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## Review of General Practice online complaints information to patients

### March 2017

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### About Healthwatch

Healthwatch is made up of 152 local Healthwatch organisations that were established throughout England in April 2013, under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. The dual role of local Healthwatch is to champion the rights of users of health and social care services and to hold the system to account for how well it engages with the public.

Healthwatch gives people a powerful voice locally and nationally. At a local level, Healthwatch Bexley works to help local people get the best out of their local health and social care services. Whether it's improving them today or helping to shape them for tomorrow. Healthwatch Bexley is all about local voices being able to influence the delivery and design of local services. Not just people who use them, but anyone who might need to in future.

### About Healthwatch Bexley

Healthwatch Bexley is the independent health and social care consumer champion and the voice of local people in ensuring that health and social care services are safe, effective and designed to meet the needs of residents, social care users and carers.

Healthwatch Bexley gives children, young people and adults a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are purchased, provided and reviewed within the borough.

Healthwatch Bexley provides a signposting service for people who are unsure where to go for help. Healthwatch can report concerns about the quality of health care and social care to Healthwatch England, or directly to the Care Quality Commission.

## 1. Background for review

A lack of awareness of how to make a complaint is a common concern identified through Healthwatch Bexley's Enter and View programme. Not knowing how to make a complaint or where to find the information was identified as a key concern in Healthwatch Bexley's 'Comparative report of access to GP within London Borough of Bexley', in which 65% of patients stated they were unaware of an internal or external complaints procedure. Similar themes emerged within Dental practices and Urgent Care centres, with 53% and 44% of residents respectively unaware of how to make a complaint. Engagement by other local Healthwatch has identified similar concerns regarding complaint procedures with audits of local GP practices taking place elsewhere (Healthwatch Southwark, 2016).

Making a complaint can be tough, particularly for those who are unwell, have been bereaved or are feeling vulnerable. Being able to make a complaint about your experience at your GP, that is dealt with appropriately and professionally is an important right for all patients. Effective complaints systems help the people who use them feel confident in the system and make GP practices aware of specific issues within their practice whilst encouraging improvement across different areas of the service (Healthwatch Southwark, 2016).

Mostly, NHS care and treatment goes well but sometimes things go wrong and being able to complain about a poor service forms part of the NHS Constitution (NHS, 2015) which state that:

*"You (patient) have the right to have any complaint you make about the NHS services acknowledged within three working days and to have it properly investigated."*

*"You (patient) have the right to discuss the manner in which the complaint is to be handled and to know the period within which the investigation is likely to be completed and the response sent."*

Patients increasingly use online sources to find information about GPs such as opening hours, how to make an appointment and services available. Patients may also prefer the confidentiality of finding information about complaints online rather than in person. Ensuring clear and easily accessible information about complaints is available to patients is an important part of patient care. Having this information online further ensures patients can access this information at a time convenient to them and without having to phone the surgery or make an extra visit to the practice.

Healthwatch Bexley undertook this review to establish to what extent GPs in Bexley offer clear and consistent advice of their complaints procedure. This enables Healthwatch to highlight the GP practices who demonstrate good practice as well as identifying GP practices where there is room for improvement.

## 2. Methodology

Healthwatch Bexley carried out an audit throughout February 2017 of each GP practice website in Bexley to see what information they offer their patients on how to make a complaint.

As recommended by Healthwatch Southwark, there are a number of criteria which contributes to good patient information for complaints and these set the parameters for our review:

- ✓ How to make a complaint
- ✓ What the surgery will do
- ✓ Who will be dealing with the complaint
- ✓ When they can expect to hear from the surgery
- ✓ If they are not happy, what they can do next

## 3. Summary of findings from our review

The majority of practices (89%) have a complaints section on their website with consistent advice amongst the majority of these for who to contact when making a complaint.

However, only 1/3 of practices offered a well explained complaints procedure for their patients with 1/4 stating a resolution time frame for dealing with complaints.

Escalation of complaints were mentioned by less than 1 in 4 practices (23%).

- ✓ 24 out of 27 practices have a complaints section on their website
- ✓ 8 practices provide clear and comprehensive information about the complaints procedure
- ✓ 23 out of 27 practices advised patients to contact the practice manager/business manager or liaison manager when making a complaint
- ✓ 1 practice has no online information on how to make a complaint about their service
- ✓ 3 practices offer advice on how to access support for making a complaint (Advocacy for all)
- ✓ 1 practice offer information on external organisations where patients can raise concerns about a service, including Healthwatch Bexley and the Care quality Commission (CQC) (1 mention of Healthwatch Bexley, 0 CQC)

- ✓ 14 practices offer information of how to escalate a complaint (7 mention Ombudsman, 8 mention NHS England and 4 mention National Commissioning Board)
- ✓ 7 practices offer advice on resolution time frames for complaints

A full breakdown of all data for each GP practice is available in the Appendix.

## 4. Recommendations

- 1) All GP practices to offer information online about how to make a complaint. It would be good practice to include the following:
  - ✓ How to make a complaint
  - ✓ What the surgery will do
  - ✓ Who will be dealing with the complaint
  - ✓ When they can expect to hear from the surgery
  - ✓ If they are not happy, what they can do next
- 2) Full complaints procedure available on website and available for download.
- 3) Websites should offer information about how and where patients can access support in making a complaint (reference to Advocacy for All).
- 4) Offer information about external organisations, including Healthwatch Bexley and CQC, where patients can voice their concerns about a service.

This report will be shared with Bexley Clinical Commissioning Group, NHS England, Healthwatch England, CQC and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

	Complaints section on Website	Contact Practice Mgr/Business Mgr/ Patient Liaison Officer	Verbal complaints by telephone to Practice specified	Complaints to NHS and Primary Care Trust	Complaints to Doctor	Complaints procedure well explained on website	Complaints procedure available from Reception	Reference to Advocacy for All	Complaints to Bexley CCG	Escalation to National Commissioning Board	Complaints to NHS England	Escalation to Ombudsman	Resolution timeframe	Healthwatch mentioned on website	Complaints to Care Quality Commission
Barnard Medical Group	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Bellegrove Surgery	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Belvedere Medical Centre	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Bexley Group Practice	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Bexley Medical Group	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Bulbanks Medical Centre	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Bursted Wood Surgery	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Cairngall Medical Practice	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Crayford Town Surgery	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Crook Log Surgery	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Dr Thavapalan	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Good Health PMS	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Ingleton Avenue Surgery	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Lakeside Medical Practice	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Lyndhurst Medical Centre	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Mill Road Surgery	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Northumberland Heath Medical Centre	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Plas Meddyg Surgery	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Sidcup Medical Centre	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Slade Green Surgery	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Station Road Surgery	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Thanet Road Surgery	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
The Albion Surgery	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
The Parkside Surgery	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
The Westwood Surgery	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Welling Medical Practice	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Woodlands Primary Care	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
	88.89%	85.19%	22.22%	3.70%	11.11%	29.63%	37.04%	11.11%	0.00%	14.81%	29.63%	25.93%	25.93%	3.70%	0.00%