

An examination of GP Practice websites

How informative and accessible are they for people?



July 2021

Introduction

In March 2020, GP Practices were instructed to conduct appointments remotely with patients unless there was an urgent need for a face-to-face appointment. Most patients were offered telephone or video consultations as a first point of contact.

People told us that it is difficult to get through to the GP Practice on the telephone, they are unsure of the online booking procedures and do not know who to contact to raise a concern or complaint.

The move towards involving patients more in their own self-care puts greater reliance on local trusted GP websites. Due to the changing ways in which patients are interacting with their GP Practice we decided to review the GP Practice websites to see how informative and accessible they are for people.

Key findings summary

Our volunteers reported a big difference in the quality and quantity of information available. Some of the websites had limited information, some had sites that were easy to navigate and view but the information on the pages were not up to date or maintained. Some of the sites were grouped together and were very corporate with private advertising, that our volunteers felt was not in keeping with the NHS.

- Key information was easy to find and access on the majority of the websites.
- We found that the coronavirus information was not always current and up to date. Information on the vaccines was variable and there was limited information on vaccine hesitancy.

- The navigation and visual aspects of the websites varied - the search boxes and translate functions did not always work.
- Information on NHS tests and results was not easy to find and the process for obtaining results was not always clear.

- There was limited information on Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) and how to get involved.

- Volunteers felt there needs to be an explanation about triage and the process available on all websites.

- Although most websites had the Friends and Family Test visible, there was a lack of data and blank results page.

- Volunteers felt that details of how to make a complaint was not always easy to find and felt hidden on the website.

- Volunteers found it difficult to easily find information on Healthwatch, carers support or veterans support.

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What we did

The review was carried out by 5 volunteers and 1 Healthwatch staff member between 10 March - 30 April 2021. Each website was assessed once and we ensured that each volunteer was not responsible for checking their own GP Practice website. We wanted to see if we could find key information without having to telephone the GP Practice.

We designed an online survey to look at the following:

- Homepage navigation
- Coronavirus information
- Appointment systems
- Patient involvement
- How to give feedback
- Accessibility

Findings

We reviewed 118 GP Practice websites. Not all of the questions were completed for each practice that was reviewed and therefore, the findings reflect the percentage of GP Practices where there was an answer given for the question.

The findings are based on what was captured during the timeframe indicated. We recognise that there may have been changes or amendments during our activity period.

Homepage navigation

We wanted to find how easy it was to find key information, just from the home page without having to use a search function.

Key Information	Percentage of volunteers who could find information:
Opening Times	95%
Appointment system (online or telephone)	92%
Prescriptions	92%
Clinics and Services	93%
New patients and how to register	90%
Practice staff: medical, clerical and practice manager	92%
Contact details	96%
Practice Patient Survey and Results	60%
NHS tests and results	32%

Volunteers felt that if you are looking at your GP's website you want help with something now. We found most of the key information was accessible from the home page. The volunteers found that there seemed to be no set standard for finding tests and results.

One volunteer said: *"I know I can get into SystemOne to get results but not everyone knows this".*

Volunteers found that photos were helpful to identify the practice staff and doctors. Volunteers felt that it raises trust to have the details of all the staff.

Is the newsfeed up to date?

Yes 😊	71%
No 😞	29%

Clear and up to date Coronavirus Information?

Yes 😊	74%
No 😞	26%

Coronavirus Information available in other languages?

Yes 😊	58%
No 😞	42%

Is there information on vaccination?

Yes 😊	49%
No 😞	51%

Many of the websites had 'pop-ups' for the coronavirus information. (A 'pop-up' is a small window of information that appears over the top of the webpage). A frequent observation was that information on websites was derived more from national information and there was 'not a lot of local information' with 'links to the national information at the top of the page' on one website.

Although it was observed that a number of practices said that they provided information in other languages, it was the case that the links provided sometimes did not work.

One volunteer said that *"the 'translate page' button was present but not working."*

Information on vaccines was variable with one volunteer saying that the practice they were reviewing had *'leaflets on vaccines'*; however, another said that the website they were reviewing had vaccine information that was 'two months out of date'.

Volunteers did not find any websites that addressed vaccine hesitancy.

Appointment Systems

	Percentage of websites	
	😊	😞
Clear methods of making an appointment	97%	3%
Transparent appointment system	71%	29%
Triage system explained	55%	45%
What to do if the surgery is closed	91%	9%

Volunteers said that: *"triage is mentioned but not detailed and it would be helpful if the information included what symptoms or health concerns are seen by whom"*.



When looking at alternatives to accessing the GP when the surgery is closed, some volunteers found that information was either difficult to find with one saying that it took *'several clicks... to find alternatives if [the] surgery [is] closed.'* Another said that there was *'no mention of 111, when to go to urgent care or the out-of-hours service'* on the website that they reviewed.

One volunteer said: *"A 'pop up' for 'engage consult' appeared on some websites but with no explanation to what it is. There needs to be an explanation about triage and the process. What is being used? This needs explaining to patients"*.

Patient Involvement

Is the Patient Participation Group (PPG) information up to date and relevant?

Yes 😊	41%
No 😞	59%

Can you find the Friends and Family Test (FFT)?

Yes 😊	62%
No 😞	38%

Even though the FFT was visible on some websites, volunteers felt that there was a lack of data in the FFT. Patients may be confused by what it is and it may not be clear to patients that it is a survey.

Are the patient survey and results displayed?

Yes 😊	24%
No 😞	76%

A common theme was that the Patient Participation Group information was out of date with examples of meeting notes being from October 2018; or another website having 'a lot about patient group, but nothing since 2016.'

Others found that although there was information about PPGs on websites in some cases the information was 'very limited' or that the PPG 'does not appear to be active.' One volunteer stated that the PPG was 'not active' at the practice they were reviewing but that the website said they were 'trying hard to re-establish the PPG.'

When considering the patient survey and results, it was similar picture with a number of volunteers commenting that the survey results were out of date. One site had the survey results from 2011-12 whilst another had 'no survey since 2014.' However, one website was reported to be 'very up to date- survey report from January 2020.'

The Friends and Family Test (FFT) was also commented on by volunteers. The comments were similar with information being out of date such as 'results from 2015/16' or that the 'FFT not working.' One volunteer commented that *'FFT very low-profile sub menu under suggestions and complaints.'*

How to give feedback

Is there information on how to make a compliment or criticism?

Yes 😊	70%
No 😞	30%

Is there information on giving feedback that is clear and relevant to patients?

Yes 😊	64%
No 😞	36%

Is the complaints procedure clearly visible?

Yes 😊	49%
No 😞	51%

Some volunteers reported that it was difficult to find the complaints procedure on the website with one volunteer saying that they *'couldn't find any complaints procedure'* on the website they were reviewing; whilst another said that the website that they were reviewing didn't *'explain how complaints are dealt with.'*

However, other volunteers reported that they had been able to find complaints information and that the information was comprehensive with one volunteer saying the *'complaints procedure and supporting organisations [were] fully and clearly explained.'*

The complaints procedure was often located under the 'Policies' tab and not always easy to locate with one volunteer commenting that they it was *'not high profile'* and another saying that they *'had to use the search box to find the information.'*

Accessibility

By law, all GP websites must comply with the Accessibility Regulations 2018 and include an accessibility statement on their website. Volunteers found that not many of the websites had accessibility features. The navigation and visual aspects of the websites varied.

Does the website have a search box?

Yes 😊	72%
No 😞	28%

However, the volunteers reported that: *"When using the search function - often nothing comes up or it was not what I was looking for. The search box system does not work very well on most of the websites"*.

One volunteer found that the search box was for *'medical conditions, not the website.'* Others found that the *'search box returns '0' for searches tried for'* and another described the search box as *'useless'* saying that *'most search requests do not show [the] item searched for.'*

Is information available in other languages?

Yes 😊	75%
No 😞	25%

Is information available about other assistance for patients with disabilities?

Yes 😊	29%
No 😞	71%

Is there information about disabled access to the surgery?

Yes 😊	35%
No 😞	65%

Is there information about hearing loop systems?

Yes 😊	19%
No 😞	81%

There were variable amounts of information about disabled access to the practice buildings from the comments by volunteers with one volunteer commenting that the website they were reviewing stated *'the building has been designed to provide suitable access for all disabled patients.'* However, another commented that although they could *'find disability access in the search box, there is no information in it.'*

As previously discussed in relation to information on coronavirus, information was sometimes available in other languages but even where the website was supposed to be able to be translated the function did not always work with one volunteer commenting that *'the 'translate page' button was present but not working' and another saying that the 'language link [was] not working.'* Another commented that there was *'limited leaflet information in other languages - no option to change website.'*

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

The CQC monitors health and social care services to ensure they meet essential standards of quality and safety. All service providers, by law, must display their CQC ratings where service users can see them. They must also show their rating on their website if they have one.²

Is the latest CQC report and rating available?

Yes 😊	73%
No 😞	27%

Website display

How does the website display on a mobile device, such as a phone or tablet?

	Percentage of websites
Very good or good	79%
Ok	10%
Poor or very poor	11%

The volunteers noted that the navigation on mobile devices varied. One volunteer said: *“not everyone knows what symbols mean. The main menu icon (three lines) is not clear – using the word ‘menu’ might be better”*.

Additional findings

There were a number of positive comments about the websites reviewed with some being seen as having a *‘clear layout and information for patients’* and another being described as a *‘very good website - with lots of patient information and up to date on covid-19.’* However, others were described as having *‘minimal information’* or had *‘quite a lot of important information missing.’* There were some comments from volunteers who had looked for information about Healthwatch Leicester and Healthwatch Leicestershire and complaints advocacy. Those that commented generally said that there was no information on Healthwatch or POhWER Advocacy on the websites.

Volunteers had looked for information on carers and found that some websites had a webform that carers or people with a disability could fill out and link to their record. Another commented that a website that they reviewed has *‘information for carers and ability to register as a carer.’*

Volunteers had also looked for information for veterans and in one case had found ‘a veterans page’ on one practice website.

During covid-19 and the vaccination drive - trust was a key issue. Things that lowered trust were adverts. Commercial organisations advertising on GP websites gave the impression that these companies are recommended by the GP.

One of the volunteers said: *“On some of the websites we reviewed, everything was commercial. Having commercial adverts seemed to detract from the trust in the GP and can be damaging. There needs to be consistency with the information available and people need to see clear and concise information”*.



Recommendations

Information

1. All the GP Practice websites should be reviewed to ensure that the information is current and relevant to patients. The news feed should be maintained and up to date.
2. All GP Practices should ensure that they are displaying their CQC rating on their website. Ensure that the
3. homepage has clear navigation to relevant patient information and provide up to date arrangements regarding coronavirus information and advice.

Search facilities

4. All of the GP Practice websites should have a working search facility installed. All GP websites should renew the options for languages, have a 'translate widget' installed and the website providers should ensure that all translating widgets are working and that the widgets are regularly tested.

Complaints and feedback

5. The Friends and Family Test should be renamed so that people better understand what it is. It can be interpreted as meaning actual tests, such as blood tests. It may be confusing to people and it needs to be reviewed.
6. All GP Practice results should be prominently displayed on the website and regular checks made to ensure that the results are showing.
7. Patients should be able to understand how to raise concerns and leave feedback. The complaints and feedback sections should have a clear and transparent process and be prominent on the website.
8. Include details for local Healthwatch and POhWER Advocacy on all GP Practice websites.

Patient Participation Group (PPG)

9. The Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) review the PPGs and how effectively the groups are engaging with patients. There needs to be more incentive given by the CCGs to have PPGs and there needs to be clear guidelines of the PPG role.
10. Involve the PPGs and patients in reviewing their own GP website.

Accessibility

11. All websites to have accessibility statements and ensure that the websites meet the accessibility requirements.
12. Ensure that information on access for people with disabilities is available including disabled access and hearing loop systems.

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