’*

Our volunteers said...

‘Very easy. Either by using the main drop down menu or another ‘appointments’ tab on the left hand side.’

‘There is a clear option shown on the home page to book and appointment. There is a ‘consult with your doctor’ option shown on the home page too. Although this isn’t actually a consultation with your GP it is a link to the e-consult form.’

‘The appointment procedure is explained with a triage/care navigation telephone procedure prior to a face to face appointment if agreed by a clinician.’

Are there a range of ways offered to book appointments / consult with the practice?

Our volunteers stated they were easily able to locate information on how to book an appointment or how to consult with the practice.

It was positive to see the varied number of ways each patient would be offered an appointment or the ability to consult with that practice.

Options given were:

- Phone
- Patient Access
- E-Consult

One practice website did highlight that, *'The patient online service is suspended during COVID-19. A text reminder service is available for booked appointments.'*

One volunteer highlighted what they saw as good practice with information about appointments under Covid.

'Appointments - Due to the pandemic outbreak, xxx surgery is operating a total triage telephone service to patients. This is a virtual appointment...'

This gave clear and concise instructions and information about how that surgery was applying Covid changes to their process.

Another volunteer liked the information given about E-consult and Patient Access, stating, *'Details were given that E-consult was now 'live' and you could get a reply within 48 hours.'*

Our volunteers said...

"I liked the fact that details were given on what was involved in registering for patientaccess.com"

Is there an explanation that patients may be asked by the receptionist why they wish to see the GP or make an appointment? This is called Care Navigation.

According to NHS Halton CCG's website, 'Care Navigation encourages patients to self-refer to local community services where they do not need to see a GP first. This takes place when a patient contacts the GP Surgery to arrange an appointment, trained receptionists have been given the information to advise and direct patients to an alternative service, providing the patients' needs fit within the agreed exclusion and inclusion criteria for each participating service'.

We were disappointed to find that our volunteers struggled to find any description of the Care Navigation process on 7 of the sites they visited.

One volunteer commented "The term care navigation is not used"

Our volunteers said...

"Clear information displayed. 'Patients who contact the surgery will be asked for as much information as possible to allow the Care Navigators to direct the call to the most appropriate service. You will be signposted to the most appropriate service for your needs'.

'I could not find anything about care navigation'.

Are appointments offered out of hours?

It was encouraging to see that almost all of our volunteers were able to find information about out of hours appointments.

Our volunteers highlighted the very detailed and informative descriptions on various websites given about the GP Extra service provision.

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

All but two of the websites had some form of links to self-care information and details of support organisations for health and wellbeing.

One site, recently upgraded, had a self-help & wellbeing 'room' section, which was well laid out and quite informative. However, it didn't provide much information on local support organisations though. Other sites generally listed contact details of local services under 'useful links'

These sections are where volunteers came across some of the most out of date information with one practice having 'Useful links' information containing contact details that were more than 10 years out of date.

One volunteer reported, *'Healthy Living in Halton Magazine - possibly old link Self-referral information links were well out of date - The dental information is from 2011. Diabetes support leaflet also looks out of date, Jigsaw counselling service link doesn't work. Sleep and relaxation information is out of date - Classes ran in September.'*

Our volunteers said...

'Healthy Living in Halton Magazine - possibly old link Self-referral information links were well out of date - The dental information is from 2011. Diabetes support leaflet also looks out of date, Jigsaw counselling service link doesn't work. Sleep and relaxation information is out of date - Classes ran in September.'

'Under community help and advice they have many different types of organisations and links'

'The site has a dedicated self-help centre with lots of information on it.'

Accessibility

All GP Websites were required to comply with accessibility standard regulations for public organisations by 23 September 2020. These regulations were introduced in 2018, allowing time for all public sector websites to comply.

We found Accessibility Statements on all but two of the sites our volunteers looked at.

Our volunteers considered the following questions when looking at the website accessibility.

1. Is there a good example of accessible information for patients who have sensory loss or learning disabilities?
2. Does the website have the option to be viewed in different languages / formats?
3. Does the website have other accessibility tools / options, i.e. Browseealoud, Recite me?

Most sites offered a translation facility, through a menu option or button located on the home page, although many relied just on 'Google Translate' for this. Some had a wide range of languages available, others just a handful. With one site just offering English, French and German.

One practice powered by 'MySurgeryWebsite' stated it had an integrated accessibility tool called 'Userway' to allow the user to make changes to the look and feel of the site. Unfortunately, our volunteers were unable to find anyway to access this tool. The same site had a 'Translate this page' link which was not working.

We visited another website powered by 'MySurgeryWebsite', that also had a non-working 'Translate this page' button. In addition, on both sites, the 'Translate' link was completely missing when the sites were viewed via a smartphone.

'Userway', was used on other sites we visited and was working well, once volunteers realised where it was kept on the site. A volunteer viewing this site said, *'The website has an accessibility button at the top left, represented by a stick man figure (in a circle). It is not obvious what it is for unless you click it. Text can be changed to larger size, different highlight, spacing, dyslexic friendly layouts etc.'*

Another website visited had a collection of fact sheets for non-english speakers. The reviewer said, *'These fact sheets have been written to explain the role of UK health services, the National Health Service (NHS), to newly-arrived individuals seeking asylum.'*

Our volunteers said...

'The larger text and dyslexia functions are useful. I can't see any easy read or tools to have the website read out.'

Accessibility widget - UserWay provides some options to change the way the information on the website is displayed.

'Not good. Asks if you need help with computer read-outs or support at appointments, then asks to complete a form (electronically) if you need help!'

'Languages? It offers English / French or German - I couldn't get French or German to work.'

'There is a translation facility for about 110 languages and Fact sheets are available for non-English speakers in 21 languages.'

Other Information

Is there an explanation of the Primary Care Network (PCN)?

Our volunteers were unable to find information on the Primary Care Networks on 13 of the 14 websites. There was one bit of information on the remaining site which stated, *'The R-Health Project involves all 6 practices within Runcorn working together and learning from each other, sharing our experiences and expertise as well as looking into new ways to deliver GP services across the Runcorn area.'*

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

Our volunteers were able to find information on PPGs on 8 of the 14 websites. Some sites contained a dedicated section on their PPGs with agendas and minutes from meetings, Volunteers were encouraged by the information on PPGs, with one stating, *'This was very easy to access and very informative'*; another told us there were, *'Explanations, joining instructions and a virtual PPG clearly outlined'*.

Our volunteers noted that not all the sites had up to date information on PPG meetings, with one volunteer commenting, *'The previous minutes on the site were out of date (August 2019) when I checked. The latest PPG information I could find was from 2017/2018.'*

Another volunteer informed us, *'The Have your Say tab has information about the PPG. It seems up to date but is not dated and the other tab to Patient Survey Report is from 2016.'*

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

Easy to find information on making complaints was only available on 7 websites.

One practice listed it under 'Feedback' on the home page which was fairly clear.

Complaints information was found under a range of different headings across the GP websites such as 'Policies', 'Patient Feedback' and 'Patient Suggestions, Comments and complaints'.

Our volunteers said...

'There is a menu option for feedback which I thought was very good, showing options for a good experience and a bad experience. The 'good experience' button takes you to the national NHS site to leave a review on the surgery'. There are 4 reviews in total on this site, three '5 Star' and one '1 Star' review, between November 2019 and July 2020. The practice doesn't seem to have replied to any of this feedback, which is disappointing. The 'bad experience' button takes you to a contact form. There is no information showing on this page to give any idea on how long it will be before you receive a reply from the practice. There is also no information on the complaints procedure.'

"Under 'Patient Suggestions, Comments & Complaints' there's a good amount of information on how to give a compliment or make a complaint"

We noted from our volunteer feedback that some practices didn't make the complaints procedures and forms available on-line but required you to speak to reception instead.

Our volunteers said...

'Again there was very little information on what to do apart from contact the practice. There were no details of the procedure or the options for support if needed'.

'Absolutely no sign I can see of any link to making a complaint. There is a link to 'Take Our Short Survey' which asks about your recent experience of the service. This is not a great a way to raise an issue with the practice'.

Is there any information about Healthwatch Halton and the Healthwatch Advocacy Hub?

Only one site had a menu link with information on Healthwatch Halton and Healthwatch England at all. Unfortunately, the Advocacy information on this link was out of date with an incorrect telephone number.

Another site listed Healthwatch Halton's contact details, but these were also over 5 years out of date.

3 sites listed details of an NHS Complaints Advocacy Service, but this was the wrong service and does not cover Halton patients.

There was a further mention of Healthwatch on one site under the PPG section, with a link to Healthwatch England's site.

Our volunteers said...

'If there is I couldn't find it - which seems to be the norm with this website.'

'Healthwatch Halton is listed under comments and complaints but it has the old Runcorn address and no website link or email details. Healthwatch is mentioned in the PPG section, with a link to Healthwatch England's website.'

'The only mention I could see for Healthwatch was under the PPG information. 'Whilst PPG's exist to improve the experience of patients using the practice, they are not intended to be a complaint gatherer or a 'forum for moaners'. Other mechanisms such as Healthwatch, www.healthwatch.co.uk exist for patients to raise issues about the medical treatment they receive.'

Is there a link to the NHS Halton CCG website?

Our volunteers could only find details of NHS Halton CCG mentioned on 2 of the 14 websites. There was very little information on the role of the CCG.

One site had a menu link with information on the CCG, unfortunately the link to the CCG website was incorrect.

Is there a web provider / web master listed?

There were details available of the web provider / webmaster on all websites although our volunteers reported difficulties in locating the details on half of the websites.

Next Steps

We will:

- 1.** Offer GP practices across Halton the opportunity to discuss their individual audit and our recommendations to make improvements.
- 2.** Raise the issue of GP website quality regionally with our Cheshire & Merseyside Healthwatch network and nationally Healthwatch England.
- 3.** Seek to co-produce a checklist of essential information for patients with our volunteers.
- 4.** Encourage local people in our area to report back to us on their experiences of GP websites.
- 5.** Undertake a sample review of GP websites in six months' time to look at what has changed.
- 6.** Discuss the report findings with NHS Halton CCG, which plans, buys, and monitors health services in our area.
- 7.** Send the report to Healthwatch England to inform the national picture.

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We're Healthwatch

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of local services.**

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- Care homes**
- Community services**
- GP Surgeries**
- Mental Health services**
- Pharmacies**
- Carers at home**
- Dentists**
- Hospitals**
- Opticians**



www.healthwatchhalton.co.uk

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