

Review of GP practice website information - how Covid-19 and service changes are reflected

September 2020



What we did

Healthwatch Coventry has the role of representing the interests of patients and the public in NHS services by gathering views and feedback and taking this to those who run and plan services.

In response to the Covid-19 situation we set a priority of working to ensure that local people have accessible information to support them to use NHS and care services in the light of service changes resulting from the pandemic.

Therefore a group of our volunteers searched for and where possible visited the websites of the 54 GP practices in Coventry. Our volunteers were of mixed experience in using the internet and they used different types of device to carry out the task: computers lpad, tablets, phones.

Volunteers recorded what they found under pre-set topics and questions [see appendices for a list of these].

Summary

Key findings

Our volunteers found that:

- 89% (48) GP practices had functioning dedicated websites.
- Four GP practices did not have a website or the website was unavailable. We were able to access a further two GP practice websites on one occasion but then access was blocked as the security certificate for the sites were not up to date.
- 51% (28) of practices provided updated website information about how Covid-19 has impacted on accessing GP appointments.
- The ease of navigation to information about how to make an appointment varied greatly between websites. Some websites had information on the home page about how to make an appointment and for the majority this information was on another page.
- 78% (42) websites had information about Covid-19 such as symptoms and what to do if you had symptoms and /or information about testing.
- 50% (27) provided an email contact route and 59% (32) provided a web form for users to contact the surgery.

- Just 2 of the 32 practices providing a web form gave an indication of the response time people could expect if they used it to make contact with the practice.
- 85% (46) websites were clear about practice opening hours and 61% (33) had clear information about how to contact health services out of GP practice hours.
- 21 (39%) had specific information about how to get test results.
- 31 (57%) had information about immunisation services.

NB other websites may have contained this information but our volunteers did not find it

How to improve web information

Based on the feedback from our volunteers we recommend:

- Using a simple website template which has been user tested on patients for ease of navigation
- Wherever possible use the same tested website template across different GP practices to reduce the variation
- Keeping the words/content on the website simple and as short as possible; making sure it is understandable by ordinary residents in Coventry through testing by a representative group of patients
- Providing reference to Covid-19 and access to GP services - as making no reference to this makes it hard to know if website information is up to date or not. Providing a weekly top line or news item update would be helpful even if this says there is no change to services
- Providing information that is reassuring eg the content in the examples section below about how the practices is making visiting the surgery for an appointment safe and stressing that people can still access all GP services
- Being clear that face to face appointments are available to those who need them in line with current NHS England guidance
- Include content to encourage patients to use services for example childhood immunisation
- Explain things in a positive patient focused way
- Provide information on response times for web form or email contact

- Provide training for those who produce website content and upload it
- Check websites from the user point of view and use analytics to track what information is being used

More detail about what we found

Website design

It looked like some practices found it difficult to update their web page content and had limited means to do this resulting in Covid-19 update not necessarily appearing the best way or clearly for the user:

Navigation

The templates used for GP websites varied considerably. Some were difficult to navigate and others were very clear. The easiest to navigate had clear links from the home page and did not overload pages with content or with lots of different types of content.

Our volunteers thought that the menu structure and navigation of the Marika Solutions website template used by several practices was helpful. However how this had been used for GP practice content varied and the content was not always easy to read/clear.

The issues with navigation around website content highlights the importance of a user testing phase for website design with patients.

Pop up boxes

Many websites were using pop up boxes to provide information related to Covid-19. Whilst these got the user's attention they often kept reappearing when volunteers were trying to look at other site content. On one site template used by more than one practice the box never fully went away but covered the bottom of the screen.

Text design

Text in the colour red or highlighted with a yellow background was also common. This had been used to try to make update information related to Covid-19 and practice service more prominent but in website design terms these colours are much less accessible for users.

Capital letters were also used to highlight text - in electronic communication this is usually interpreted as indicating shouting and so isn't recommended.

Terminology

There was use of terms that patients are unlikely to understand the meaning of eg 'Covid-19 Hot Hub'.

Changes to GP practice appointment methods and process

We looked at information given about how GP practices had changed access to GP services as a result of Covid-19, because people have highlighted to us that they were unclear about what NHS services are available and how. Recent guidance from NHS England states GP practices must offer face to face appointments to those who need it. There has also been promotion of non face to face appointments via phone or video appointment.

We found evidence of a number of different approaches to providing appointments/services:

- Some practices sought to highlight online services and appointments booking via headings such as 'Do it online'. Sometimes this was the most prominent information. Two practices said they had suspended online appointment booking (due to BMA advice).
- One practice website said on the home page that they have suspended all routine GP appointments and are only offering essential services: Child immunisations; Depo Injections (mental health & high risk patients); Suspected cancer symptoms; Prescriptions (sent electronically to nominated chemist only). This is not in accordance with current guidance to GP practices from NHS England and it was unclear if this was old information which had been left on the site.
- For the 28 practices where website did not contain any specific information referencing Covid-19 and appointments or access to practice services it was difficult to know if the information provided on the website was current or not.
- For some websites new information had been added about changes to appointments in one part of the site, but existing information, which is different was still available in another part of the site. This was confusing.
- One GP practice retained information advising people that no appointments are needed and they could come to the practice. We did not know if this was current information.

This variation is potentially confusing and one clear up to date message promoted through all communication channels to local people would be helpful.

Examples of messages

Practices explained changes to appointments in different ways and some of this was clearer and more patient focused than others. The information below has been copied and pasted from the websites and so is presented as written:

- **OUR SURGERY DOORS HAVE RE-OPENED FOR BOOKED APPOINTMENTS WHICH HAVE ALREADY BEEN TRIAGED BY THE CLINICIANS. ANYONE ENTERING THE SURGERY WILL BE REQUIRED TO WEAR A FACE COVERING. PLEASE NOTE ANY QUERIES WILL STILL BE DEALT WITH OVER THE TELEPHONE AND NOT WITH OUR SURGERY RECEPTIONISTS FACE TO FACE.**

A good length

- CORONAVIRUS AND LATEST INFORMATION ON THE SURGERY'S APPOINTMENTS AND TRIAGE SYSTEM [in red box at top of homepage]

- **We are open as usual opening hours.** However only doing telephone triage by GP. We are not booking face to face appointments when you ring at reception desk. *How it works then? You ring at reception 02476520183 and ask for telephone appointment with GP. GP will ring you in few hours,. After listening to you - GP will decide if you need any one of following appointments:*

- Face to Face
- Video call
- Extended access after 6:30pm
- Covid 19 HOT Hub if you have symptoms of COVID or other respiratory symptoms.

People won't know what a 'hot hub' is

- **PATIENT NOTICE - June 2020**
Following the government guidance on Monday 15th of June 2020, all patients entering this surgery are strongly advised TO WEAR A FACE MASK OR A FACE COVERING. If you attend the practice with gloves on, you will be asked to remove them as when used incorrectly (which has been observed in public of late) they in fact spread bacteria as they are intended for single use only. Hand Sanitizers will be provided to you on entry into the surgery. Our staff also carry out cleaning intermittently throughout the course of the day. Thank you for your understanding! We are working hard to enable our services to continue in spite of current difficulties that everyone is experiencing. Please contact the surgery on...

- In order to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of patients, staff and the wider community we have moved to an initial telephone appointment for all patients. The surgery is still open and patients can access all its services. Many surgeries operate a Dr First triage as part of their routine practice, therefore we are taking these steps as a precautionary measure.

Helpful statement about the surgery still being open and access to all services

- **We are open our usual opening hours.** However, we are only doing telephone triage by GP. We are not booking face to face appointments unless deemed necessary by the GP, when you ring reception desk, you will get a request for a call back from the GP, the GP will provide you with a telephone/video consultation. If the GP needs to see you for an examination you will be invited into the surgery but will have to follow strict safety guidelines.

'Only doing' is quite negative phrasing. Would be helpful to have link to info saying what the safety guidelines are

- Please DO NOT come to the surgery unless you are invited to do so by the Doctor or Nurse. [XXX] Doctors will contact all patients by telephone to check whether or not it is safe for you to come to the building.

A short and clear message

- Booking an Appointment tab
-SEE LATEST NEWS FOR TEMPORARY CHANGES TO BOOKING PROCESS

**** Current advice due to Coronavirus****

***** Please do NOT attend the surgery unless you are requested to do so by a doctor or you have received a confirmation phone call for your appointment. We are using telephone triaging to discuss your medical condition and to provide appropriate advice, treatment and guidance. You will be asked some initial questions by our reception staff. Help us to keep others well and to protect the staff providing these services.*****

People don't tend to like answering questions from reception staff so some reassurance or information about this could help

- Changes to Appointments
You will still be directed to the most appropriate source of help, but any face to face appointments will now be changed to telephone appointments in the first instance. Video and online consultations will be made available soon.

Could be edited to make this shorter

All online bookings are now for telephone appointments only.

Face to face consultations will be arranged only if essential and only after a telephone consultation with a GP or nurse practitioner. We have made special arrangements for babies and young children to continue their vaccination schedules so please contact us as usual for this.

- We have changed how we are working - we have adopted new measures to protect patients and staff in the surgery. Face-to-face appointments with a healthcare professional will only be confirmed after an initial telephone or video consultation.

Clear and patient focused

- You can still access our services- (Practice remains OPEN during the Covid-19 Pandemic)
We remain OPEN during the coronavirus pandemic, despite access to some services being altered. We will do our very best to help you obtain the help you need when you need it. We encourage initial contact by online services or telephone where possible. We are looking after many of our patients over the telephone, and have access to video consulting, text and email services to help protect you. We will still see patients face to face if we feel this is necessary.

Positive tone and patient focused

We are open and we want you to get in touch if you need to.

You can still book direct appointments with the nurse for all routine child immunisations, adult pertussis if you are pregnant or pneumococcal vaccine if you are at risk.

If you attend the surgery we ask you to wear a face covering. A screen has been fitted in our foyer for when you first enter our building

We are following the most up to date guidance on maintaining social distance in the waiting room, and decontamination of premises and equipment is being strictly followed.

Conclusions

Our volunteers found some GP practice websites easier to use than others and were surprised that some practices did not have a website or the website did not work.

Patients/residents will usually only have experience of the website of their own GP practice if it has one. By looking at 11-15 practice websites each, our volunteers were able to see the different approaches being taken.

Heathwatch Coventry has observed and heard from local people through our Covid-19 survey (*Covid-19 communication; changes to NHS services and mental wellbeing, experiences of Coventry people, July 2020*)¹ that communication has not been clear during the pandemic leading people to be unclear what NHS services are

1

www.healthwatchcoventry.co.uk/files/HWCoventry_Briefing_Experiences_Coventry_people_and_%20impact_of_Covid-19_0.pdf

available and how to access them. This continues with some people still thinking that services such as GPs are closed or only providing a limited service.

Covid-19 has also pushed more people and services online. In previous work Healthwatch Coventry identified an appetite for more communication from GP practices with their practice population (*Improving patient communication/involvement and the role of technology in local NHS services; March 2020*)². There is an opportunity to provide more and clearer information to local people via GP practice websites as well as social media channels where practices have these.

We expected to find more specific information about how Covid-19 had changed how GP practices were working, just 50% had some content on this.

We also expected to find content designed to make sure people knew that important services could still be accessed; for example childhood immunisation and other services where the take up has reduced or is not high enough. As we go into the winter period Flu vaccination will be an important service to be communicated, especially as more people will be entitled to this and may not know.

Our volunteers identified how websites can be more user friendly and easier to navigate. We also saw the variation in messages and how this could be more consistent and patient focused in order to make sure that communication reaches more people.

There will continue to be a need to communicate with local people and enhancing communication channels will help GP practices to carry out their role.

Many GP practices are small and we acknowledge this is a factor in having the time and skills to maintain website content. GP practices in Coventry are coming together in seven Primary Care Networks with a responsibility for the health of their local population. Therefore within Primary Care Networks consideration should be given to supporting channels of communication with practice populations of which websites should be a valuable part.

Next steps

We ask that consideration is given to how GP practice websites can be used as a method for communicating information for local people and how the development of this can be supported via Primary Care Networks and the Clinical Commissioning Group.

Below are content messages which could be used and adapted by GP practices:

² www.healthwatchcoventry.co.uk/using-digital-technology-nhs-care

Content/message suggestions

We are open and treating patients

You can still get the help you need but this may be provided in a different way in order to keep you and staff safe

If you are asked to come to the surgery you should wear a face covering. We have put in place extra cleaning, social distancing and reduced the number of people in the building to meet the guidelines and keep people safe.

Childhood immunisation (vaccination for XX) is still important and can be organised now

If you have a symptom you are worried about such as a lump don't delay get in touch with us

Please contact us by phone or by online services first. We are looking after many of our patients over the telephone and have access to video consulting, text and email services too. We will still see patients face to face when needed.

Please only come to the surgery if you have been asked to do so by a Dr or member of staff.

Thanks

Thank you to the Healthwatch Coventry volunteers who did this review.

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Appendices

Questions under which information recorded by our volunteers

1. What information is given about appointments on the home page?
2. Is this information clear about how to get an appointment (rating 0-5 - 5 very good)
3. Is info about appointment methods clear (rating 0-5)
4. Is there clear info about Covid-19 and what to do if have symptoms
5. Is the contact phone number for the surgery displayed clearly?
6. Clear email for contact
7. Is there a web form for contacting the practice?
8. Is information given about the response time for email or web form contact?
9. Is there information about how to get test results
10. Is there information about immunisations
11. Are practice opening times clearly stated?
12. Is there clear information about out of GP hours and what to do?
13. Any suggestions for improving the information on the site?

Data tables

	Yes	No/No info	Total
Has the information about making an appointment been updated in the light of Covid-19	28	27	55

	Home page	Other page	None	Total
Is information about how to make an appointment on the homepage or another page	13	37	4	54

Piece of information	Yes	No	Total
Is there clear info about Covid-19 and what to do if have symptoms	42	12	54
Is the contact phone number for the surgery displayed clearly?	42	12	54
Clear email for contact	27	27	54
Is there a web form for contacting the practice?	32	22	54
Is information given about the response time for email or web form contact?	2		
Is there information about how to get test results?	21	33	54
Is there information about immunisation?	31	23	54
Are practice opening times clearly stated?	46	8	54
Is there clear information about out of GP hours and what to do?	33	21	54

GP practices in Coventry

Allesley Park Medical Centre
Allesley Village Surgery
Anchor Centre
Balliol Road Surgery
Bredon Avenue Surgery
Broad Lane Surgery
Broomfield Park Medical Centre
Central Medical Centre
Cheylesmore Surgery
Clay Lane Medical Practice
Copsewood Medical Centre
Coventry GP Group of Practices
Coventry NHS Healthcare Centre
Edgwick Medical Centre
Engleton House Surgery
Forrest Medical Centre
George Eliot Medical Centre
Godiva Group of Practices
Govind Health Centre
Henley Green Medical Centre
Hillfields - Dr Sani
Hillfields- Dr Bano
Holbrooks Health Team
Jubilee Healthcare
Kensington Road Surgery
Kenyon Medical Centres
Limbrick Wood
Longford Primary Care Centre
Malling Health at Foleshill
Malling Health At Stoke Aldermoor
Mansfield Medical Centre
Meridian
Moseley Avenue Surgery
Paradise Medical Centre
Park House Surgery
Park Leys Medical Practice
Phoenix Family Care
Priory Gate Practice
Quinton Park Medical Centre
Sky Blue Medical Group
Springfield Medical Practice
St Georges Road Surgery (Dr Dadhanian)
Stoke Aldermoor Medical Centre
The Forum Health Centre
The Gables Medicentre
Torcross Medical Centre
Walsgrave Health Centre

Westwood Medical Centre
Willenhall Oak Surgery
Willenhall Primary Care Centre
Windmill Surgery
Wood End Health Centre
Woodside Medical Centre
Woodway Medical Centre

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