Healthwatch Oxfordshire GP website 'check-up'

APRIL 2021

THANK YOU	We would like to thank all our volunteers for taking part in this research, their help and support was invaluable.

Executive Summary

During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic patients were recommended not to attend surgeries for appointments. Healthwatch Oxfordshire heard from patients that it was taking longer to get in touch with their GP surgeries using their surgery websites and by telephone.

Given that patients were being recommended using the practice website we wanted to find out how easy websites were to navigate for patients. All 67 Oxfordshire GP practice websites were surveyed between November 2020 and January 2021 to assess the ease of use and clarity of information on the site. The survey was carried out by Patient Participation Chairs and Healthwatch Oxfordshire Volunteers.

We followed this research up with an assessment of all websites to understand how new patients can find information about how to register and what was required for to complete registration.

Findings

All 67 Oxfordshire GP surgeries have a website, information on these sites was often:

- Inconsistent across different web pages.
- Out of date.
- Links to internal and external pages not working.
- Links led to pages with no content.

Specifically:

- There is no consistent place to find information about how to make a complaint and the information available was often insufficient.
- How to find accessible sources of information were hard to find – 10 sites had no accessibility information or capability for the site to be made more accessible.
- The translate option did not work on 12 of the 67 sites.
- Two websites had no self-care information.
- Often difficult to find how to contact the Patient Participation Group and most PPG postings were old.
- Only one site had a direct link to Healthwatch Oxfordshire.
- Requirements to complete registration at the practice included:
    - 43 practices asked for patient identification
    - 43 practices required proof of address

Recommendations

1. All GP surgeries must review and update their websites by the end of July 2021. This review must include checking accessibility, translation, checking that links to other sites / documents work, information on how to make a complaint. Healthwatch Oxfordshire will carry out a second review of all GP websites during August 2021 and report back to GP surgeries, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, and Care Quality Commission.

2. All GP surgeries must make information about how to register with the practice easy to find on the website and accessible.

3. Information about how to register with the practice must be clear and in line with the NHS guidance and documentations. This can be found here:

   https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-surgery/

4. The registration document must be the NHS GMS1 registration form. This form together with guidance on completion can be found here https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gms1

5. A clear statement must be posted saying that:

Anyone in England can register with a GP surgery.

You do not need proof of address or immigration status, ID or an NHS number.

If you have problems registering with a GP surgery:

Call the NHS England Customer Contact Centre on 0300 311 22 33

or

Contact Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group:

Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group

Jubilee House

5510 John Smith Drive

Oxford Business Park South

OX4 2LH

Tel: 01865 336800

Email: oxon.gpc@nhs.net

Or

Contact Healthwatch Oxfordshire

Healthwatch Oxfordshire

The Old Dairy

High Cogges

Witney

OX29 6UN

Telephone 01865 520 520

Email hello@healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk

More information about Healthwatch Oxfordshire can be found on their web site www.healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk

6. Easy to find and updated information on what a Patient Participation Group (PPG) is, how to join it, and how to make contact. This should be done in conjunction with the practice PPG.

The report will be circulated to all Oxfordshire GP practices, the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), and Patient Participation Groups. Each surgery will also receive a copy of the assessment of their website.

1 Background

During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic patients were recommended to not attend surgeries for appointments. There are several options available as an alternative, these include eConsult and telephone or video appointments.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire heard from patients that it was taking longer to get in touch with their GP surgeries using their surgery websites and by telephone.

Given that patients were being recommended to use the practice website we wanted to find out how easy websites were to navigate for patients. All 67 Oxfordshire GP practice websites were surveyed between November 2020 and January 2021 to assess the ease of use and clarity of information on the site.

2 Methodology

An assessment sheet was designed with input from Patient Participation Group (PPG) Chairs. All PPG Chairs were offered the opportunity to assess their GP surgery website, where this was not possible Healthwatch Oxfordshire volunteers carried out the assessment.

Assessment of websites was performed by PPG Chairs or Healthwatch Volunteers (referred to as assessors in the report) accessing the site from a web search and recording their findings to the agreed questions on their assessment sheet.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire collated the information from the assessment sheets and drafted this report.

3 What we wanted to find out

The purpose of this exercise was to find out:

- What information there was about COVID-19 on the site.
- Information / advice about changes in cancer care during COVID-19
- Ease of making an appointment to 'see' a medical professional.
- Whether there are links to other sources of advice to support self-care.
- Accessible information.

- Advice on registration and practice boundaries.
- Information on how to make a complaint.
- Information on the surgery's Patient Participation Group.
- Information about Healthwatch Oxfordshire

The sections below are an analysis of the information found about the 67 websites assessed. Each GP surgery will receive an individual assessment of their site with recommendations for improvement. These will be sent by Healthwatch Oxfordshire and supported by their PPGs.

4 Information about COVID-19

Does the practice website have a COVID-19 pop up page, or information on the home page? If so, does it cover: latest advice, local and national guidance including the latest guidance around the loss of taste and smell and signposts to help and support?

All 67 websites had at least one link to a government or NHS website with COVID-19 information.

https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus

https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-COVID-19/

- Fifty-nine of the websites had details that appeared either by pop up or on the home page. The dates of the information varied in date from 7 Feb 2020 and 9 Dec 2020, with one website have information dated 18 January 2021.

- Ten websites did not have any information either in the pop up or on their website about the latest guidance around taste and smell but had **a link** to NHS.uk where the information was provided.

- Three websites included information about the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

5 Information about cancer care

Is there any information/advice about changes in cancer care regarding COVID-19?

Of the sixty-seven GP websites:

- 5 had a link from the Home page to a COVID-19 support room to both Macmillan and Blood Cancer UK.

- 1 had a Cancer Screening COVID-19 Update (Jul 2020).

- 24 had information relating to cancer care but not specifically cancer care during COVID-19.

- 7 websites had a link to Cancer Healthtalkonline, it was reported that none of these links work.

An assessor searched for cancer care which led to an external website link popping up which in turn wanted to download drivers the volunteer answering the questions did not go any further.

Another link directed the patient to a Dermatology waits update, dated December 2018. With the following message: *We have been advised that all GP referrals to the Royal Berks Dermatology Dept have been suspended for the foreseeable future due to an inability to recruit consultants. Their Cancer Dermatology Dept is still taking referrals.*

It was also noted that on several GP websites the links from the self-help centres to the NHS A-Z/other cancer pages were broken.

6 Ease of making an appointment to 'see' a GP

Is it easy to find how to make an appointment? Does it explain the options phone/video link/face to face?

All sixty-seven GP websites had information about how to make an appointment, most of these were clear and had good instructions. Some of the GP websites had the information directly on the home page explaining the current COVID-19 options available to patients, including telephone, video or on the practice website by eConsult.

"Good instructions. As the surgery prefers people to phone and be triaged, there is a calendar which shows the days each GP is in, with a list of the weeks they are

away. If the nominated GP is available that day, the patient is added to their call back list for the day. If the GP is not in, the patient is asked to call back when they are or be seen by another GP if the condition is urgent. The GP who calls back will decide if there needs to be a telephone conversation, video link or face to face consultation. EConsult is for information or urgent items."

Patients also have the option to book appointments via Patient Access. Several websites did not mention the option of video appointments. A few websites still had live links to book appointments online, these either did not work or took patient to eConsult.

Several comments made were that appointment information was not up to date, it could be found in more than one place on the website and not always giving the patient the same information.

"I did not think it very clear. Initially it was not easy to find, when clicking on Appointments > Book Appointments" it directs you to book via Patient Access – the online service. There is no mention of, or link to the process put in place during Coronavirus. I then did find the information under "Your Care" > "Coronavirus information" > "Coronavirus Latest update".

"There is a tab which leads to an explanation of times, type appointments, use of Practice Nurses, etc. May be slightly outdated as is a pre Covid page and does not include changes arising from the pandemic e, g. mentions chaperones which is not correct. Makes you login to Patient Access to book an appointment but then after several screens says that no appointments can be booked online. Makes no reference to the NHS app. Does not include Covid restrictions but there is reference to changes to appointment processes on home page and a direct link to eConsult. Overall a confusing area and not easy to get a clear view."

7 Links to self-care for health conditions

Sixty-two of the GP websites had links to self-care information on the home page that were easy to find, although there were a few comments about the links being easy to miss. These links provided several different options for self-help for a wide range of conditions including both long-term conditions and short-term illnesses, and for various target groups e.g., children, men, women, elderly etc.

Websites links included:

- The NHS Health A-Z
- NHS Live-Well – Advice and Tips
- A Patient 'Support room' page
- A Patient Access resource page
- Other options for patients were:

- On a practice link to 'Well-being and Health review'.
- Find Health Information with link to https://patient.info/symptom-checker
- Link to information leaflets https://patient.info.health

Several websites also had a link to finding local services.

Many links on websites led to empty pages or did not work. One assessor reported a link to a page where the font size and background colour made it difficult to read.

It was reported that two websites had no direct information on self-care.

8 Accessible information

8.1 What accessible information is provided for patients who have sensory loss /learning disabilities?

Many of the GP websites have an Accessibility link from either the top or bottom of the Home page these link to an Accessibility Statement and to Abilitynet. These statements highlight that websites are designed to be dyslexia friendly to allow users to change the style, font size and colour of the font, there are links to guides how to do this. Others provided are Type/Text/Talk for the deaf and those with hearing loss.

One website highlighted that the Receptionist would help if you were visually impaired or hard of hearing. Another website has a form to complete if you need further help – at appointments or reading/accessing information, though you may need help completing the form.

One website gave the following information '*What to do if you cannot access parts of this website: If you need information on this website in a different format like accessible PDF, large print, easy read, audio recording or braille*' It then provided contact details to be able to do this.

Some websites have pages and links that would appear to be helpful to those with learning disabilities but have not been flagged specifically as such. Other areas that these links are found in:

- There is a link to the BBC website 'My web, my way' for assistance with other accessibility issues.
- Further information – Patient Services

Some comments were made that the Accessibility information was not easy to find. For example:

- Information blending in with the GP website logo.

- Information hidden behind a cookie pop up and unless these are accepted the information could be missed.

Ten websites had little or no information relating to accessibility. Areas highlighted were that some websites did not provide a text phone number, no option to zoom or use a browse aloud reader. As well as font sizes being too small 11 and not dyslexia friendly.

Cannot find a link to alter text colours.

8.2 Is there any guidance for patients who may need information translating?

Most of the GP websites had a translate option either at the top or the bottom of the home page which in most cases offered a comprehensive list of languages through Google Translate, translating the whole site instantly.

On twelve websites it was reported that these links did not work and one link took you to an archived page.

"Opening the languages took me to Department of Health and Social Care page and message saying this item has been archived but there is a link to the UK Government Web Archive which explains how the NHS in the UK works."

A number of websites provided information about applications forms being available in a variety of translations for new 'non-English speaker patients' as well as leaflets providing information about the NHS. One website highlighted that an interpreter can be arranged by receptionist if needed.

Fourteen assessors highlighted that the website had no link to translating information, with one commenting that they 'typed Translate in Search - it gave me Cookie Policy'.

9 Registration and practice boundaries

Is the information for registering as a new patient easy to find and understand? Does the website provide information about the practice boundary?

Sixty-two of the practices have information about registering at the surgery as a new patient.

- Most of these have a link which is located on the home page. Assessors reported that the information was clear and easy to submit registration.

- One website had an issue with a pop up on the new patient registration link which kept appearing which did eventually disappear eventually.

- One Oxford City GP surgery website had information about offering healthcare to people experiencing homelessness within Oxford City.

One assessor reported that *'there is no acknowledgment of the needs of travellers and the boating community which is a significant part of the Banbury area population'*.

Five of the GP websites did not have a boundary map, two did mention the areas served. Another said that they welcomed patients who live in the area, but there was no map to explain which area.

10 Information on how to make a complaint

Is there information about how to make a complaint if you are unhappy with the service? Was this information easy to find?

Patients should be able access information about how to make a complaint, there are several ways that they can do this:

- Contact their GP practice directly
- https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/about-the-nhs/how-to-complain-to-the-nhs/
- https://www.oxfordshireccg.nhs.uk/about-us/make-a-complaint.htm

Eight websites did not have information about how to make a complaint.

Fifty-nine of the GP websites provide some information around how to make complaints, several of these provided a full explanation of how to contact the practice manager. Other comments by assessors included that although the information was available it was found in several different areas of the websites and was not always obvious where to find it. Places where this information is available included:

- Policies
- Complaints
- How do I ...Leave feedback
- Patient Info

"The mechanism to complain is not transparent. Reference made at the very bottom of the "Contact Details" for the Surgery page. Then refers users to Section 9 of the Practice policies for tips on how to make complaints but could not find this."

"Online Requests – feedback form for suggestions not specifically for complaints. On using Search for complaints, a page entitled Complaints and Feedback appeared with a link to the above feedback form."

11 Patient Participation Groups

Is there up to date information about the Patient Participation group (PPG)?

Many of the GP websites have links directly from the home page to a PPG page. Some of these only supplied information about how to join the PPG by either completing an online form or by emailing the PPG using the email address provided.

How to find out about the PPG was not always obvious and when using the search facility did not always provide information on the PPG.

GP websites that had links to PPG minutes or reports, many were not up to date, with some only having information from 2011-12, 2013-14, 2014-15.

Only seven websites had PPG reports from 2020, the low number of reports could also be due to GP practices being able to suspend PPG work during the COVID-19 pandemic to allow them to focus on the increased work within their practices.

One assessor commented that when they typed PPG in the search box:

"it brought up a … oxfordhealth.nhs.uk showing three articles relating to PPG at the surgery, one being a video which was produced by Healthwatch Oxfordshire 4 May 2018, the other two taking you back to surgery home page."

A PPG chair reported that:

"No minutes of meetings [on the website*] – reluctance of practice to list minutes due to confidentiality. Has been subject of meetings but no movement forward."*

12 Information about Healthwatch Oxfordshire

Only one website had a link to Healthwatch Oxfordshire. This appears on the "Comments & Complaints" page which is accessible from a "Feedback" tab on the top menu.

Several of the GP websites have a link from the PPG page to past Healthwatch Oxfordshire surveys. Where the survey is no longer live the link takes you to the Healthwatch Oxfordshire website where you could navigate further should you wish.

13 Website provider / host and cookies

There are 14 different web site hosts / providers across the 67 GP surgeries. Four websites had no identifiable provider / host.

Table 1 below shows the provider's name and number of sites they host.

- This variety of providers will in some way go to explain the difference in the sites being accessible and up to date.

- It was not always shown when the website was last updated – this does not give confidence to the visitor that they are reading the latest information. For example, of the 26 sites provided by My Surgery three are dated © 2006 – 2021 and three dated © 2020 the other 20 are not dated.

Table 1   GP Surgery Website host provider

Provider name	Number of sites
My Surgery	26
Tree View Designs	10
Footfall @ silicon practice 2020	8
Emis Health	5
Genpra	4
Surgery web	2
Cypher Media	1
GP Surgery.net	1
NHS Logo	1
Oldroyd Publishing Group	1
Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust	1
Website Design by Websafe	1
© Neighbourhood Direct Ltd 2020	1
© 2020 Simon Albert Burford Surgery	1
No identifiable provider	4

13.1 Does the website ask if you accept use of cookies to improve browsing experience?

Fifty-two of the GP websites asked about the use of cookies, with some websites having a pop up appear on entry to the home page. Others gave the option to click on a message at the top of the page.

Twelve websites had no direct information regarding cookies, of these two had a 'disclaimer' at the bottom of the home page.

A few issues found with the cookies were:

'the set cookies preferences didn't work until you dismissed three pop-ups about flu and coronavirus however the cookies preference box remained even though it had been dealt with it, accept all cookies had to be clicked to dismiss it.'

Saved them but the pop-up box remained, had to accept all afterwards to get it to go away."

Either click on Accept or 'i' for more information. If you click on this it takes you to Privacy Policy page which displays a message saying currently being updated.

14 General observations

Several comments received said that websites were not very clear to navigate, with websites being very busy and not easy to find information. Another comment was made regarding the pop-ups about new patients, coronavirus etc that appeared time a new link was clicked it was sometimes persistent and kept showing, not always clicking on the cross closed it.

"The drop-down menu could be improved, e.g., to find out who holds surgeries when, go to Opening times>surgery days and times. I would expect it to be under appointments. The list under Further Information isn't in any order and seems to be completely random. Separated into categories would be helpful. I don't find the website easy to navigate and I believe it would be impossible for a person with more limited knowledge. "

"A little confusing when trying to find information, not as straightforward as hoped."

Comments were also made referring to broken and out of date links, or with links that were misdirected.

Designed to look good but I feel that in some areas it talks a lot but doesn't say anything.

The website doesn't make you have a good experience. People these days expect to be led by pictures and videos not massive amount of words. I appreciate there needs to be a great deal of information but the packaging of this is poor and unappealing.

A PPG Chair commented that they had supported the GP practice in the maintenance of the website and would be looking at highlighted areas where question answers were no. Another recently undertook a site audit for the GP Practice and provided a report on the findings (difficult navigation and repairing broken links etc).

"This Practice also uses other software tools for patient communications. Most of this review has been done using Chrome on a Windows 10 PC. This is important as some function differences between platforms have been discovered."

Some GP websites had recently been updated; one PPG Chair commented that the PPG had been consulted during the update, another commented was also made that the PPG page was not written by the PPG.

"Better than the old one, but still needs some revisions, As, far as I am aware there was no patient input."

Two updated websites having been updated by the same designer/web provider, the same volunteer looking at both and commented that one was better to navigate than the other.

Another commented *'I was asked to comment just as it went live.'*

"this new website has only recently been launched and remains a work in progress BUT is already a vast improvement on the previous one – easier to navigate and the linkage to EMIS far smoother."

One volunteer noted that all links from the GP website open in the same window, which meant that they got lost following links in some cases they could not always back track when it had taken them to another website. An example of this was that they couldn't backtrack from Patient Access to the surgery.

"Overall a good site and patients seem to like it. A question I would have asked on this survey is about use of social media and how this integrates into the web site e.g., is there a live Twitter feed on the home epage."