Healthwatch Portsmouth review of GP surgery websites in Portsmouth

August 2023 – December 2023

Contents

1. Introduction

In August 2023 NHS England updated their publication "[Creating a highly usable and accessible GP website for patients](#)," encouraging patients to continue using online channels. Useability is important because GP websites are now the front door to NHS care for many patients. 62% of patients visited their GP website in 2022 (GP Patient Survey 2022). Nearly one in five people in England reported to have a disability, making accessibility an essential consideration of all services, online journeys and websites. (ONS census 2021 England and Wales)

"NHS England outlined key challenges for the NHS that ease of use gives patients confidence in the system and encourages them to use these channels again. "

 "GP websites no longer exist just to display information; they are becoming places where patients can complete tasks. This shift to being places where you can provide services makes websites a valuable tool for practices and worthy of time and effort to ensure they are optimised."

Healthwatch Portsmouth (HWP) developed this project in carrying out its statutory functions.

- To obtain the views of people about their needs and experience of local health and social care services.
- To make these views known to those involved in the commissioning and scrutiny of care services.
- To make reports and make recommendations about how those services could or should be improved.

1.1 Background and relevant HWP previous reports

In November 2020, Healthwatch Portsmouth recommended:
- Further analysis of the variation in quality across the Primary Care Networks (PCNs).
- Service improvement and development on the provision of patient information on GP surgery websites urgently takes place so that people feel informed and confident to access medical help.

March 2022 Recommendations
- A need for GP website development to ensure that information is accessible in different language formats.
- Homepages need to be refreshed and renewed to avoid becoming cluttered with information.

- Website development should look at the number of words being written, and required to read, and look to convey information in other formats, such as audio, video, animation and slides.

1.2 This survey

Healthwatch Portsmouth decided to do further testing of GP websites serving Portsmouth and record whether people found they could achieve a task "easily" , through to "with some difficulty" in relation to the Government's updated guidance, "to create a highly usable and accessible GP website for patients" and to make recommendations for improvement. The review was also looking at the principles set by NHS England for good content, in that each GP practice website;
- explains, in plain English, what patients need to know and do.
- is concise.
- is up to date and accurate.
- is written in plain English to a reading age of 9 to 11 years old.

2. Methodology

This survey was done by Healthwatch Portsmouth between August and December as an observation and was carried out in a non-invasive way by visiting the GP surgery websites online and looking at the accessibility of the information within a checklist drawn from NHSE guidance on useability.

All the information is in the public domain and all data collected remains in the public domain, therefore no explicit consent was required from the surgeries by Healthwatch Portsmouth.

An experienced group of Healthwatch Portsmouth volunteers were involved in the coproduction of survey questions which were designed to evaluate the GP practices websites for the stated purpose of the research.

We invited HWP Volunteers, subscribers to the HWP newsletter and published an opportunity on our website for members of the public to get involved. There was no requirement or expectation that any reviewer had previous experience of visiting a GP website. A total of 43 people have given us their views, completing the 9 question survey that HWP set for this review exercise.

The review was carried out on mobile phones; NHS England recommends a 'mobile first' approach as it pushes to make digital products more readable on smaller screens and therefore easier for most users.

2.1 The results

Please see separate document for detailed results of the review findings.

2.2 Summary

Question 1. 62% of reviewers found the websites easy to understand.

	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very easy		32.56%	14
2	Easy		30.23%	13
3	Neither easy nor difficult		23.26%	10
4	Difficult		11.63%	5
5	Very difficult		2.33%	1

Question 2. 65% of reviewers found key contact details easy to access.

	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very easy		34.88%	15
2	Easy		30.23%	13
3	Neither easy nor difficult		20.93%	9
4	Difficult		9.30%	4
5	Very difficult		4.65%	2

Question 3. 48% of reviewers found websites up to date.

	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		48.84%	21
2	No		25.58%	11
3	Don't know		25.58%	11

Question 4. 63% of reviewers found "Calls to action" or beginning a task easy.

	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very easy		30.23%	13
2	Easy		32.56%	14
3	Neither easy nor difficult		23.26%	10
4	Difficult		11.63%	5
5	Very difficult		2.33%	1

Question 5. 49% of reviewers found the Search Box was visible.

	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		48.84%	21
2	No		13.95%	6
3	Don't know		37.21%	16

Question 6. 65% of reviewers found the "Menu" box visible and sections clear.

	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very easy		32.56%	14
2	Easy		32.56%	14
3	Neither easy nor difficult		25.58%	11
4	Difficult		6.98%	3
5	Very difficult		2.33%	1

Question 7. 63% of reviewers found the Homepage "highly useable".

	Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very easy		27.91%	12
2	Easy		34.88%	15
3	Neither easy nor difficult		18.60%	8
4	Difficult		13.95%	6
5	Very difficult		4.65%	2

Question 8. 33% of reviewers found information on Extended Access Service (EAS) easy to find.

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very easy		16.28%	7
2	Easy		16.28%	7
3	Neither easy nor difficult		30.23%	13
4	Difficult		32.56%	14
5	Very difficult		4.65%	2

Question 9. 21% of reviewers found Pop Up banners created difficulty.

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		21.05%	4
2	No		78.95%	15
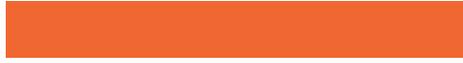
2.3 Discussion

The option to choose the response "neither easy or difficult" or "don't know" has often been used, at and above 25% of responses. This may be that the reviewers were unsure how to rate their own ability and experience, or these responses contribute to a total result that points to reviewers having some difficulty using the GP surgery websites. Self-rating is purely subjective, and this result is open to interpretation and therefore has this limitation.

The results indicate that there are key challenges to GP website design in the Portsmouth locality, this includes the essentials i.e. content being up to date, being easy to understand, making it easy for patients to begin a task, being able to search the website and use the menu box. HWP would like more people to find the and finding the website 'highly useable' as per the updated NHSE 2023 guidance on content.

3. Recommendations

1) The results indicate the need for localised ongoing website development and testing in line with the August 2023 NHSE recommendations (pl see above), that "there is ongoing testing of the accessibility of GP websites".

2) An accessibility statement should be present on the website.

3) Where the percentage was low of people being able to easily find information on the GP surgery website we recommend that engaging content on the particular topic should be included on the home page to aid searchability. (pl see response to Question 8)

4) GPs should pay for support from their website provider (or have a process in place) to regularly review, upload and check all content and images. This is to ensure they are loaded appropriately and are accessible.

5) GPs could be contracting third parties to provide that service to relieve the burden on practice teams.

6) GP practices should ask for accessibility support from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board which commissions primary care services across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. HWP hope that accessibility expertise will be available in the local integrated health and care system to support GP practices to think through and test accessibility.

4. Conclusion

It is difficult to gauge the improvement in ease of access on using GP surgery websites since HWP made its recommendations in March 2020 and November 2022. We had produced a set of questions based on what we thought at the time would be useful information for patients to be able to search for on GP surgery websites. With the introduction of the August 2023 NHSE guidelines we had a benchmark of new principles for good content, as set by NHSE, to use in our August to December review of GP surgery websites. Healthwatch Portsmouth will enter into ongoing discussion on this key area with local system primary care leads to call for further improvements in GP website useability and very importantly amplify the call for support that GP surgeries will need to achieve it.

Healthwatch Portsmouth
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