

healthwatch

Blackburn with Darwen

GP Online Access Report October-December 2018.



Stroke Association Focus Group Blackburn

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Glossary

Acronyms are used throughout this report, for ease of reading the following glossary is provided

App- A Digital application that can be downloaded onto smart phones, iPad, tablets and computers designed to perform certain functions, tasks, or activities for the benefit of the user.

BwD- Blackburn with Darwen

Enter & View visits- Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen authorised representatives carry out these visits to health and social care services to find out how they are being run, gather feedback from patients and make recommendations where necessary. The purpose might also be to contribute to a wider Healthwatch programme of work.

GP-General Practitioner

SMS-Short Message Service (text)

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our partner organisations for sharing information and our questionnaire and for supporting us to access seldom heard groups.

We would also like to thank Darwen Healthcare for sharing information with us about their online booking campaign and the impact it had in terms of choice for patients which has been included in this report.

Rationale

Blackburn with Darwen has below England average user rates for online booking of General Practitioner (GP) appointments and reordering prescriptions according to the National GP Patient Survey 9th August 2018. With the upcoming implementation of the Healthier Lancashire and South Cumbria digital health strategy - Our Digital Future (<https://healthierlsc.co.uk/digitalfuture>), Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen wanted to understand service users' experiences, both positive and negative, and identify common themes or any barriers that people may face in supporting their health digitally in order to inform the commissioning of these services and ensure that patients' preferences are considered.

Methodology

As quantitative surveys have already been undertaken, engaging large numbers of residents through the National GP Patient Survey published on 9th August 2018 (<https://www.gp-patient.co.uk/surveysandreports>), we focused our work on qualitative engagement with seldom heard groups of people. 54 people accessing GP services completed our online and paper survey. In addition, we engaged with eight focus groups, where we spoke to a further 80 people and invited people across the

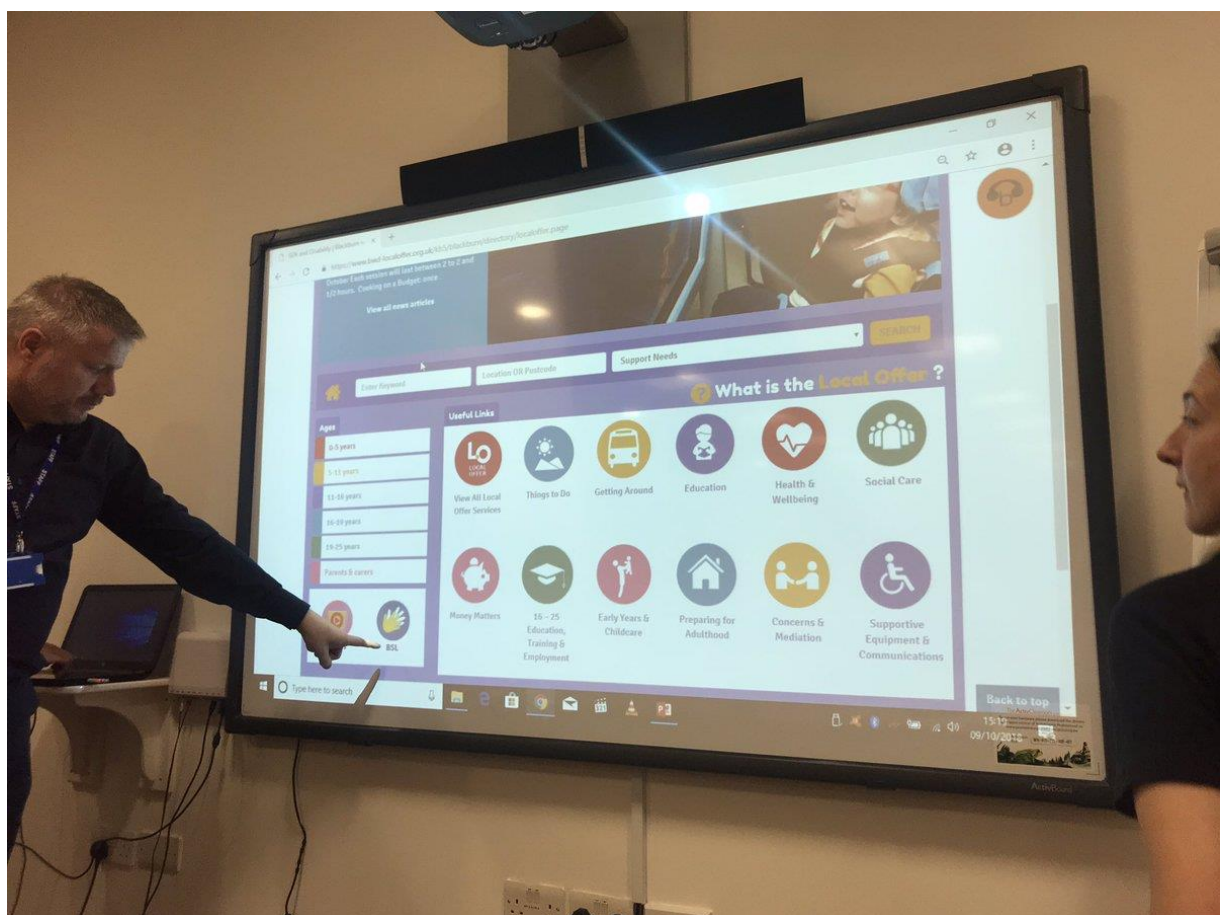
borough to share their views about using online booking and prescription reordering services via our website, social media and through partner organisations.

An Enter & View visit was undertaken to Darwen Healthcare, providing valuable insight from their own survey about booking online.

Service user feedback from engagement activities

Questionnaire Feedback

Feedback from people we spoke to and who completed our questionnaire showed that (54) 67% of respondents did not use the online booking service. Almost all of those who did, used the Patient Access app. Only 33% of respondents found it easy to register for the service and only 27% reported that it was easy to schedule an appointment at a time that was convenient for them. However, 55% of respondents found it easy to reorder prescriptions.






I use the online service for reordering prescriptions, but I don't use it for booking appointments because you can never get an appointment for the doctor you want to see. I would use the appointment booking if you could book the GP of your choice and there was a greater availability of appointments.




From the feedback from respondents as to 'why they did not use online appointment booking and how it could be improved' six main themes emerged:

1. The most frequent comments received were about difficulty accessing digital means including having a computer, smart phone, tablet and Wi-Fi or data availability.
2. The second most frequent comments received were that the person needed a lot more help and support to use digital skills and technology and access to online booking services.
3. Equally, comments were received that it would need to be a simpler registration process. Some carers and parents expressed the need to be able to manage dependants' appointments and reordering prescriptions through one account.
4. There needs to be better promotion and information about the online service that is understandable to a wider scope of service users.
5. There needs to be a wider range of appointments and choice, for example more pre-bookable short notice appointments, the ability to book a GP of choice, the nurse or other practitioner at the practice.



GPs reported that over a quarter of their appointments could be dealt with by other health professionals within the practice
(GP partnership review 2018)



6. It should be noted that many people we spoke to said they preferred to call into the doctors or ring up because it was easy and more convenient for them.

We live very near to the doctors so it's convenient for me to just call in and book appointments and reorder prescriptions. If we ever moved further away from the surgery, I would use it.



I have never really considered using the online booking service because I find it easy to just ring the surgery. I can see the benefits of it, but I've never felt the need to use it

Focus Group Feedback

Several diverse focus group engagements were undertaken with service users across the borough including residents with learning disabilities, visual and hearing impairment, carers, refugee and asylum seekers, stroke survivors and young people aged 16-17 years old, BAME ladies' and peer led support group dealing with male specific issues. A total of around 80 people engaged with us through these groups. The six main themes identified in the questionnaires were also repeated within the focus group feedback. However, there are some specific issues related to some minority groups.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

- Many people found it easy to use once registered but some people still preferred to ring the doctors for appointments because they could not book language translation or British Sign Language services on line.
- Practice websites and Patient Access are only in English and the use of 'fancy language and words make it difficult to understand.'

Culture Change

- Some groups felt that more awareness, especially in doctors' surgeries and a change in community attitudes to managing own health was needed.

Health Barriers

- Some respondents felt that they would never grasp digital means due to memory issues and ill health.



Understanding technology is an issue for me- I would love to use it but I really struggle to understand it.





“ The pop-up advertisements on the internet are challenging neurologically and overwhelm me. ”

- Some concerns were raised about booking online appointments which may lead to call centres taking over from doctors' receptionists, losing that personal interaction with someone who knows them.

“ Already patients cannot get through to their doctors by phone, so they are being forced to use the online booking system. The more this happens, the more commissioners will say that this is people's preferred choice. ”

- Young people between the ages of 16 and 17 we spoke to stated the apps seemed easy to use but hadn't bothered because they had to visit the GP for a code to register. This was a common barrier cited by service users throughout this project.

Conclusion

Summary of results and feedback

Six main themes emerged about the use of the online booking service.

1. A lack of access to digital means including Wi-Fi.
2. People wanted more support to access and register for online services.
3. A simpler and more accessible registration process was needed.
4. Greater promotion and information about the service.
5. There needs to be a wider range of appointments and choice on line.
6. Maintaining patients' preferred choices.

These themes were also identified in the 'Have Your Say: Digital health' Healthwatch collaborative report commissioned by Healthier Lancashire & South Cumbria which will be published in January 2019.

The national GP Patient Survey 9th August 2018, showed that only 6% of patients in BwD used an online booking service to book a GP appointment, compared to 10% nationally. Awareness of the service was also lower at 31% compared with 41% nationally. It was unclear at the outset of this project if the lack of awareness of the availability of booking GP appointments through a digital application (App) was a contributing factor to low uptake. However, the awareness and uptake of prescription reordering online service was slightly higher (39%) compared to the national average (38%). In the survey, BwD patients reported that GP websites were quite easy to use (74%) but this was marginally lower than the national average (78%).

In our own website survey of 25 GP practices, it was highlighted that only 11 people out of 25 found it easy to locate information on the GP website about online booking services. Furthermore only 6 people out of 25 found it easy to register for Patient Access due to either technical issues with the website, finding the information and having to go in person to the practice to register. (See appendix 1) This was found to be a contributing factor to uptake as well as lack of awareness about the service.



I can use a smart phone and could use this service, but I didn't know anything about it. More information at the surgery would be helpful.



Some initiatives are being delivered in BwD that aim to improve awareness and uptake such as the targeted campaign by some GP practices to inform patients about the online services which demonstrated a significant uptake of booking appointments online. (See appendix 2 & Darwen Healthcare Enter & View report. (November 2018)

https://www.healthwatchblackburnwithdarwen.co.uk/sites/default/files/darwen_healthcare_final_report.pdf

Most GP practices are signed up for Patient Access in BwD, however with the introduction of the iPLATO myGP App some of the registration processes may be simplified. According to the Lancashire Evening post article (2/10/18) the ‘app is proving a great success in its rollout across Lancashire.’ ‘It suggests that patients can register remotely using their date of birth and mobile number.... Following a quick authentication process, patients can make and cancel appointments, use a secure and instant messaging service, book medication reminders and use self-care support tools to monitor weight and blood pressure.’

“Would my family still be able to book my appointments for me?”



Unlike Patient Access, myGP App can also be used to manage dependants’ appointments which could address some of the negative feedback we received.

However, there appears to be some variations in this process experienced by patients who have used the app reporting that they still need to go into the doctors to be able to access certain aspects such as prescription reordering. A higher level of security is required for access to prescription reordering because it forms part of the detailed care records. Patients must be provided with NHS online credentials which some practices refer to as a PIN/activation code. Each GP practice may have different process for verifying identity and these can vary widely. This has been confirmed by a digital advisor for Healthier Lancashire and South Cumbria Digital Exemplar Programme.

These variations can cause confusion for people and recommendations were made in the Healthwatch collaborative ‘Have Your Say: Digital Health’ report to improve the online registration process generally.

Some people reported that they had wanted to improve their technical skills, but cost was an implication as they were not eligible for free training.

Age UK have been offering some targeted support to people over 50 years of age through their Neighbourhood Digital Inclusion Project, “Here to Help”. (see appendix 3) Other support in the borough is delivered by ‘Good Things Foundation, the **Online Centres Network**’ which is made up of organisations that are working to tackle digital and social exclusion by providing people with the skills and confidence they need to access digital technology.’ In Blackburn these are based at Inter Madrassah Organisation, Blackburn College and Blackburn Central Library.



I have tried to access computer courses at the college, but it is too expensive. I have also tried to access the free training, but this is only available to people over a certain age.



According to the findings that have influenced the Healthier Lancashire and South Cumbria Digital Strategy, ‘**82% of people go online every day and 72% of adults use a smartphone**’. Digitalisation will provide an additional choice for individuals to manage their own health, social care and wellbeing in the future. There is an acknowledgement by the NHS that not everyone will want or be able to use digital means, but for those who do, initiatives will be implemented to enable this. Reassurance has been made in the Healthier Lancashire and South Cumbria Digital Strategy that ‘technology will never replace the care and compassion that comes from our dedicated workforce’. Some service users we spoke to did have real concerns that as more people move to online services financial decisions will be made to ‘**get rid of the receptionists**’ at the GP services removing their preferred choice of booking appointments by phone and at the surgery.



I am afraid that all booking will go online, and appointments will be handled through a call centre by people who don’t know you like the receptionists do.



Recommendations

1. Provision or better accessibility to digital devices, data and reliable Wi-Fi.
2. Increasing confidence in using the online booking apps with more support in doctors' surgeries and wider community for those who would like to register and try it.
3. Simple language supported by visual and audio means in the app and the ability to book translation and BSL services on the app when making online appointments.
4. The booking apps and registration process need to be unified and simplified across GP Practices and enable carers and parents to manage dependants where appropriate.
5. Wider choice of appointment times and availability.
6. Reassurance that face to face and telephone reception services will remain available for patients who prefer these options.

GP Practice providers have an important role to play in addressing the recommendations 2 to 6 in achieving a successful digital future.

Blackburn with Darwen Digital Strategy 2018-2020 makes developing a digital borough that enables all citizens the means and opportunity to 'engage with the digital world a priority' addressing recommendations 1 and 2. This will support Healthier Lancashire and South Cumbria's 'Our Digital Future' strategy aims to provide better care by utilising digital means.

The Healthwatch report 'Have Your Say' identifies similar actions across Lancashire as raised in points 1 to 6 but it is too early to say how these will be addressed. Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen recommends ongoing open communication and information sharing between stakeholders involved in the implementation of these strategies. It also recommends the involvement and consultation of citizens when assessing the impact and effectiveness of these strategies.

References:

Healthwatch BwD Darwen Healthcare Enter & View Report (Published 28/11/18
https://www.healthwatchblackburnwithdarwen.co.uk/sites/default/files/darwen_healthcare_final_report.pdf (Darwen Healthcare 'My GP Campaign' (003) iplato)

Blackburn with Darwen Digital Strategy 2018-2019

GP Partnership review-document. Dr Nigel Watson MBE MBBS FRCGP. Published to gov.uk, 2018

The National GP Patient Survey published on 9th August 2018 found at (<https://www.gp-patient.co.uk/surveysandreports>),

'Have Your say: digital health' - Healthwatch Lancashire, Healthwatch Cumbria, Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen and Healthwatch Blackpool collaborative report commissioned by Healthier Lancashire & South Cumbria (to be published Jan 2019)

Healthier Lancashire and South Cumbria's Our Digital Future strategy (published 2018): <https://healthierlsc.co.uk/digitalfuture>

'Lancashire's online GP appointment app proving a great success': Published: 03:00 Tuesday 02 October 2018:LEP found at: <https://www.lep.co.uk/news/health/lancashire-s-online-gp-appointment-app-proving-a-great-success-1-9375773>

Online Centres Network; accesses at (<https://www.onlinecentresnetwork.org/>)

Appendices:

Appendix 1: General Practices website review

Staff and volunteers undertook a review of 25 practice providers websites and considered how easy it was to locate the online access information and registering process.

Out of 25 practices, that have a website, only 11 people found it easy to locate information about booking appointments and repeat prescription ordering on line.

Eight people found it difficult to locate the information because it was in a small box on the front page or they had to search for it.

Six people could not find the information at all with some people experiencing failed links to Patient Access. A few people found the different systems confusing.

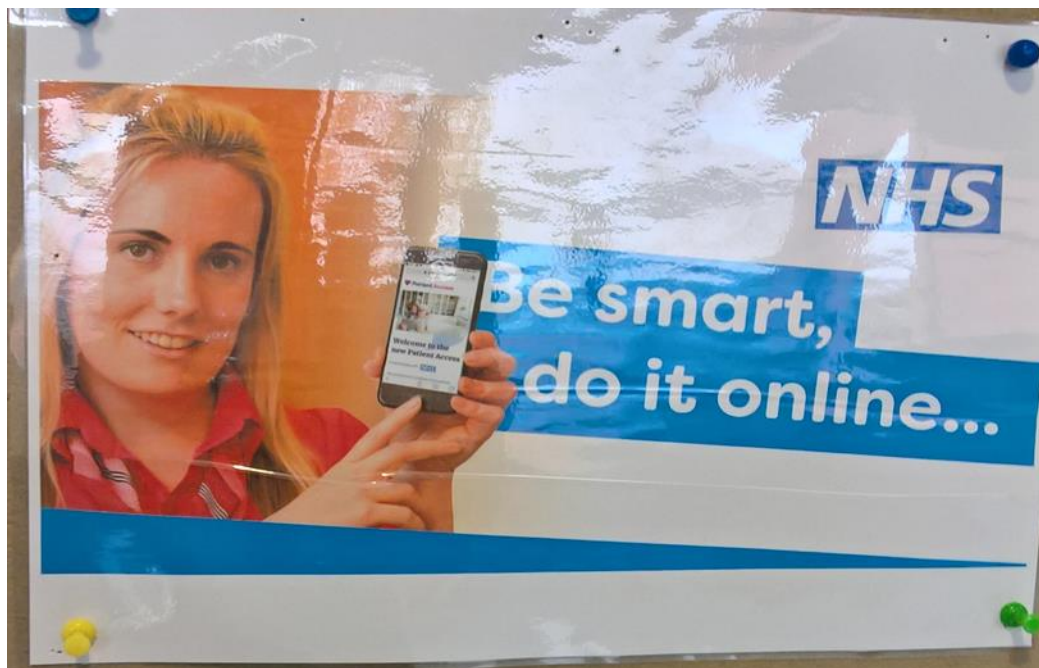
Most practices in the Borough use and promote Patient Access the other is myGP App and a couple of practices do not have these services at all.

Only six people found it easy to register for the online service with most respondents (17) stating that the need to visit the practice in person would be a problem for them to use it.



Appendix 2 Darwen HealthCare's promotion of iPLATO myGP App and the increase in online user uptake.

During an Enter & View visit to Darwen Healthcare it was noted that they have adopted the myGP App which has proved popular following two campaigns to inform patients about it. Since initiating the awareness campaign, which is also supported by very visible information at the surgery, the Practice Manager told us that there has been a significant uptake of the online service to book and cancel appointments creating more choice for patients. The initial number of patients registered to make online appointments was 0.06% (nine patients) with only one appointment being booked and three being cancelled on line. Two campaigns were delivered through iPLATO, whereby patients were contacted through tailored SMS text messages to raise awareness of the service. Following the second campaign 8.55% (1,267 patients) had registered for the online appointment and prescription service. 793 appointments were booked and 280 cancelled using myGP App.



Appendix 3

Age UK Neighbourhood Digital Inclusion Project. “Here to Help”

Age UK One Digital

Digital Inclusion Project.

One Digital

Since November 2017 Age UK have been delivering a programme called **One Digital** a Digital Inclusion project.

Attending a few selected medical centres on a weekly basis, volunteers have been raising awareness and offering support to people over 50 years of age to access the online booking appointments and prescription reordering service. Feedback from the Digital Inclusion Development Officer for this programme said that some people did not know about the online booking service and that the number of different apps available may be quite confusing. It was reported that some people said that they would still prefer to ring or visit the doctors to make appointments even when they knew about the online booking service but did express a desire to sign up to Age UK IT classes to improve their digital skills. The programme ends in May 2019.