

Healthwatch Sefton working with and listening to People First Merseyside members talk to us about their GP services. 2024

Healthwatch Sefton

**We believe that health and social care providers
can best improve services by listening to
people's experiences**

We spoke to and heard from 17 People First Merseyside members, representing people with a learning disability – this is what they had to tell us about accessing their GP services.



We talked about the GP patient self-check-in facility and asked members how they felt about it:

- 5 of the 17 members said that when they had tried to ask a receptionist to check them in, they had been told 'to go and check-in at the machine'. 2 members said that they felt able to tell the receptionist they had a learning disability.
- It was shared by members that staff don't know if you have used the patient check-in machine incorrectly. You are not then checked in and you miss your appointment.

We had a discussion around booking appointments. Here is what members had to say:

- A member shared they felt it frustrating when ringing the GP. When you finally get through they say 'no appointments are left'. Other members agreed. The member stated there is only one doctor who understands her.
- Booking appointments on-line: members shared that this is great for patients who can use it, but asked because of this system, is that why there are no appointments left when they ring?

We asked members if they were aware of being able to ask for reasonable adjustments?

- Members shared that they are aware they can ask for reasonable adjustments, which includes asking for longer appointments, BUT felt other people with learning disabilities may not know this.
- The Red Flag system was discussed – It was asked by members why the red flag system is not working? It was reported that there are still patients who need this who are not registered and that systems across the NHS still do not talk to each other. One member stated that they had asked their doctor based in Bootle to put a note on their records to say they had a learning disability but this still hasn't been done, even though the hospital had implemented it.

Members were asked if they had access to medication reviews:

- 3 of the 17 members said that they had received a medication review. 1 member could not remember ever getting one.



Below are some of the experiences shared:

A Bootle surgery – ‘The surgery invited me to book a face-to-face appointment for my asthma review. I used the app and got the option of face-to-face and different dates. I can use online and understand it so I am impressed’.

- Other members of People First Merseyside commented that they would not be able to use the online service.

A Litherland surgery – ‘My inhalers sometimes have no numbers on them and I cannot hear if they have run out. I have a lot of medication / inhalers in my cupboard and don’t know if I am using out of date inhalers’.

A Netherton surgery – ‘They take their time with me and talk to me. I get my checks with the doctors and nurses’.

A Litherland surgery – ‘I have to take thyroxine and blood pressure tablets. I cannot swallow tablets and have to try and cut them myself. I cut myself with the knife trying to take them. I have told the doctors. There are not many doctors there now’.

Questions and comments from members included:

- How are patients with a learning disability told that they can ask for longer appointments?
- Are staff being trained to recognise patients with a learning disability or other hidden disabilities?
- A number of members in the group said that through their involvement with People First Merseyside, they felt comfortable asking the receptionist to book them in for their appointment.
- It was suggested that staff in the GP reception need to be willing to show patients who struggle to use the patient self check-in system. It was shared by members that some patients with a learning disability cannot use the check-in system and that they felt staff were not trained to help patients with a learning disability.
- Booking appointments online, members shared that this is great for patients who can use it but asked because of this system is that why there are no appointments left when they ring?
- Medication reviews for patients with a learning disability – is there a policy in place for this?



OFFER FROM PEOPLE FIRST MERSEYSIDE:

- People First Merseyside helps train GP surgery staff. We teach them how to support patients with learning disabilities and / or autism.
- Our commissioned bespoke training can be half a day or a full day.
- We make the training fit what each surgery needs and cover topics like health action plans, reasonable adjustments and patient experiences.

RESPONSE FROM NHS CHESHIRE & MERSEYSIDE:

Thank you for sharing the report about People First Merseyside's experience of using GP services in Sefton, it's a really valuable report and we will share with our practices and use the themes within the report to shape our plans for the next year. I have covered the main areas raised below:

Identification of patients with a Learning Disability.

All practices have a register of patients with a Learning Disability, this will ensure that anyone involved in the care of the patient within the practice can see this. Unfortunately as the report notes, there are still improvements to be made in how our digital systems share information across both Health and Social Care. We are involved in work across Cheshire and Merseyside to start using the connected care record which if we can start to roll out will help.

Reasonable Adjustments

Appointment times : We don't have a formal mechanism in place letting people know they can ask for longer appointments but would encourage patients to request this if they feel it would be helpful.

Staff Training : staff do receive training about Learning Disabilities and across Cheshire and Merseyside we are looking to roll out the Oliver McGowan Training. This is an ongoing process due to the turnover of staff. We have recently expanded our protected learning time training to bring in other staff groups (it was previously focused on GPs and practice managers). People First did provide training for the Medicines Management team a while back and this was very well received.

Online check in: all our practices have a Digital Champion identified. This role is to promote use of digital systems and they are available to support patients who want to use any of the online services in the practice. Patients can ask the reception team if they would like this support.

Appointments - Online: demand for appointments in our surgeries remains very high. As part of the work we are doing on access practices have been asked to review their mix of appointments to make sure that all three methods are offered (face to face, phone and on line), in a mix that supports the needs of the patients at that practice. Each of these methods needs to be factored into the available workforce for the day.

Medication reviews for patients with a learning disability:

Any patient can request a medication review if they feel it would be helpful and some of the examples included in the report would benefit from a review. Patients can ask at reception as all practices have access to a pharmacist in practice.

Next steps.

We will share this report in our GP bulletin so that all practices can see the feedback, alongside this we will remind practices about the importance of supporting patients with their digital champions. Through the work of People First it would be very helpful if they could share the messages about the digital champions and access to medication reviews. We are just in the process of writing our Local Quality Contract for 25/26 – this is scheme that all practices participate in and we focus on areas where we feel we need some targeting work. Learning Disabilities has been included for many years and we will review the themes in this report to see if we need to focus on these in next years scheme. Thank you for the offer of training, we will review the plans for next years training programme alongside the mandated training and will come back to you if you can support us further.

Thank you to all the members who took the time to contribute as its only by hearing their experiences that we can shape our services to better meet their needs.

Regards,

Jan Leonard. Associate Director– Primary Care and Community Integration. Sefton Place.

We are supporting People First Merseyside to put forward their questions and concerns relating to GP services to NHS Cheshire and Merseyside (Sefton) to respond to.

Healthwatch Sefton

We value inclusivity. Listening to the first-hand experiences of diverse groups improves care for everyone

Healthwatch Sefton

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