



Lesser Heard Voices Veterans

Veteran Friendly Accredited GP Survey

March 2020



What was the project about?

We wanted to hear about Buckinghamshire GP Practices experience of achieving Veteran Friendly (VF) accreditation. This would help us to work better with veterans in the future and encourage other Practices to also seek this accreditation.

Why did we do this project?

In 2019 Healthwatch Bucks created the role of a Community Lead to work with groups identified as 'Lesser Heard Voices'. We realised that engaging with these groups required a different approach involving seeking out community organisations and leaders, attending meetings and forums, building long-term relationships and gaining trust over time. Armed Forces veterans were selected as one of three varied groups to engage with during 2019/20.

Whilst doing this project, we actively encouraged local PCNs (Primary Care Networks) and GPs to consider becoming Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) Veteran Friendly (VF) accredited practices. Of 51 practices in Buckinghamshire, 15 had achieved their VF accreditation by early 2020. This represents 25 surgery locations which cover a large proportion of our county's population.

What did we do?

Through engagement with the RCGP, we were able to find out which GPs in Buckinghamshire had already achieved their accreditation and who the VF lead was in that Practice. We developed a small online questionnaire and contacted each practice individually to ask them to complete it for us. We received responses from 10 GP practices of the 15 who were asked to complete it.

We completed this work while conducting our Veterans in Buckinghamshire project in 2019/2020.

What did we find?

How easy did you find it to achieve your Veteran Friendly accreditation?

- 5 practices said it was “very easy” and 5 found it “easy” (from “very difficult” to “very easy”)

How long did the accreditation process take, from initial application to award of the accreditation?

- 2 practices said it took “Less than 2 weeks”; 5 said it took “Between 2 and 4 weeks”; 1 said it took “Over 6 weeks” (in initial ‘pilot’); 2 practices responded “Don’t know”

Have you seen a recent increase in veterans asking to be flagged?

- 5 practices said “No”, 2 said “Yes”, and 3 said “Don’t know”

“It is still early days. We have several ideas which require finalising.”

“I think we need to push awareness more and make sure we are contacting the veterans”

“We have added a question in our new patient pack as to whether they are a veteran. We are actively coding patients. Patients don’t ask us proactively to flag them though.”

A little too soon to tell at this time to give insight ...

How easy do you and / or your staff find it to flag veterans on your GP system?

- 4 practices said it was “Easy” and 5 said it was “Very easy” (from “Very difficult” to “Very easy”), 1 practice responded “Don’t know”

“It’s a relatively slow process to get veterans flagged - obviously from now on we will gather the data on the registration form but reaching currently registered patients is more tricky. We’ve put it on the waiting rooms screens and enlisted the help of the PPG.”

Is there any other insight you could give us regarding your practice's engagement with veterans?

“We have been doing this work for several years now as a project prior to the RCGP accreditation being rolled out. This is because I personally have an interest, having been brought up in a military family myself. We would love to get more patient participation and involvement with our PPG as I feel this would improve the number of coded veterans within our practice as well as help disseminating information of why this might be helpful for local veterans. We have had some very positive experiences with one patient being successfully treated and having ongoing support for long-standing PTSD via Combat Stress. I also think the work has enabled local psychiatry and psychology services to think differently about the issues military veterans might have with their mental health.”

“... the e-learning package was excellent, very easy to follow, and we look forward to increasing the communication with the veteran population”

“Our first application was lost in the system so had to re-apply. It worked the 2nd time. We have added a question to our registration form asking: if the person is a veteran. I have previous experience as have been involved in fund raising evenings for Combat Stress & have referred a patient to them. Our staff have been made more aware & we now have a folder on the computer where all notifications & updates are stored for reference purposes.”

“It was 'Easy' to get accredited, but only because I'd done a lot of training and teaching by the time I applied for accreditation. It's taken a lot of time and effort on my part but not on the part other surgery staff (who each attended just some teaching sessions and read some emails), so was easy for the rest of the staff. We've gone from 5 to over 80 coded veterans. My experience changed with them as soon as I knew about the health needs of veterans, rather than since accreditation - for information about that you'd have to speak to other doctors or nurses who aren't the Lead on the subject, as the Accreditation itself may have had more impact on them. It's the process of gaining accreditation that had the most impact, rather than the certificate itself (although that was a lovely motivator and boost!).”

Outcomes

What will we do?

- We will share our survey and responses with the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) project manager responsible for the rollout of the Veteran Friendly (VF) accreditation.
- We will share this with the existing VF accredited GP Practices.
- We will share these findings with Bucks CCG and the Bucks AFC Civilian Veteran Partnership Board.
- We will maintain a summary of Buckinghamshire VF accredited practices on our own website, for purposes of signposting.

Recommendations

- We recommend that the RCGP work with GP practices to find ways for veterans who are existing patients of a practice to get flagged, even if a practice is not VF accredited.
- We recommend that GP practices in general, specifically ask whether a patient is a veteran when taking on new patients - i.e. in the new patient forms. We believe that the RCGP can help in promoting and standardising this.

Acknowledgements

We thank those VF accredited GP practices who responded to our questionnaire. Our thanks also go Erica Albin, RCGP Veteran Friendly Project Manager for her initial views on this survey.

If you require this report in an alternative format, please contact us.

Address: Healthwatch Bucks

6 Centre Parade,
Place Farm Way,
Monks Risborough,
Buckinghamshire
HP27 9JS

Phone number: 01844 348 839

Email: info@healthwatchbucks.co.uk

Website URL: www.healthwatchbucks.co.uk

Twitter: @HW_Bucks

Facebook: HealthWatchBucks

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