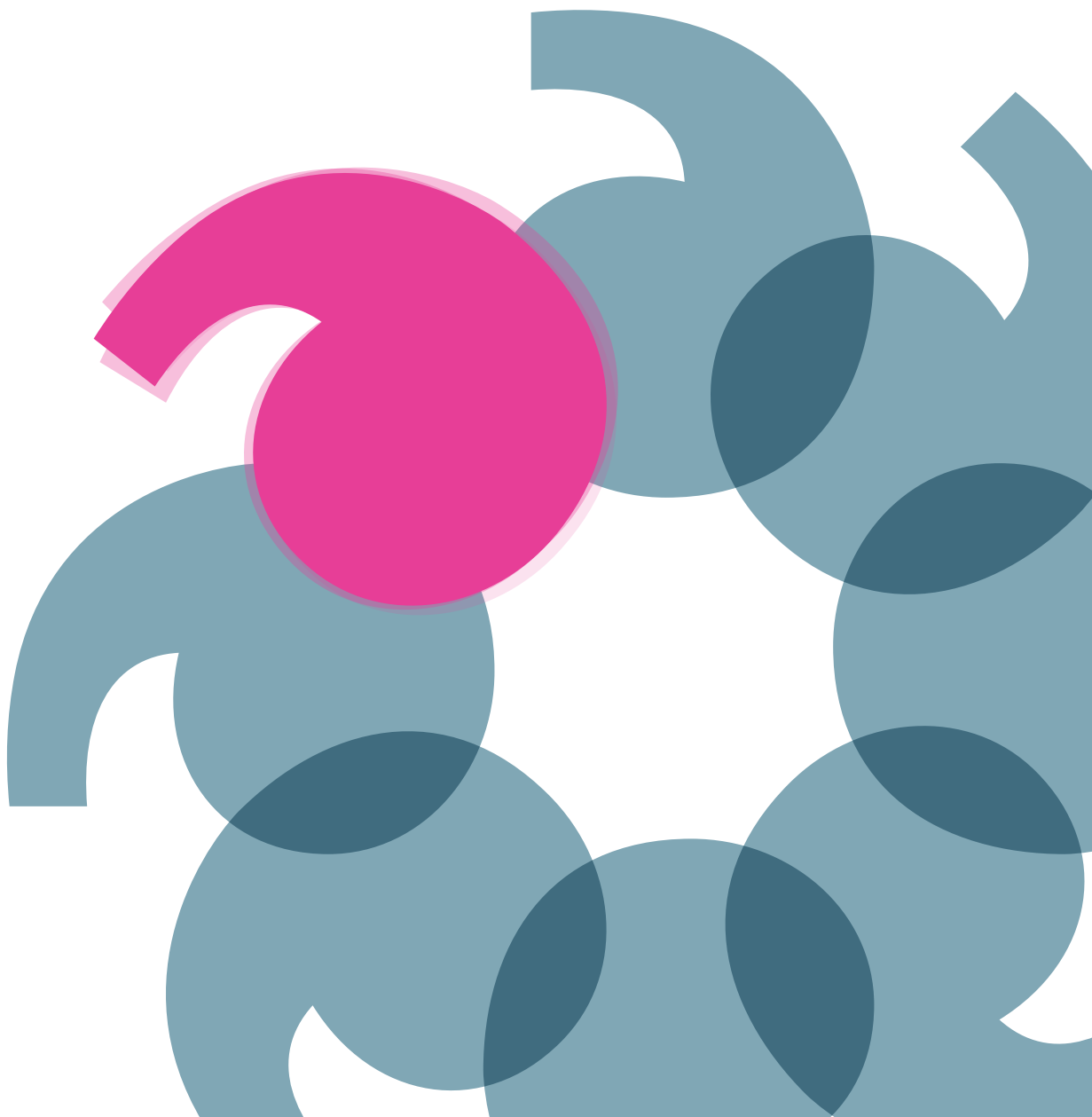# healthwatch
Islington

Summary of an analysis of Islington GP practice websites, March 2021

Introduction

This summary draws on the results of a March 2021 analysis of the websites of 32 NHS GP practices in Islington, and the information available to patients about online services. Although the analysis and this summary focus, but not exclusively, on the information and access pertinent to coronavirus, we are also aware that accessing help and support online will be an increasing feature of the doctor/patient interface. The information and help available to patients through the practice website and online services is likely to be increasingly important to meeting patient needs and contributing to their satisfaction with their practice.

In drawing on the analysis of the websites and online services for this summary, it has been important to consider and address that not all patients will be familiar or comfortable with online services and digital information. Nor will all patients have English as their first or familiar language, and access to translation of website contents can be crucial.

Geraldine Pettersson
Volunteer, Healthwatch Islington
March 2021

Key findings

1. Coronavirus pop-up

Twelve websites (40%) had the standard NHS coronavirus pop-up when first accessed. This pop-up links to other websites providing information on symptoms, testing and tracing, self-isolation, people at high risk, long-term effects of COVID-19, and social distancing and other measures.

Eight websites (27%) had introduced their own customised pop-up. Those that had been customised included information on:

- Not attending the surgery unless invited to do so by staff
- Downloading online help and using platforms such as e-consult and 'Dr.iQ'
- Coronavirus and safety measures, including for high-risk patients
- Access to NHS 111
- Vaccination priorities and reassurance that you will be contacted by the NHS about vaccination

The remaining websites did not have a pop-up on access but, in most, the home page has been customised to provide information about accessing their services and coronavirus. These include:

- Practical and up-to-date information about coronavirus, symptoms, safety measures, and NHS 111
- Messaging on not attending the surgery unless invited, how to consult your doctor online and other online help including Patient Access, 'Dr.iQ' and e-consult
- Information specific to the isolation of high risk or vulnerable patients
- Access to NHS and BBC Health websites for latest news
- Vaccination priorities, and instruction not to contact surgery regarding vaccinations, you will be contacted by the NHS
- Highlighting 'spotting a scam' to avoid being victim of fraud

A minority of websites (5) had little information about coronavirus, safety measures, COVID-19 vaccination, and the priorities for gaining access. The analysis of these websites reveals:

- Access to news through the NHS and BBC Health websites - the news items are often listed but there is no extract or comment on relevancy
- Access to NHS Health A to Z Leaflets
- Advice not to attend the surgery unless invited to do so

2. 'Business as usual' content can confuse coronavirus messaging

Hardly any of the websites had altered or updated their standard information (on opening hours, available services, and appointments, for example) to take account of the new circumstances arising from the pandemic. There were only two websites where the information on services was changed to give priority to online services and to tell patients not to attend unless invited. Although it is understood that practices could be reluctant to change the standard information because it is hoped the present arrangements are temporary, it is likely that current arrangements will extend longer than first envisaged. Patients not confident with accessing information from websites (or where English is not their first language) could be confused by information on the home page telling them not to attend in person, presented alongside sections providing information on opening hours, clinics, and services as though they can still be accessed face-to-face.

3. Out of date information can undermine confidence

Where websites link to newsletters, promote events, or reference other information, this content needs to be kept up to date. There were examples of this not happening on a small number of websites, for example a practice newsletter dating from 2017, a Patient Participation Group meeting taking place in 2017, an annual report for 2015, and surgery opening hours for Christmas 2019. Although time pressures may make updating the website difficult, where information is not current or is obviously out of date, this can impact on patients' confidence with the rest of the website.

4. Examples of good presentation of information

Where there was more information on the GP practice websites about coronavirus and associated measures, some good examples included:

▶ Information on the home page accessed through a section called the 'Covid Support Room' that included information for vulnerable patients and those with mental health concerns
▶ Access on the home page for Getting Help for You and Your Family – this was not specific to coronavirus but about health concerns generally
▶ Access from the home page to a section on 'Managing the risk of Transmission'
▶ One practice had a video about COVID-19 for patients with Learning Difficulties
▶ On the home page, a customised statement by the practice on 'Isolation of High Risk or Vulnerable Patients'
▶ Website included information from the British Islamic Association about the vaccination programme and priorities. Information was also focused to help address vaccination hesitancy
▶ Some websites gave good coverage to safety measures and linked to more information about this topic on Government and NHS websites
▶ Two practices used the home page to share information on how to 'spot a scam' by those trying to charge for the vaccine (which is free on the NHS)

Only about a third of websites had information about safety measures when visiting the practice or when out in the community. In part, the small number of websites providing this information is understandable because the key message is for patients not to visit the practice unless they are invited to do so and, presumably, they will then be told about the required safety measures. One practice in their newsletter stated clearly that they were only open for essential healthcare by appointment and provided information about safety in the community, as well as information on safety measures for visiting the practice, or if a nurse or doctor needed to attend you at home. The newsletter also stated that a free mask was available if the patient required it.

5. Lack of information for parents and carers

Unless the patient accesses the e-consult standard website (where there is a separate box with information about getting help for your child), there is almost no information immediately available on the home pages or the navigation menus about getting help for your child or for an older person being cared for. It would assist parents and carers if this was given greater prominence. The BBC News has referred to parents who have children shielding, and these parents said that they feel largely forgotten.

6. Covid Vaccinations

About half of the websites referred in in some way to the vaccination programme, and information on the vaccination programme has increased over time. The message is generally that patients will get contacted by the NHS and not to contact the GP practice for this. A number of websites also link to information on the NHS website on vaccination and the priority groups.

Only a small number of websites explained the importance of getting vaccinated or addressed the concerns that patients may have. Examples where the websites make more information available:

▶ One website had a separate menu heading for 'Novel Coronavirus' and included a section under this heading on Ramadan and the COVID-19 vaccination with questions and answers for the Muslim communities. The information came from the British Islamic Medical Association and included a section on 'answering the myths'.

▶ Language translation was not available on all websites (see later in this summary) but a small number did provide vaccination information from NHS leaflets in a full range of languages including Arabic, Polish, Igbo, and Nepali.

▶ One website included access to information entitled 'How was the Covid-19 vaccination developed so quickly' as one means of addressing hesitancy.

▶ One practice in a separate section on vaccinations explained that it was sending patients a link on their mobiles to book appointments and those without a mobile should contact the practice reception. However, separate information like this was not present in all websites seen.

▶ One website had a separate tab that provided access to information to address the concerns of Asian communities about the vaccine.

7. Contact details for GP practices

All of the websites provided at least minimal information on how to contact the practice (usually with a short reference to NHS 111 and emergencies 999). The information about e-consult was usually from that provider website, but generally had fairly limited information on what to expect. If someone is not familiar with the internet or does not have English as a first or familiar language, it may be difficult for them to understand exactly what will happen, or what to expect from an online consultation. There was also some mention of Dr.iQ and 'Virtually Healthcare' as other online services, usually with limited information extracted from the websites of those services. There were occasional examples of good practice:

▶ One practice had a separate tab for online services and had separate pages for 'Help from Reception Team: using e-consult Lite to explain your problem' that offered information on telephone assistance and the times when it was best to call.

▶ One practice website had e-consult and the NHS app on the home page and there was a tab for online services that explained its use and what to expect. It was also good practice that the standard information on appointments had been changed to focus on online and e-consult.

▶ On one website, there was good information provided by e-consult about what it is and how it works, and a patient-facing video that showed how it is possible to get a consultation and how that works.

8.   Translation

Translation services for the web content were not readily available on more than half the websites. There is often a tab on the home page that offers a translation service, but nothing happens when you click it. There were also some examples of good practice, with the home page and other website contents immediately translated into at least forty languages (one offers up to sixty languages). However, this was by no means standard practice.

9.   Links to other useful content

Although all websites gave access to NHS information and many to the BBC Health News, there was little access to other helpful websites. A small number of websites gave access to the British Islamic Medical Association. There were also a small number of websites that gave access to other sites for assistance such as: MIND, Mencap, NSPCC, and Domestic Violence helplines.

Healthwatch Islington is an independent organisation led by volunteers from the local community. It is part of a national network of Healthwatch organisations that involve people of all ages and all sections of the community.

We gather local people's views on the health and social care services that they use. We make sure those views are taken into account when decisions are taken on how services will look in the future, and how they can be improved.

https://www.healthwatchislington.co.uk