A report on the patient experience of finding information on the homepage of GP websites, carried out in the Portsmouth Primary Care Network areas.

Healthwatch Portsmouth (HWP) developed this project in carrying out its statutory functions;

- To obtain the views of people about their needs and experience of local health and social care services.
- To make these views known to those involved in the commissioning and scrutiny of care services.
- To make reports and make recommendations about how those services could or should be improved.

This project was identified as a priority during the Covid 19 pandemic. The pandemic gave rise to the need for patients to find relevant information on their GP website.

This project is also in response to the wider expectation that there is improved access to primary care services through digital enquiry. NHS England in "Improving Access to General Practice Communications guide and resource pack." https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/improving-access-to-general-practice-guide-v2.pdf (published in 2017 and updated in 2018) state that commissioners and providers:

"As a minimum, ensure that information regarding improved access to general practice services is placed on each practice's website, and that this information can be easily accessed i.e. on the website homepage."

The purpose of the survey was;

1. To identify the information that could and could not be found on each GP website
2. To gather feedback on the patient experience of using GP practice websites
3. To share this information by publication to members of the public
4. To make recommendations to commissioners and providers

In August 2020 Healthwatch Portsmouth (HWP) completed a survey of 18 GP surgery websites. Since the point of completing the survey the number of GP surgeries has reduced to 15 with the closure, or amalgamation, of 3 surgeries. The survey covered surgeries in each of the 5 Primary Care Networks (PCNs) covering the city PO1 to PO6. The survey was completed by Healthwatch Portsmouth Volunteers and HWP staff who are Portsmouth residents. The GP websites were accessed by either a computer, a tablet, or by a mobile phone. A total of 36 GP website survey responses was provided by the Healthwatch Portsmouth volunteer and staff group on the 18 GP Practice websites.

The survey data (attached): Table 1. The quantitative and qualitative data for GP websites across the city

Key findings of data (listed by frequency or impact).

Q3: Not all **surgery websites** could be found. Though a small percentage, (6.7% of website visits) it is a cause for concern.

Question 5: On 35% of website visits the surgery **email address** could not be found. Patients who want to express their story and circumstances through email will be prevented from doing so, email is an accessible mode of digital communication.

Question 7: On 75% of website visits GP surgeries across the city stated that they **require two forms of identification** for new patients wishing to register at the Practice. It is not a regulatory requirement to provide identification. NHS England state in (updated) guidance 2017;

"When applying to become a patient there is no regulatory requirement to prove identity, address, immigration status or provide an NHS number."

This information being provided to anyone wanting to register at those practices, of requiring personal identification, serves to disadvantage people already vulnerable to health inequalities, including people fleeing domestic violence staying with friends or family, people in unstable accommodation or street homeless.

NHS England in 2017 stated, *"The persistence of administrative barriers to GP registration means lost opportunities for illness prevention and early intervention, as well as an increased burden on overstretched hospital and emergency services."*

Question 9: On 15% of website visits information on how to access medical assistance, **out of hours**, could not be found.

Question 10: On 48% of the website visits the option for information to be **translated into languages other than English,** could not be found.

Question 11: On 11% of website visits links and/or **contact details of external specialists** were not listed. The surgery's website, as a part of a PCN should be enabling patients to access to a range of health professionals and primary care services.

Question 12 (1-5): Information on **how to give feedback** was not found on 23% of website visits, information on **how to complain** was not found on 27% of website visits. A notable variation was that information *was* found on the surgery's Patient Participation Group in 92% of website visits. Information aimed at involving and informing patients on **service standards and quality** could only be found on 50% of website visits.

Question 13: On 17% of website visits **Covid 19 information** was not automatically displayed.

Question 14: Information on 5 key **Covid prevention measures for face to face appointments** was available on less than 40% of the website visits.

Question 17: On 25% of website visits instructions on **how access health advice** during the pandemic could not be found.

Question 18: On 38% of website visits information could not be found on **changes made to services during the pandemic.**

Question 19: On 32% of website visits information could not be found on **prescription services during the pandemic.**

Question 23: On 27% of website visits people **did not feel informed and were not confident** to access medical help.

Qualitative data of significance by frequency or impact

Question 23. Overall, with the information provided, did you feel informed and confident to access medical help?

- Bewildered by the mass of detailed information I was required to read
- There was no information provided regarding procedure for attending appointments in person during COVID 19 or of safety measures in place.
- I was alarmed at the lack of Covid information, no pop ups no updated info on services
- On registering - Forms can be printed 23 pages, can be downloaded, and completed online but no email address available
- Couldn't find e consult? booking can be completed online but no e consults as far as I could see.
- e-consult is very misleading. As a patient the process tells you that the information you are submitting, at some length, will go to your GP. You can name your GP; this adds to the expectation that your GP will look at your symptoms as described. This does not happen.
- No ID requested or suggested for registration online booking completed and submitted very easy and straightforward.
- The new extended access services to Lake Rd routine appointments at evenings and weekends is difficult to locate and when found does not tell you how to access these appointments. nothing just a dead end this is unacceptable
- The search facility did not work making accessing anything other than the titles provided impossible
- No search facility

Additional comments. (open-ended question)

A summary of the positive comment themes:

- Language option button on front page with a full choice of translations.
- The website is clear.
- Clear information on services provided.
- Clear categories and easy to find information.
- Good clear instructions and headings about what is available.
- Excellent website - easy to negotiate, translation option at top of page; so easy to use.

A summary of the neutral comments provided:

- Whilst information was available, the website was not intuitive, had to search for individual things rather than linked items
- Helpful lots of numbers provided for local services; however, I did have to search for a lot of the information and the complaints procedure was not straightforward and requires a lot of clicks and navigating.
- How do you get a routine evening and weekend appointment at Lake Rd Health Centre the Extended Access service funded by PCCG?

A summary of the negative comment themes:

- I found there was a lot of close type information. Not easy to read. Some of the navigation links were not clear to find or follow. I had to delve quite deeply at times- this could not have been done easily without good IT skills and being fully literate in English

- Lacking COVID updates and procedures
- Not easy to follow info on website
- Could not find option to display information in another language.
- Difficult to find what to do if you want to leave feedback or make a complaint - eventually found this under 'Patient Policies' section.
- E- consult is entirely misleading- the wording states, in fact opens with " Want advice from your Doctor...." this is an algorithm programmer and does not go to "YOUR GP." in fact kicks you out saying " seek medical advice....really helpful...maybe just turn up at ED??
- Not good. As previously stated, search facility did not work - only to direct me to an alternative language!
- Search facility poor - main home page informative

Healthwatch Portsmouth Recommendations

There are numerous areas for improvement in the accessibility of GP websites and the quality of information provided. In summary, this report provides a picture of variation across the city with examples of good information provision and poor information provision, but quality improvement is a relatively quick and easy goal to achieve. Now more than ever high-quality patient information needs to be displayed on GP surgery websites to assist patients in this enduring COVID-19 pandemic. We hope that our recommended changes are made speedily. Healthwatch Portsmouth recommends that:

1. As a specific regulatory breach, surgeries' non- compliance with NHS regulations relating to proof of ID needs to be urgently addressed. **Non-compliance surgery website statements should be identified by GP Practices and resolved with the responsible person for registering new patients.** Training should be provided for staff who provided information about the registration process for new patients so that the practice of requiring 2 forms of ID for patient registration no longer occurs.

2. There is further analysis of the variation in quality across the Primary Care Networks (PCNs).

3. Service improvement and development on the provision of patient information on GP surgery websites urgently takes place so that people feel informed and confident to access medical help.

4. The following information and topics should be easily searchable on all GP surgery websites:
   - The automatic display of COVID-19 information
   - 5 key COVID-19 prevention measures for face to face appointments
   - how to access health advice during the pandemic
   - changes made to services during the pandemic
   - prescription services during the pandemic
   - how to access medical assistance, out of hours
   - information translated into languages other than English
   - contact details of external specialists
   - involving and informing patients on how to give feedback, complaints, service standards and quality

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Avril Adams, Graham Keeping, Pam Pritchard, Jan Dixon, Ikpemesi Olubor, and Roger Batterbury

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