



Analysis of surgery websites across Suffolk

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Background

- This research was conducted between **March 2023 and August 2023** to assess the usability and accessibility of GP surgery websites across Suffolk.
- Following an initial research project, undertaken by Healthwatch Suffolk during 2020, the research was reviewed and expanded to include information outlined in NHS England's (NHSE) guidance for GP practices to ensure their websites provide the best possible user experience for patients. Advice on developing a website can be found at :
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/creating-a-highly-usable-and-accessible-gp-website-for-patients/>
- It should be noted that surgeries adapt and change their websites on an ongoing basis so although some information may have changed this research provides a snapshot of surgery websites during the period of the research.

Background

- A total of **70** surgery websites in Suffolk were researched during the **six-month period**, and 70 has been used as the basic unit for analytical purposes.
- The **current NHSE guidance** details specific key areas of importance, such as ease of navigation, the use of plain English, and a 'mobile first' approach, for example. Each website was looked at and **measured against these criteria** and the results analysed in this report. Thirty-seven different areas of interest were included.
- The research was in the form of a **desktop review**, based on one user's experience. The findings therefore are subjective but deemed valid as a good basis for further exploration and development. Recommendations have been made where relevant, based on the NHSE suggested guidelines.

Details of surgeries by locality

- Fifty-one per cent (36) of the surgeries are contracted to **PMS**, 33% (23) contracted to **GMS**, and 16% (11) to **GNS**.
- Sixty-three per cent (44) of the surgeries are **individual surgeries** and 36% (25) are **group surgeries**.
- When compared with the **NHS guidance** on websites 54% (38) of the surgeries had an NHS look and feel; 22% (15) did not, and 23% (16) broadly met the guidelines.

Location	Surgeries
Babergh	8
Forest Heath (one with St Edmundsbury)	7
Ipswich	11
Mid Suffolk	9
Suffolk Coastal	12
St Edmundsbury	11
Waveney	12
Total	70

Web hosts

Web host/provider used	Numbers	%
My Surgery	16	23%
Footfall	10	15%
Suffolk Primary Care	10	15%
FPM Group (My Surgery)	8	12%
Web Adore	6	9%
Top Dog Digital	5	7%
Tree View Designs	4	6%
IATRO	3	4%
Gen Pra	2	3%
Egton Digital	1	1%
MSW Digital	1	1%
Silver Monkey	1	1%
Surgery Link CNS Media	1	1%
NBTv	1	1%
Not clear	1	1%

There is no consistent use of **web hosts or providers**, although My Surgery, Footfall and Suffolk Primary Care provide most websites (as shown).

Is information easy to find?

- Information about **making appointments** was very easy to find in the majority of surgeries (69) and difficult to find in only one surgery.
- Information about **prescriptions and repeat prescriptions** was also easy to find, with the majority (69) of surgeries meeting the criteria.
- Ease of finding information showing **lists of specialisms and which practitioners could help with specific concerns** was mixed, with information being easy to find in 79% (55) of surgeries. We also found 11% (8) broadly making information easy to find, but 9% (6) of surgeries failed, with information being difficult to find.

Is information easy to find?

- The ease of finding information relating to getting **sick notes for work** was again very positive, and in 94% (66) surgeries it was easy to find. There was only 5% (3) where no information could be found. However, information could only be found in five surgeries by either clicking on eConsult under the 'Services We Offer' section, or the 'Appointments' section.
- **Test result information** on 90% (63) of websites was easy to find, and were difficult or could not be found in only 6% (6) of websites.
- Information about **new patient registration and joining information** was - in 99% (69) of surgery websites - easy to find, and could not be found in only one surgery .

Is information easy to find?

- However, **refugee support and signposting was difficult to find on 93% (65)** of websites, with only 7% (5) surgery websites having clear and easy to find information for refugees.
- Information about how to **contact the surgery** giving phone number/email address was easy to find on 96% (67) websites with only 4% (3) surgeries failing to make this information easily available.
- **Opening hours or out-of-hours** information was easily found on 96% (67) websites with only 4% (3) websites where it was either difficult or could not be found.
- Information about **disabled access** was easy to find on 67% (47) websites but was not easily found or could not be found on 33% (23) websites.

Ease of access to Ask my GP/eConsult and online requests

The main systems used are:

eConsult: 46 surgeries

askmyGP: 13 surgeries

SystemOnline: 15 surgeries

Own online: 6 surgeries

Patches: 1 surgery

Different systems: 2 surgeries

There was no consistency in the use of online systems processing online requests for advice and appointments.

The numbers are skewed because several surgeries used two systems, and often the pages opened on different tabs, and others the same tab or window, while some navigated from the main site.

Since the review was undertaken, one surgery has announced it will be launching a new online appointment system in 2024 named Anima, which is being used by surgeries across England.

Do websites meet the NHS Accessibility Standard criteria?

- 76% (53) of surgeries had **accurate and up-to-date content**; 20% did not; 3% (2) was mixed with some updated and some not, and 16% (11) surgeries did not have up to date content on their websites.
- 83% (58) of surgeries had **clear and accessible content and layout**; in 14% (10) surgeries the content was not clear and accessible, and in 3% (2) it was broadly OK with some issues.
- **Ease of navigation around the website** for the majority 87% (61) of surgeries navigation was good, with only 3% (2) exhibiting problems with navigation.
- **Content is concise and plain English is used** in 63% (44) of the websites. Only 9% (6) did not meet the criteria at all. However, 28% (20) of surgery websites were mixed, with some sections meeting the criteria and others not.

Do websites meet the NHS Accessibility Standard criteria?

- 71% (50) of websites had a satisfactory **translation facility**. All these websites used Google Translate and four were mobile friendly. There was either no translation facility - or it could not be found - on 29% (20) of websites.
- There is a satisfactory **search facility** on 73% (51) websites, but it was not satisfactory or not available on the other 27% (19) websites.
- 70% (50) of the websites are **mobile friendly** and 10% (7) give a mixed experience and 19% (13) did not prove to be mobile friendly.
- Only a small number of websites – around 12% (8) - **use pop-up boxes**, with the majority 88% (62) not using them at all.
- **Warning callouts** were only used by a minority - 19% (13) - of websites. Warning call outs could not be found on 80% (56) of websites.

Services offered, guidance or health information, and signposting

- **Up-to-date COVID information** was available on 67% (47) of websites; it was not available on 9% (6); difficult or unable to find on 11% (8) of websites, and out-of-date on 13% (9) of surgery websites.
- Information about **social prescribing** was available on 47% (33) of websites, not available on 24% (17), and difficult or unable to find on 29% (20) of other websites.
- **Cancer support and information links to local support** was easily accessible on 47% (33) of websites, 26% (18) had no information included, and in 26% (19) of cases, the information could not be found.
- Information about **social prescribing** was available on 47% (33) of websites, not available on 24% (17), and difficult or unable to find on 29% (20) other websites.

Practice policies, feedback, and patient participation information

- 99% (69) of the websites had clear details about their **privacy notice and GDPR policy**.
- **Care record information** was also very accessible on 99% (69) of websites. It was difficult and could not be found on one surgery website.
- Information about the **PCN (primary care network)** was easily accessible on 61% (43) of the websites; it was difficult to find on 36% (25) websites, and could not be found on 3% (2) websites.

Practice policies, feedback, and patient participation information

- Information about **patient participation** was accessible on 92% (64) of websites, and not available or difficult to find on 8% (6) of the websites.
- Information on how to **complain or make comments** was clearly and easily accessible on all 70 (100%) of the websites.
- The **Healthwatch Suffolk widget or link to the Feedback Centre or a web page** was available on 66% (46) of websites, but did not appear on 34% (24) of them.

Concluding observations

- It is **important that websites are updated regularly** to ensure that patients have accurate and up-to-date information about their surgeries that can be relied on.
- Language should be **easy to read** and in **plain English** to ensure that everyone can understand what the information is telling them.
- There is very little information and advice for **immigrants** and **asylum seekers**. These are patients possibly in most need of guidance and information.

Concluding observations

- Many surgeries do not have a **search facility**, making navigation more difficult and time-consuming. A search facility can **facilitate ease of navigation** across the website and ensure that patients can find the specific information they need quickly and easily.
- However, for group practices, where several surgery websites are linked to the overarching group, the **search facility could cause difficulties**. Generic group information was often returned in the results, rather than some of the surgery-specific information that was being sought. Results also tended to navigate away from the individual surgery website to the group site, which wasn't always obvious and impacted further navigation.
- **Online requests** could be made **more consistent** and easier to navigate to make it easier for patients and surgeries to be more flexible.

Concluding observations

- While signposting was good on many of the sites, this was often a link to general or national resources. Many of the GP websites would benefit from **expanding their signposting links** to specific local services. While it is recognised that this is not always easy to maintain, with services becoming out of date, it was felt to be an important consideration.
- One of the issues identified is that advice and local support for those diagnosed with **dementia** and their carers is not available on many websites.
- Where surgeries have developed leaflets giving patient information online and on registration, these leaflets give patients a full description about **all aspects of the surgery offer**, and can be downloaded or given as paper copy to ensure the patient is fully informed.



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