



July 2020

GP Website Audit:

Finding information during Covid-19

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Introduction

In May 2020, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire undertook a survey of GP websites in their area to find out the extent of current information and advice provided on local GP practice websites with a specific focus on information available for cancer patients and their carers.

The work was prompted by concerns raised by members of the Patient Advisory Board at a meeting of the East of England Cancer Alliance on the 15th April 2020. Elective treatments, including cancer surgery, had been cancelled or postponed due to a reduction in intensive care units (ICU) and staffing capacity during the height of the pandemic. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire wanted to know whether there was accessible and available advice for cancer patients, particularly at a time when it is likely that there would be an increase in patients accessing websites for information.

At an East of England local Healthwatch meeting, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire asked if other local Healthwatch in the region could replicate the project in their areas and Healthwatch Hertfordshire agreed to do so. In this way a picture of what is happening across the region as regards the credibility and accessibility of virtual information for patients will be evidenced and recommendations for improvements can be focussed both regionally and locally.

About Healthwatch Hertfordshire

Healthwatch Hertfordshire (HWH) represents the views of people in Hertfordshire for health and social care services. We provide an independent consumer voice for evidencing patient and public experiences and gathering local intelligence with the purpose of influencing service improvement across the county. We work with those who commission, deliver and regulate health and social care services to ensure the people's voice is heard and to address gaps in service quality and/or provision.

What We Did

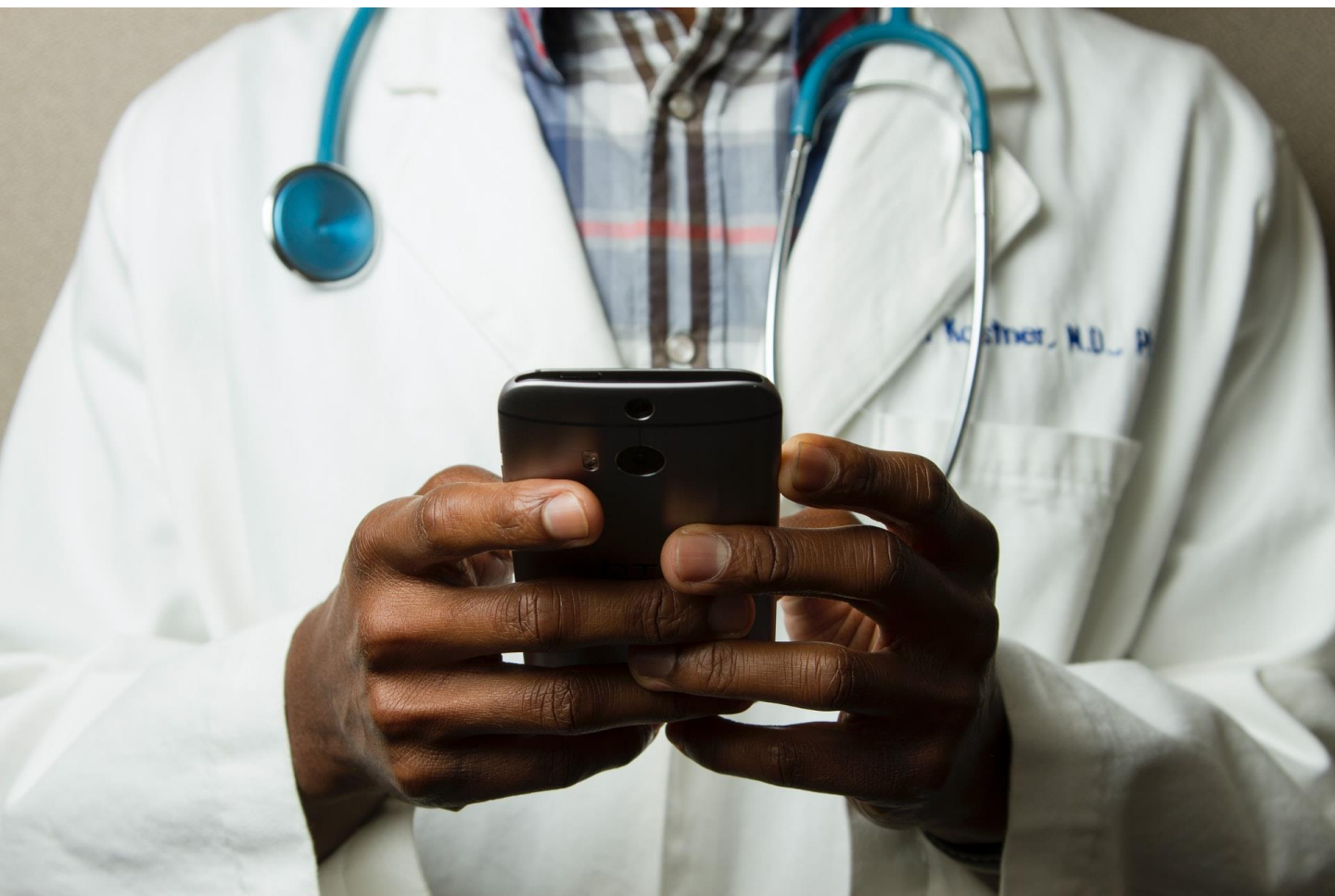
We designed an online survey for our volunteers to audit the websites using the same key questions as Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire:

1. Is the website up to date?
2. Is there current Covid-19 advice?
3. Is there a link to the NHS Covid-19 advice site?
4. Is there advice for Cancer Patients?
5. Is there a link to the Macmillan Covid-19 web page?
6. Are there any links to Cancer Support Groups?
7. Is there information/links to the local Healthwatch?

Volunteers recorded the date of their visit and the name of the website provider. Volunteers were also encouraged to comment on the website style and anything they thought was good practice.

The audit was carried out by 15 volunteers and 2 staff members over a 2 week period: 25th June to 10th July 2020. We covered all the GP practices in Hertfordshire viewing 103 websites (some GP practices have merged and now share websites – these are counted only once). Volunteers and staff were asked to declare any conflicts of interest (none were recorded) and did not review their own GP practice website.

Summary of findings



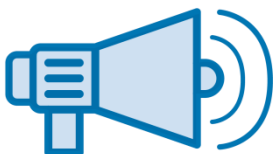
Summary Results



- **93% of websites were considered to be up to date or reasonably up to date**
- **99% of websites provided Covid-19 information**
- **96% of websites provided a link to the NHS Covid-19 advice site**



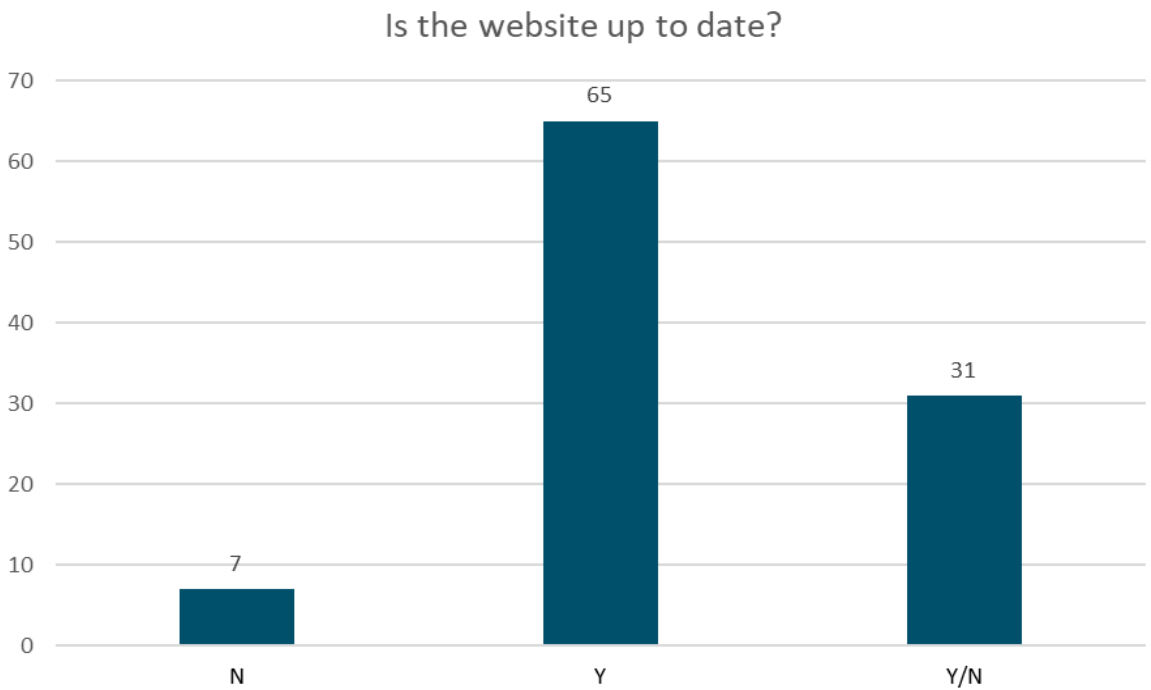
- **89% of websites provided some kind of advice for cancer patients**
- **61% of websites provided a link to the Macmillan Covid-19 web page**
- **85% of websites provided a link to some kind of cancer support group**



- **1% of websites provided a link to local Healthwatch**

Is the website up to date?

The majority of websites were found to be up to date by the reviewers. Many of the websites did not show when the page was last updated (e.g. FootFall © Silicon Practice 2020) so volunteers looked at news articles and current information to gauge how up to date the website was. Current Covid information gave the impression that the website was being managed effectively. However when looking at other information, reviewers were less sure (Yes/No answers).

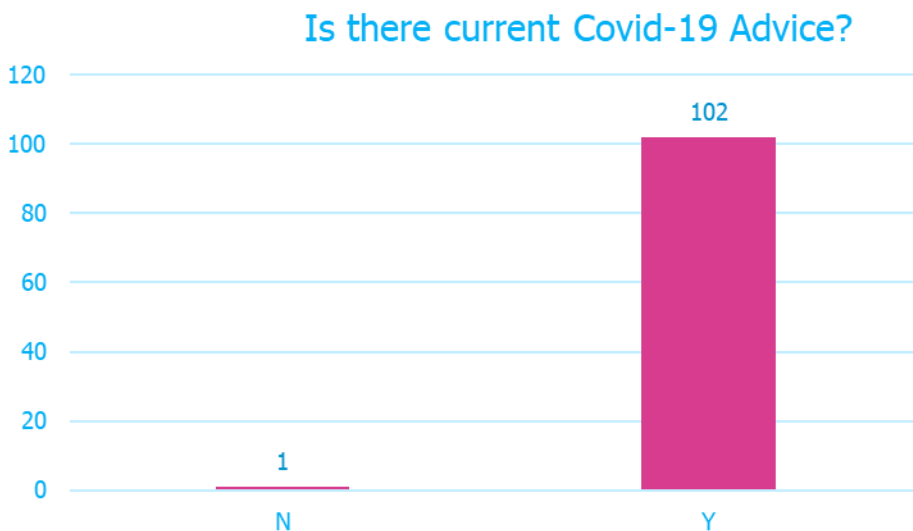


Some websites featured surveys or newsletters that were very out of date e.g. Patient Survey from 2014, latest news article from 2018 (though this was sometimes offset by a current rolling BBC Health information header), Bank Holiday closures in May or updates about Measles for 2018. One GP website had a notice that said 'this service is no longer registered with CQC' on their home page (this has now been amended).

Is there current Covid-19 advice?

Unsurprisingly at this stage in the pandemic all but 1 GP Practice was found to have Covid-19 advice . One that did not provide Covid-19 advice was found to have a Surgery newsletter dated Nov 2019 and was wishing patients a Happy Christmas for 2018 ! The reviewer commented that the staff at this surgery obviously have not been able to maintain this website and therefore patients have not been updated on Covid-19 or cancer care services.

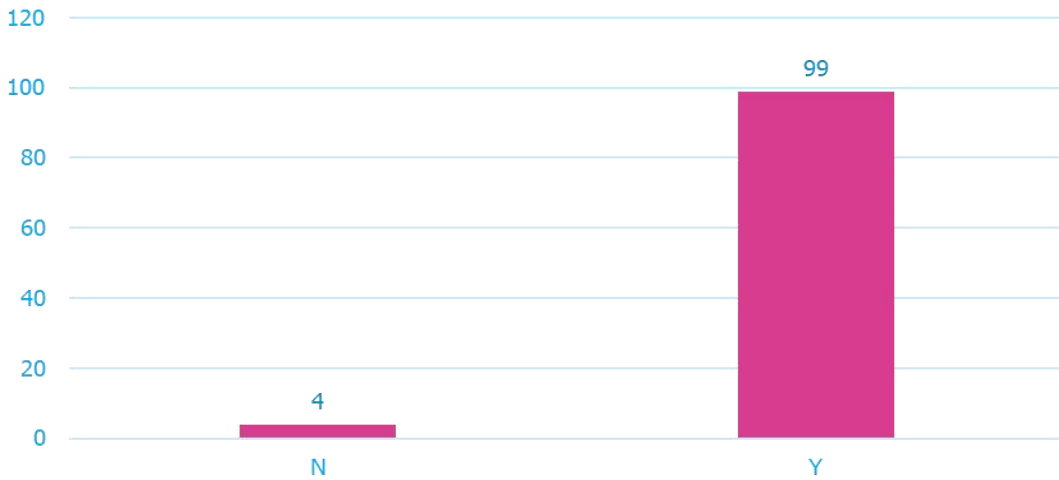
Most websites had a pop up box as soon as you opened the website which had to be closed to progress further. A few were found to have completely disappeared when going back to look for the information (even when completely closing the browser) whilst others popped back up when moving to different areas of the website . The loss of the pop up box was problematic if the website contained very little Covid-19 advice anywhere else.



Is there a link to the NHS Covid-19 advice site?

As with the Covid information, most had some kind of link to the Covid-19 NHS advice area, those that didn't linked only to the government website.

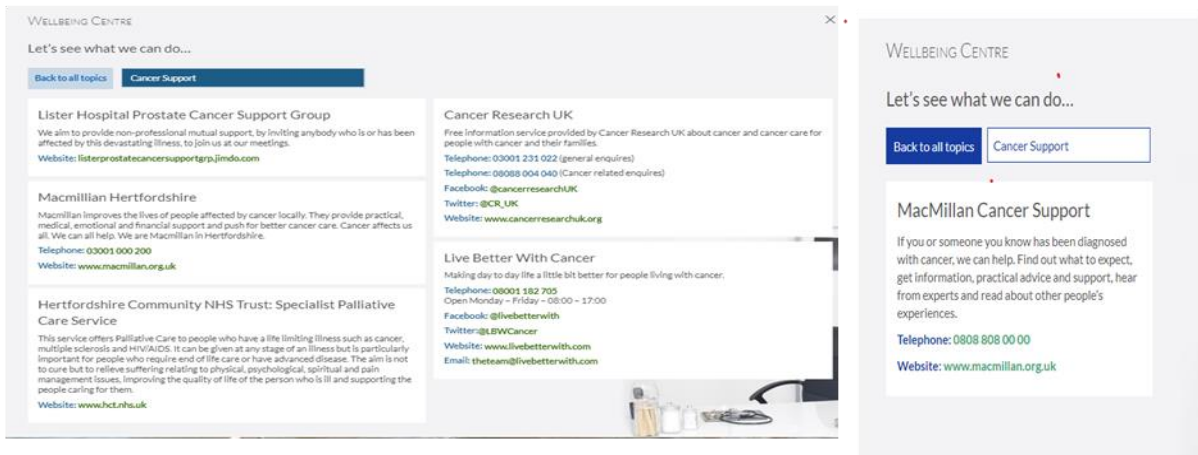
Covid-19 NHS Link



Is there advice for Cancer Patients?

92% of websites reviewed did offer advice for patients about cancer. However, the quantity and quality of advice varied enormously.

Websites that had the information rooms format generally either had the Macmillan information as standard or had been customised by the Practice to show more local information and advice.





Those where cancer advice was included in Long term conditions or A-Z type formats either provided information on lots of different types of cancer and organisations or simply linked directly to the NHS site.

Finding the advice however proved difficult for some reviewers (even though it was there) as the advice could be located in a number of different locations that were not always obvious or prominent.

Generally cancer advice was found in the following places:

- Wellbeing Centre
- Long Term Conditions
- Conditions A-Z
- Advice and Help Zone
- Health Advice
- Health Websites
- Self-Care
- Consultation Room
- Cancer Awareness tab (screening)
- Cancer

This variety of locations often made it hard for reviewers to find the information on cancer.

Some of the locations were easy to see and others were in small writing on the side or bottom of the page.

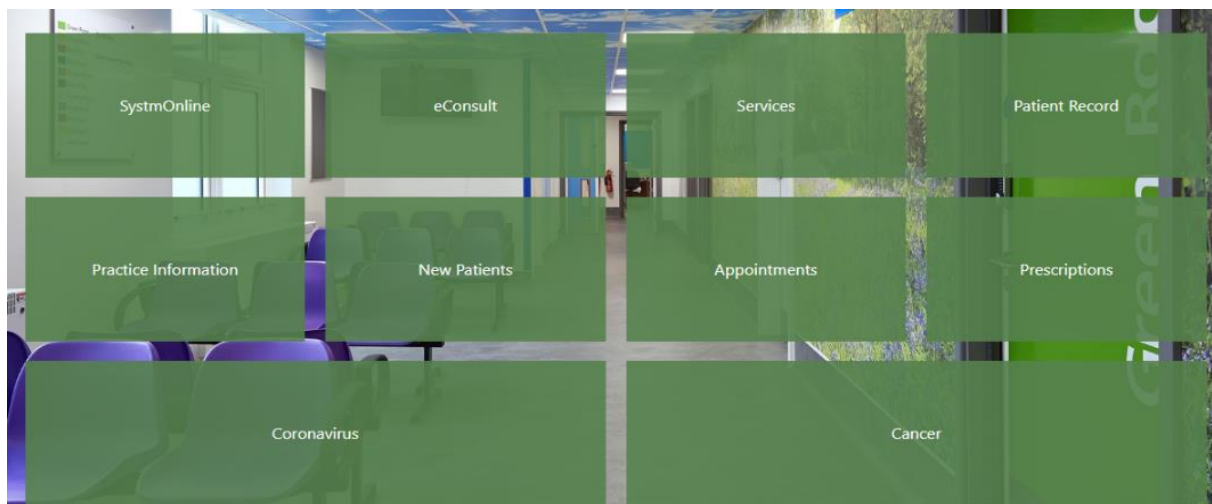
Most websites did not have cancer on their front page. Symonds Green Health Centre however does have a 'Cancer' heading on the front page in the tabs on the side that takes you to the 'Be Clear on Cancer' page that lets patients know what to do if they have a symptom they think may be cancer and when to contact their doctor. This is the type of information that needs to be more prominent on websites. The site also has more information on cancer in the long term conditions section but because there was no link in the 'Lets be clear on cancer' section it was missed initially by the reviewer.

Another website does have Cancer as a main tab but unfortunately there was little information in it as the site is under construction.

Where the Cancer Healthtalkonline was mentioned (usually websites that had A-Z or long term conditions sections), the link in every case was broken. Similarly the next link, 'Cancer Overview' was not responding. This is something that should be easy to put right.

Some websites had detailed information on screening e.g. Knebworth and Marymead had information on cervical screening in the news archive as well as a whole section by following the 'Be Clear on Cancer' heading within the Cancer section in the Advice and Help zone.

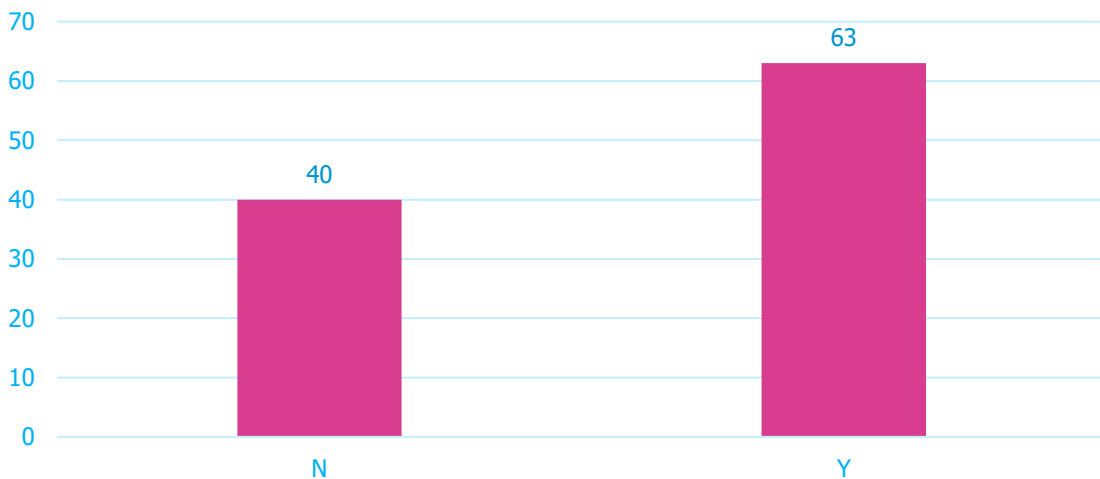
The Patients' Voice Group at Hall Grove Group Practice has recently (May 2020) produced a cancer guide for patients and carers but this is only in the Patients' Voice section and there is no link to it in the cancer advice area of the website so it is less likely to be found .



Example of a website that features 'Cancer' on the Home page

Is there a link to the Macmillan Covid-19 web page?

Is there a link to the Macmillan Covid-19 page



The link to the Covid -19 Macmillan specific page did not appear to be available on 40 of the websites reviewed. On websites such as FootFall © Silicon Practice 2020, where there is a designated Covid-19 Support room, this was easy to find and seemed to be a standard entry for this type of site.

Covid-19 Support Room
✕

How can we help you?

If you think you might have coronavirus or you've been in close contact with someone who has it visit [NHS 111 online coronavirus service](#) for advice.

<p>Well-being while staying at home</p> <p>Taking care of your mind as well as your body is really important while staying at home because of coronavirus (COVID-19).</p> <p>Visit NHS Every Mind Matters for advice, practice advice and support groups.</p> <p>If you cannot wait to see a doctor and feel unable to cope or keep yourself safe, it's important to get support.</p>	<p>Advice for patients with pre-existing conditions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Macmillan – Cancer and coronavirus ▶ Asthma UK – What to do if you have asthma ▶ Blood Cancer UK – Information for people affected by blood cancer ▶ Diabetes UK – Coronavirus and diabetes ▶ Kidney Care UK – Guidance for patients with kidney disease 	<p>Advice for Vulnerable Patients</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Guidance on shielding and protecting extremely vulnerable people ▶ How to get support for extremely critical vulnerable person ▶ Advice for people at higher risk – those who are 70 or older, are pregnant or have a condition that increases the risks from coronavirus. ▶ Pregnancy advice ▶ Requests for medical certification for absence from work
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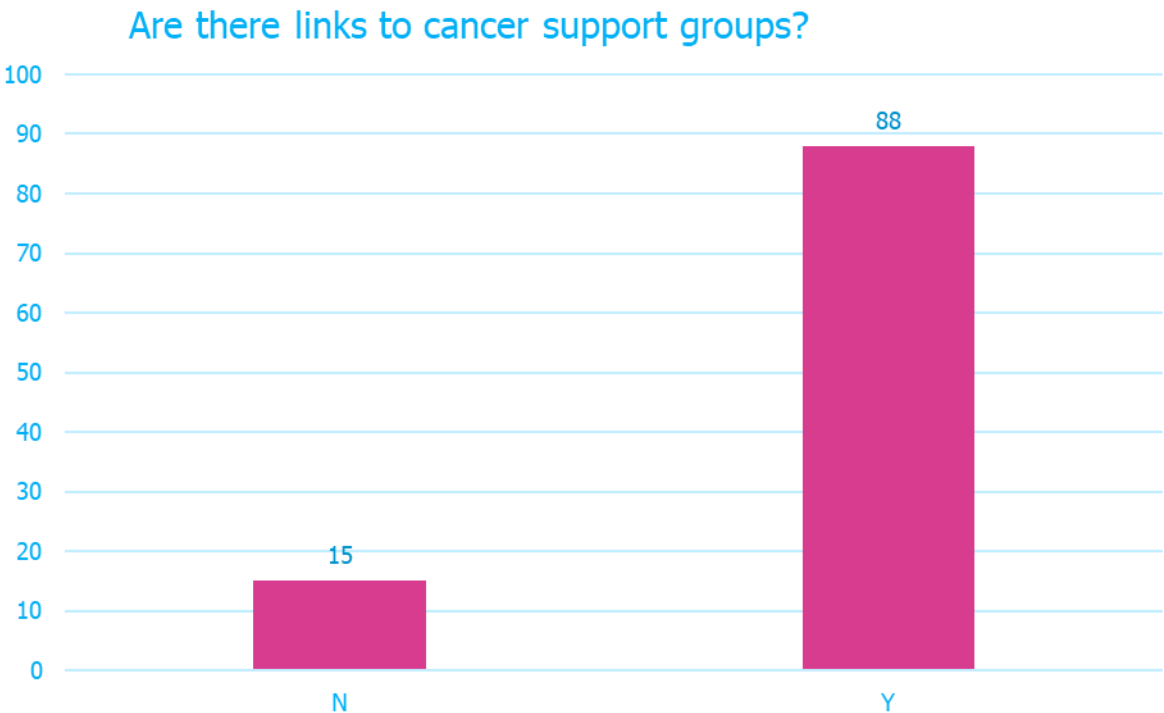
On one website, a reviewer commented 'Aside from a mention of Covid in March you would have thought Covid never happened. Besides that, there did not seem to be any mention of cancer or cancer support in the entire website.'

Are there any links to Cancer Support Groups?

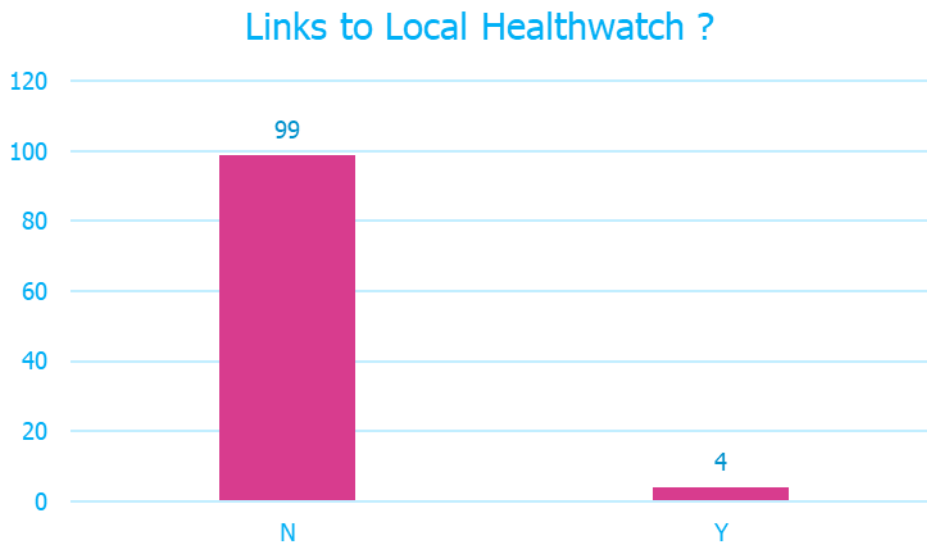
A number of reviewers initially marked down websites that did not have obvious information about support groups in the more traditional sense but if a website had a link to Macmillan or Cancer UK that talked about how you could contact someone either online or by telephone we have counted that as a 'link' to a support group.

Support can mean different things to different people and once diagnosed it is quite likely that the hospital treating you will provide information on specific help and support for your particular type of cancer.

Some websites provided more local information for their patients which felt more personable and supportive to the reviewers. Local information may make patients more likely to contact the organisation.



Is there information/links to the local Healthwatch?



Reviewers only found 4 websites that mentioned local Healthwatch and these were all in the Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group area. Local Healthwatch appeared in the complaints section (for further support), Covid resource area and in the Cancer section of the Wellbeing portal.

One other website did mention the current Healthwatch Hertfordshire Veterans health project in a news article (again HVCCG).

Website Providers

Many of the GP practices in Hertfordshire have updated their websites to 2020 versions making them appear much more modern and 'clean' when compared to the older versions. Reviewers generally preferred using these websites as they were easier to navigate.

The most popular design is FootFall@Silicon 2020 followed by Copyright 2006-2020 My Surgery. 15 practices remain on the old Silicon version. It is hoped that they will update soon as reviewers found this site less user friendly and the Self-help A-Z did not always work.

There were some good sites used by just one practice with a couple apparently still under construction.

Reviewers found that the way the website was laid out, colouring, pictures, and font size all contributed to how the reviewer felt about the GP practice not only in terms of accessibility but also how caring and approachable the practice might be.

Website Provider by CCG

Website provider	ENHCCG	HVCCG
Footfall @Silicon 2020	25	14
Silicon Practice	3	12
Copyright 2006-2020 My Surgery Website	10	21
Copyright@2020 Manor View Practice	0	1
Surgery Web	1	0
Creative Line Design	1	0
GP Websites by GP Surgery.Net@2020	0	1
MRM Design Copyright 2012	1	0
Oldroyd Publishing Ltd	3	3
Practice 369 -iatro	1	0
2020 FPM Group	4	2

Conclusion



If GPs are expected to play a pivotal role in diagnosing cancer earlier and supporting the NHS Long Term Plan ambition to diagnose 75% of cancers at stage 1 or 2 by 2028 then information about what to look out for and what to do (Let's be Clear on Cancer) needs to be much more prominently displayed on GP websites. Patients should be actively encouraged to call their doctor or to complete an e-Consultation through a personal message from the practice if they are at all concerned.

As referrals to cancer services have significantly dropped over the last 5 months it is disappointing to see that the specific Covid-19 Macmillan advice was less widely used but it is hoped that patients accessing the Macmillan link would also see the coronavirus information.

Overall there was good information on Covid-19 with up to date links to the government and NHS sites. Many had additional news features about the wearing of face coverings for example or highlighted important issues such as domestic abuse during the pandemic.

It was very disappointing to see how few websites had links to Healthwatch or POhWER (advocacy services).

More than ever before, with so much change in how services are delivered it is important that patients can easily access the right information that will give them reassurance and support.

Recommendations

1. Make it easier to find information on cancer and what to do if you are worried
2. Ensure key cancer campaigns and information are not hidden away or confined to the Patient Group section (e.g. the Cancel out Cancer Campaign -ENHCCG area - and the Hall Grove information leaflet)
3. Ensure links and information are regularly checked and updated
4. Information that is changing rapidly needs to have dates
5. Archive out of date surveys and messages
6. Ensure that 'pop up' information boxes don't completely disappear and that there is a link to that information elsewhere on the site
7. Ensure that the website is flexible to local and current need and is able to respond to issues with specific conditions to promote patient awareness.

Data Disclaimer: As Information on websites can be amended, changed or added to at any time it is possible that information not seen by the reviewer at the time of the survey is now available. Some websites are difficult to navigate so information that is reported as not existing could possibly be present somewhere on the website.

Next Steps

The report and data will be shared with Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire who will combine it with information from the other local Healthwatch within the Eastern Region. Dave Simpson, Chair of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will then present the information to the East of England Cancer Alliance.

We will also be sharing our findings with East and North Hertfordshire and Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Groups (see responses on page 17).



Response from Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group

The Healthwatch survey provides really valuable insight to help improve information for patients and Herts Valleys CCG will communicate the findings to all GP practices along with the Healthwatch recommendations.

It is reassuring that most GP Websites in Hertfordshire held information for patients with cancer and COVID-19 but we clearly need to make sure that there is more consistency so that all patients receive the same quality and quantity of information. It's particularly important that information about what patients should look out for and what to do if you are concerned is much more prominently displayed to support early diagnosis of cancer in keeping with the NHS Long Term Plan.

We will be working alongside GP practices to improve information for patients – starting with developing a central resource on the CCG website using the Be Clear on Cancer information that all practice websites can link to and that can be managed centrally to ensure validity and consistency.

Shazia Butt, Head of Quality Assurance Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group



Response from East and North Hertfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group

East and North Hertfordshire CCG would like to thank Healthwatch Hertfordshire and the volunteers who carried out this piece of work. We recognise how important it is for GP practice websites to feature good quality information which is both up to date and easy to find, especially when NHS services and how patients access them has changed dramatically. It's pleasing to see that most practice websites viewed as part of this audit met these standards.

We will share the findings in this report with our practices and encourage them to talk to their website providers and implement the recommendations. As a CCG we already have plans over the coming months to provide our practices with materials covering important topics such as cancer care which they can use to communicate with patients through their websites, newsletters and text messages. Our CCG's 'Cancel Out Cancer' campaign which is led by volunteers and helps people understand more about cancer screening, symptoms, and prevention will also be promoted through practice websites.

**Rosie Connolly, Acting Associate Director - Quality Improvement,
NHS East & North Hertfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group**



Thank you

We would like to thank all the Healthwatch Hertfordshire volunteers and staff who took part in this audit.

