



## Enter and View Report

### GP Access at Guardian Medical Centre

Visit: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016

Report published: 8<sup>th</sup> November 2016

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# Background

## What is Healthwatch Warrington?

Healthwatch Warrington helps the residents and communities of Warrington to get the best out of local health and social care services. We gather the views of local people and make sure they are heard and listened to by the organisations that provide, fund and monitor these services.

## What is Enter and View?

Part of the local Healthwatch programme is to carry out *Enter and View* (E&V) visits. Local Healthwatch representatives, who are trained volunteers, carry out these visits to health and social care services to find out how they are being run and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement.

The Health and Social Care Act (2012) allows local Healthwatch representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families and carers on premises such as hospitals, care homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists and pharmacies. *Enter and View* visits can happen if people identify a problem but equally, they can occur when services have a good reputation. This enables lessons to be learned and good practice shared.

Healthwatch *Enter and View* visits are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues. If safeguarding issues are raised during a visit Healthwatch Warrington has safeguarding policies in place which identify the correct procedure to be taken.

## Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to the findings observed on the specific dates set out below. This report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all service users and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

## Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Warrington would like to thank the staff, in particular Nicola Scott (Practice Manager), for taking the time to show the visiting team round and for answering their questions. We would also like to thank our trained volunteers for their contributions.

## Background and Purpose of the visits

Healthwatch Warrington made the decision to visit GP practices within the borough; with a focus on access and the general environment of surgeries. This is because access to primary care services (mainly GPs) has been identified as a recurrent theme within the public feedback data collected by Healthwatch Warrington.

GP access is often highlighted as a problematic aspect of patient experience, with common issues including; difficulties encountered when booking appointments, a lack of appointment availability and communication problems. However, public service reviews also hint at areas of good practice that could be highlighted and shared. Therefore, our authorised representatives visit GP practices in different clusters to gather feedback directly from patients and conduct specialist Enter & View visits.

Healthwatch Warrington engages with local Patient Participation Groups, GP practices and partner organisations to share our findings and help make improvements through recommendations.

Guardian Medical Centre was selected for an announced E&V visit, as the surgery had received an overall 'good' rating in a recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) report (published in April 2016). Healthwatch Warrington had also received public feedback specifically about access issues at the surgery via its Feedback Centre.

Furthermore, the E&V visit would take place during a Macmillan Coffee Morning being held at the surgery; giving the visiting team an excellent opportunity to speak to more patients about their access experiences.

## Details of the Visit

### Location

The visit took place at Guardian Medical Centre, Guardian Street, Warrington, Cheshire, WA5 1UD.

### Date/Time

The visit took place on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016, from 10:30am - 12:00pm.

### Authorised Representatives (Visiting Team)

Catherine Bamber - Healthwatch Warrington, Authorised Representative

Clare Sreeton - Healthwatch Warrington, Authorised Representative

Esstta Hayes - Healthwatch Warrington, Authorised Representative

Jonathon Woodruff - Healthwatch Warrington, Authorised Representative

### GP Practice Staff

Nicola Scott, Practice Manager

### Description of the Surgery

Guardian Medical Centre belongs to the Central West GP cluster and is located within a relatively short walking distance of Warrington hospital. The site is situated next to a main road (Priestley Street) and has a Rowlands Pharmacy adjacent to the main building.

At present, approximately 10,000 patients are registered at the surgery. The surgery employs (or receives services from) eight GPs, two registrars, two medical students, three nurses, a healthcare assistant and 16 reception & administration staff. In addition to a range of other services such as spirometry, diabetes clinics, asthma tests and hypertension assessments, the surgery specialises in patient blood and chronic disease management. The surgery also has links with a dietician, midwives and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

# Results of the Visit

Wherever possible the reports below are in the words of the E&V team members who were present at the time of the visit. The reports have been collated by the Healthwatch Warrington E&V Consultant and some text has been formatted to allow for easy reading; however the essential facts of the visiting team's reports have not been altered.

## Observations from the Visit

### External Access and Appearance

Two members of the visiting team approached the surgery on foot and two by vehicle.

Those on foot walked from Warrington town centre, through Bank Park, using finger posts to travel towards the Hospital (which is near the surgery). Once on main roads, the pavement became very high kerbed, with steep gradients, patchy tarmac and uneven surfaces.

The surgery, its car park and signage are clearly visible when approaching by road.

The surgery's relatively large car park is situated at the front of the building and is kept in good condition. There are several disabled spaces, which are clearly marked. There is also dropped kerb access for disabled users and visitors with prams. However, there are no dropped kerbs on the immediately opposite side of the road.

The grass sections surrounding the car park are well maintained. Visitors can use the car park free of charge. There is a small notice inside the building that asks car park users to sign in their car registration details at reception to avoid a charge. However, the visiting team did not see a similar notification within the car park itself.

The pavement leading up to the turn in road (Guardian Street) for access to the surgery building was very bumpy and raised in areas. This could cause significant problems for wheelchair users and patients with restricted mobility.

There are no bus stops along Guardian Street or Priestly Street, which are the closest roads to the surgery. The nearest bus stops are situated on Liverpool Road and Lovely Lane. This could present access difficulties for patients using public transport. Though access via public walkways and public transport routes is not within the remit of the surgery itself, external travel and transport issues can be considered by the surgery. This will help staff to understand the access needs of patients and can help inform access advice for patients.

The surgery premises are modern and purpose-built, with a Rowlands pharmacy adjacent. The roofing and windows were in good condition. The building is clearly marked with the surgery's name written in large letters above the front entrance. However, one of these letters has now slipped and this could be fixed to improve its appearance. There is a small sign near the main road pavement which states the surgery's name.

The area surrounding the front door is both clean and tidy, but could benefit from some flowers or decoration to help brighten it up and make it feel more inviting. The surgery's opening times are shown on a plaque next to the front door.

The front door is well oiled, is on a single level and is wide enough for double buggies and wheelchairs. However, there is no automatic opening button for wheelchair users or slow close arm to reduce the speed of the door when it is closing; as the door is quite heavy.

### **Reception Area**

Upon entry, the surgery is clean and tidy. A short passage leads from the front door to the main reception desk. The corridor contains a notice board, which displays a mixture of posts about the surgery itself, other health information and Healthwatch Warrington literature.

A payphone is placed here, along with a repeat subscription box, away from the main reception room. This is an excellent feature as patients do not have to enter the main reception area to use these facilities, which helps to reduce congestion.

This corridor is also equipped with a self-service booking in machine, which allows the user to select different language options. The visiting team spoke to a patient using this machine, who told us that it was easy to use. There is an additional self-service booking in machine in the main reception area.

The main reception area was very clean. There was a sign-in book for monitoring guest flows on top of the reception desk. However, staff did not direct the visiting team to use this until it was requested.

The visiting team also observed that patients queue upon arrival at the main reception desk, which leaves little space between visitors at the desk and those next in line. This could potentially lead to confidentiality / privacy issues.

The receptionists and back office staff are all dressed in the same uniform, which looks smart and professional. Staff were courteous, efficient and friendly.

The reception desk is operated by a member of staff at all times and there is a bell for patients to use whenever any that the staff member has been called away. Patients were dealt with politely and efficiently by the receptionist and appeared to be moving through to their appointment within a reasonable time frame.

In terms of accessibility, the reception desk has a cut away area to accommodate wheelchair users. There is also a sign behind the desk indicating that there is an induction loop and “Do we make ourselves clear” forms are available on the front desk; giving patients the means to request information in an alternative format should they require it.

There is a call system in place that beeps for patients; no names are called or displayed. The reception desk staff then usher patients through to be seen. The Practice Manager told the visiting team that patients prefer this system for privacy.



Whilst there are obvious benefits to using this system, this may not cater for everyone's needs (such as patients with limited hearing) and could be explored further if any issues arise as a result.

### Waiting Room / Seating Area

The largest waiting area is housed in the same room as the main reception desk. The visiting team were also invited to visit several other waiting areas around the building, all of various sizes.

One seating area had a fire exit leading from it and no windows and did not seem as pleasant as the other areas to wait in.

All seating areas were very clean, with several radios providing ambient background noise. The walls of corridors were decorated with framed children's art from schools in the local community (with a health focus), which was a nice addition to brighten up interior spaces.

The main waiting area had a television, electronic information screen (with large, easy to read letters) and selection of magazines for patients to enjoy while waiting to be seen.

There were adequate numbers of seats for the surgeries running during the visit. Although the main reception was busy, at no stage did the visiting team observe any visitors having to stand.

However, the visiting team could not find any chairs with arm rests for those who are unable to rise from their seat without using their arms to assist, which could reduce patient independence. However, the Practice Manager explained that accessible chairs are available, but were currently being reupholstered for hygiene purposes (the Practice Manager has confirmed that is now back in place, following the visit). New consultation beds and chairs are due to be available soon.

The visiting team also noticed that the notice boards are very tidy and all literature was displayed in uniform fashion throughout the practice. The posters on display were all up-to-date and relevant.

The largest notice board in the main waiting area was dedicated to the Patient Participation Group (PPG), with eye-catching lettering above it to draw attention. However, some of the documents on the board were laminated (making them glossy and difficult to read, especially as they were printed in small font). Also, some of the PGG minutes on display contained unexplained abbreviations.

The second notice board in the main waiting area was positioned alongside the access corridor. Therefore, visitors reading this board then blocked other people walking to from the doctor's rooms; which may discourage people to stop and look, despite it showing useful information.

### **Additional Facilities**

There is are two clearly marked disabled toilets in the building, one of which is located just to the left of the entrance into the main reception; which is well sign-posted and very clean. In addition, there is a baby changing facility with sink, hand washing facilities and a separate toilet. There is also a water dispenser available for visitors to use.

Accessible information is available and advertised in the surgery, which also has a website for communication with patients. The surgery also uses Language Line, for patients requiring translation services, alongside foreign language information leaflets.

The Practice Manager also told members of the visiting team that she would be open to requests from patients that require adaptations to help with accessibility. However, the Practice Manager further commented that not all patients want to ask for accessibility resources, even those which are already available such as a hearing loop.

As such, there have been no patient requests for accessible information to date. Potentially, this could be addressed by a more active PPG, a promotional campaign by the surgery in partnership with Healthwatch Warrington raise of awareness of these resources and confidence amongst patients to utilise them.

### **Dementia Friendly Approach**

The surgery building is all on one level, with the same non- shiny flooring throughout. It is well lit, but could benefit from some more “way out” signs. The visiting team also noted that there was a calm atmosphere and the receptionist was good at sign posting people to the various waiting areas.

### **Navigation around building**

The surgery building was composed of bright, airy spaces. The entire site is connected through main corridor. Different areas throughout the building have different waiting rooms and spaces, arranged according to the requirements of various clinics. The visiting team found that it was easy for visitors to get around the building, including those with prams or using a wheelchair.

All doors had signs on them, informing visitors which place these doors led to. For instance, treatment room doors and doctor’s surgeries clearly marked. However, as almost all of the doors were propped open along the corridor, they were not always immediately visible.

Staff appeared to be on hand to help with building navigation and access. For example, the visiting team observed that the receptionist on duty did give clear and friendly directions to visitors in order to guide them to the correct waiting area.

## Cleanliness and Maintenance of Communal Areas

Spaces were clear, well maintained, odourless and clean throughout the surgery. Hand sanitisers were attached to the wall for patients and staff to use in each waiting area, with two near the wall of the main reception. However, the waiting area to see the surgery's nurses seemed relatively small, cramped and somewhat dark.

The visit team had the opportunity to briefly look at consultation room, which seemed large, clean and well laid out. The visiting team also checked all of the toilets and they were cleaned to a very high standard.

There is a downstairs administration office where we saw two members of staff taking calls and making appointments, during the visit. There are also offices upstairs where the administration for the practice is completed, all of which appeared to be clean, well-lit and tidy.

## Patient Voice and Feedback

Any patient is able to request to see a specific GP. However, if the named GP is not available, the surgery is able to refer them to see another GP instead.

Patient involvement in the PPG is promoted by the surgery, both on the dedicated noticeboard and its website.

The PPG has seven members that meet every two months. The Practice Manager told the visiting team that she would welcome more involvement in the group to boost its activities and suggestions for improvements, particularly from younger people.

In addition to the above, Family & Friend's Test questionnaires were available (along with collection box) on the main reception desk.

## Safety

A chaperone service is available at the surgery for patients who would like someone to accompany them to their appointment (carried out by specially trained staff members). This service is widely promoted throughout the building. The communal areas were kept clear from obstructions.

## Staffing, Leadership and Promoting Positive & Respectful Attitudes

The Practice Manager gave a brief tour of the building to the visiting team; being immediately available, very friendly and happy to answer our questions afterwards. The visiting team observed that staff interactions with patients were all kind and respectful during the visit.

The visiting team spoke to several members of staff and they all said that they loved working at the surgery and felt that they were like one big family. This gave the impression that staff clearly took pride in the practice. For example, on the day of the visit some staff had come into the surgery on their day off to host a Macmillan coffee morning. All of the cakes on sale were made by staff to support the event.

The Practice Manager feels that the surgery's doctors are very personable and patient orientated. They are flexible and spend a lot of time with patients.

## Appointments

The surgery's opening hours are advertised on-site (on plaque next to the front door) and online. Extended hours are available from Monday to Thursday (from 6:30pm - 8:30pm).

The first 3 GP appointments of the day are pre bookable, 14 days in advance. Nurses are pre bookable and emergency appointments are also available. There are also same day phone triage appointments completed by an on call GP, with reception taking the patient's details and then an on call GP advises.

There are 12 face to face appointments available in the morning and a further 12 face to face appointments in the afternoon (along with phone triage). On average, appointments are 10 minutes long, although foreign language patients usually require double appointments times to make use of translation services.

There are a total of eight phone lines for patients to call the surgery. The phone lines put callers on hold if they are busy, but do not have an automatic message to inform the caller which place they are in the queue.

The visiting team spoke to one older patient (who had mobility problems) and her husband. The patients commented about how difficult it was for them to get through in on the phone first thing in the morning. They said that when they are eventually able to get through after ringing continuously, all the afternoon appointments are then usually gone.

However, on the day of the visit, the surgery had been able to give this patient a late morning appointment. The lady was worried about what would happen if she was really ill, but did not need to call 999. This patient told the visiting team that she had never used the 111 service and did not want to do this as she heard such bad publicity about it and her husband didn't trust the system, nor had they ever used the extended appointment service at Bath Street. It should be noted that the patient did comment that "they are all very good", once she is able get into the surgery to see a medical practitioner.

There is also an online booking facility available for patients who register at the surgery to use it.

The Practice Manager highlighted some challenges, such as finding flexible locum cover for holiday periods. Furthermore, the surgery has experienced relatively frequent 'Did Not Attend' (DNAs) - there were 114 in July 2016, where patients have not attended their appointment.

The surgery does send SMS reminders to patients to confirm their booking and follow up reminders. However, not all patients are signed up to this service and this is an issue that the PPG could work on.

However, the Practice Manager felt that access at the service was generally very good and there were no significant issues at present.

### Patient Survey Responses

As part of the GP Access project, Healthwatch Warrington has developed a survey for patients to find out more about their experiences, which can be found on our website: <http://www.healthwatchwarrington.co.uk/get-involved/surveys/>

The visiting team took the opportunity to speak with patients directly and collected a total of 10 survey responses on the day.

Overall, 60% of respondents were very satisfied with the surgery's booking system, with 20% viewing it in a neutral light and 20% feeling negative about it.

The main problematic issue highlighted in patient feedback relates to relatively long waiting times when booking appointments by phone, which has also been flagged up in historic public feedback reviews submitted to Healthwatch Warrington.

Whilst 20% of respondents stated that they are on hold for 5 minutes or less on an average call to the surgery, 40% said they have to wait between 5-10 minutes to have their call answered. Furthermore, the remaining 20% of respondents stated that they are normally unable to get through as lines are busy. This could relate to the number of staff available to answer calls at peak times and may be alleviated by more patients using the online booking facility. This in turn could relate to increasing awareness of this option, as only 30% of survey respondents indicated that they knew about being able to book appointments online.

In terms of positive feedback, 70% of respondents told us that they could ‘always’ or ‘often’ book an appointment on the date and time that they wanted (generally, morning visits). Additional patient comments and feedback from the surveys was generally very positive, with statements such as; “staff are great and can’t do enough to help” and “very pleased with the service I receive”.

Although 10% of respondents also suggested that the surgery should offer Saturday appointments, this would need to be considered in terms of wider demand.

### Summary

Whilst there were some issues raised about getting through to the surgery by phone, the patients that spoke to the visiting team appeared to think that the surgery offered a good service.

Some of the external access issues identified by the visiting team (e.g. lack of nearby bus stops and public pathing) will be shared with other partners such as Warrington Borough Council for further review.

The Practice Manager had a generally positive and engaging attitude toward improving access at the surgery. From her perspective, an ideal investment would be to provide a more accessible front door and boost the profile of the PPG.



## Recommendations

- 1. Front Entrance:** the signage above the main entrance requires a small repair (to straighten a slipped letter) and could benefit from flowers or decoration to improve its appearance. The surgery should also look to adapt the front door to be more accessible for all patients (by installing a bar to slow the door closing, or installing an automatic opening system).
- 2. Notice Boards:** the visiting team suggest that documents displayed on notice boards should be written in larger, clearer font and not contain unexplained abbreviations. There should be a focus on providing key information in an accessible format.
- 3. Promoting and Developing the PPG:** the surgery should work towards developing and engaging more effectively with its PPG. A stronger PPG could help the surgery to tackle some of the access issues highlighted in this report and empower patients to contribute to improving access in a meaningful way. This could include a drive to recruit young members and developing a 'virtual' PPG presence.
- 4. Phone Waiting Times:** the surgery should focus on ways to improve phone waiting times and promote alternative booking methods amongst patients to help reduce demand, potentially with PPG help.

### Distribution List

*This report has been distributed to the following:*

- *Warrington Council, Adult Social Services*
- *Warrington CCG*
- *Care Quality Commission*
- *Healthwatch England*

## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### *Response from Provider*

We were happy for Healthwatch Warrington to come in and meet the Guardian Medical Centre team at work and are delighted that the overall opinion was positive regarding the practice.

We aim to provide a variety of easily accessible ways for patients to contact and communicate with our practice and seek ways to continually improve our contact and communication methods. Our goal is to provide patients with a variety of appointment times and methods that work for them. We are flexible and open to change that will improve our services to patients.

With reference to the recommendations I can confirm that the sign outside the building has been fixed. We will improve the scale of size of the PPG minutes. We understand the importance of not confusing patients with acronyms and abbreviations and will ask the Chair of the PPG to keep these to a minimum.

At our recent Flu Clinic on a Saturday Morning we took the opportunity to promote our PPG and ask patients if they would like to be involved, although we did not manage to recruit many participants we will continue to promote the PPG using the Notice Board and website.

We will endeavour to continue to promote the online access availability to our patients which we understand would help alleviate the amount of calls received by the practice to book appointments. This is an ongoing process and we will try to come up with new innovative ways to promote this service.

Nicola Scott, Practice Manager



## Appendix B

### *Front signage repair (post-visit photo)*



