

Herne Hill Road Medical Practice

Enter and View Visit



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Visit Information

Location

Herne Hill Road Medical Practice

1-2 Herne Hill Road

London SE24 0AU

Surgery Contact

Stacey Henry, Operations Manager

Kerry Blake, Assistant Practice Manager

Date and Time of Visit

9:00am-12:00pm, Wednesday 19th February 2025

Healthwatch Lambeth Authorised Representatives

Eulalia Gonzalez, Project Coordinator

Anna D'Agostino, Engagement Officer

Caroline O'Neill, Engagement Officer

Kate Gosling, Healthwatch Lambeth Volunteer

About Healthwatch Lambeth

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care in Lambeth. We are here to make sure people running services and those who have the power to change services listen to local feedback, put people at the centre of care, and improve services so that they better meet people's needs, now and into the future.

What is Enter and View?

Our Enter and View programme involves visiting publicly funded health and social care services in Lambeth, such as GP surgeries, hospitals, pharmacies, or care homes, to see what is going on and talk to service users, their relatives, and carers, as well as staff.

Every local Healthwatch has the legal power to carry out Enter and View visits. Enter and View visits are not inspections. We focus on what it is like for people receiving care, what works well and what can be improved to make people's experiences better. We provide extra eyes and ears, especially for the most isolated and vulnerable. We do this by observing the quality of the service and by talking to service users, their relatives, and carers, as well as staff.

These visits provide a snapshot rather than a full assessment of care over time. The visits provide insight and recommendations, from a patient or service user perspective, for improvement, which service providers and commissioners should consider and respond to constructively, as part of their commitment to quality improvement and patient-centred care.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all the staff at Herne Hill Road Medical Practice who facilitated the Enter and View visit. A special thank you goes to all individual participants who have given their time to share their experience. Their feedback is key in helping improve the care they receive.

Methodology

Healthwatch Lambeth Enter and View Representatives made an announced visit to Minet Green Health Practice on Wednesday, 19th February 2025. We heard feedback from 8 patients, 6 carers and 9 staff members.

Preparation for the Visit

Ahead of the visit we met with the Herne Hill Road Medical Practice Operations Manager and Assistant Practice Manager to obtain background information about the practice. We also reviewed the practice website to understand the hours of operation and services available to patients.

Data Collection

Observation

A portion of the visit on the day was observational, involving the authorised representatives walking around the public/communal areas and observing the surroundings and using their senses. This included a checklist to assess whether the environment was inclusive of, and accessible to, all residents using guiding principles from the Patient Led Assessment of the Care Environment (PLACE) Assessment¹.

These principles relate to assessing whether the environment was inclusive of, and accessible to, all residents, including people with learning disabilities, memory loss, as well as varied visual and spatial abilities.

In-person discussions with patients and staff

Feedback from patients and staff was obtained through face-to-face conversations on the day of the visit.

Participation

Healthwatch Lambeth Enter and View Representatives made an announced visit to Herne Hill Road Medical Practice on 19th February 2025.

Informal interviews were conducted in the practice waiting area with patients and in a meeting room with staff. Healthwatch Lambeth representatives spoke with 7 staff members and 8 patients during the Enter & View visit, and 6 carers. For the purpose of our findings, we are combining the feedback from patients and carers into one group comprising of 14 patients/carers.

Many of the patients/carers interviewed many been registered with the practice for a considerable amount of time, with 3 registered at the practice for over 10 years. Two others have been with the practice for 6-10 years, and two for 3-5

¹ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/areas-of-interest/estates-and-facilities/patient-led-assessments-of-the-care-environment-place>

years. Only one patient we spoke to has been registered at the practice for less than a year.

English is not a first language for six of the patients/carers we spoke to. Patients/carers reported their first languages to be Portuguese, Spanish, Hausa, Farsi, and Mandarin.

The seven staff members interviewed were in both clinical and non-clinical roles. The longest-standing staff member we spoke with had been working at Herne Hill Road Medical Practice for 27 years, whilst the newest staff member had been in their role for 6 months.

Profile of participants

We collected demographic profile information from all those who provided feedback (see Table 1), summarised below.

- Most participants who provided feedback were women (both patients and staff)
- All staff included in the interviews were female and ranged in age from 35-69.
- The age range of patients we spoke to was predominantly 30-49

Strengths and Limitations

The insight discussed in this report was provided by a small portion of patients, and therefore, we cannot assume that the feedback is reflective of all patients registered at Herne Hill Road Medical Practice. Rather, it provides a snapshot in time and the lived experience of those patients who did provide comments.



Table 1: Profile of participants

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Patients/Carers (n=14)</i>	<i>Staff (n=7)</i>
Age		
18-24	-	-
25-49	6	4
50-64	-	2
65-79	1	1
80+	-	-
Gender		
Man	1	0
Woman	8	7
Ethnic Group		
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	-	-
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	-	-
Asian/Asian British: Indian	-	-
Asian/Asian British: Other	-	-
Black/Black British African	1	-
Black/Black British Caribbean	-	1
Latin American	2	-
White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh	2	6
White: Any other White background	1	-
Sexual Orientation		
Gay	-	-
Heterosexual/Straight	5	7
Prefer not to say	-	-
Other Characteristics		
English as a first language	3	7
Disability	1	1
Long term condition	-	1
Carer	1	1

NB: Data presented is based on those who answered profile questions and not the whole sample. Some participants answered all questions, whilst others preferred not to provide a response to some of the questions.

Practice Overview

The Herne Hill Road Medical Practice staff team were very friendly and welcomed Healthwatch Lambeth Enter and View authorised representatives on the day of the visit.

Location and public access

Herne Hill Road Medical Practice is located at 103 Herne Hill Road, London SE24. The core practice opening hours are 8am–6:30pm Monday–Friday, with extended opening hours offered on a Wednesday from 7:30am–7:30pm.

The practice is located a 4-minute walk from Loughborough Junction Station. A bus stop is located outside the practice with one bus, the P4, that connects Brixton to Lewisham. Many other buses also stop at Loughborough Junction station.

There is no on-site car park; however, free on-street parking is available outside of the hours of 12–2pm each day. The practice ensures no clinics run at these times. Dedicated drop-off locations and Blue Badge parking were not obvious on our visit. It may be helpful to have information about drop-off locations and parking available on the practice website or signage outside the building.

Patient population

There are approximately 7,000 patients registered with Herne Hill Road Medical Practice.

Services available

The practice is staffed by 6 GP partners, 3 nurses, 2 health care assistants, 2 pharmacists, 3 managers and 5 administrative staff.

Herne Hill Road Medical Practice Patient Participation Group (PPG) was being re-established at the time of our visit, with the first meeting scheduled for 11th March 2025.

Practice website

The practice website is clearly laid out and informative. The address and contact details of the practice are easily accessible. The practice CQC rating (Good) is clearly visible on the website. New patient registration is available through an online tool, and information is provided on registering without ID or proof of address. There is guidance for individuals who may need help with their appointment, such as if there is a particular health professional they want to see, if they need an interpreter or if they have any other access or communication needs.

The website includes sections such as Appointments, Prescriptions, Services, About Page, Register, and Contact. The Wellbeing Centre page on the website offers self-referral services and local health resources, while the news section provides updates on health topics.

Patients can request repeat prescriptions via the NHS App, Patient Access App, or by email. The practice website encourages patients to nominate a pharmacy for collection and provides guidance on medication reviews and prescription charges.

In terms of website accessibility, the practice has published an accessibility statement, including information about an Accessibility Test conducted on the website. Patients are asked to contact the practice directly if they need help with their appointment, such as interpreter services or other access requirements.

Overall, the Herne Hill Road Medical Practice website provides a clear, user-friendly, and informative experience, ensuring patients can efficiently manage their healthcare needs. There is a page on the practice website describing what Patient Participation Groups are and directs patients who are interested in joining the group to call the practice.



Findings

External Environment

Herne Hill Road Medical Practice is clearly signposted with a large sign directly above the entrance to the building. The practice is located on a main road, and the external environment is very clean, tidy, and well-maintained.

To enter the practice, you need to press a large button which opens the front door automatically. There is no signage to alert you to this, which may be helpful to some patients/carers. There is a secondary door which requires manual opening to enter the reception and waiting area. Staff keep an eye on this area of the building and assist any patients/carers who need help to open this door.

Internal Environment and Waiting Area

As you enter the practice, the reception desk is located on your left, and an electronic sign-in device is positioned directly opposite the reception desk. This was not very clearly signposted, but returning patients knew how to use it.

A Hearing Loop is available at the reception counter. A sign indicating the availability of hearing loops is displayed on the first window you encounter at the reception desk.

There are two waiting areas in the practice, the largest is located on the ground floor and is used for patients with appointments on the ground floor, whilst the secondary, smaller waiting area is located upstairs for patients whose appointments are in clinical rooms on the second floor. The second floor is accessible via stairs or an elevator.

The downstairs waiting area is sufficiently sized with 15 chairs arranged in a very tidy manner. Most seats are wooden without armrests, one with armrests. There is adequate space for wheelchair users to navigate and find a place to wait for their appointments. The upstairs waiting area has 9 plastic chairs, one with armrests. The waiting area is much smaller, with adequate space for wheelchair users to wait for their appointment.

Two hand hygiene stations are available, one as you enter the practice waiting area downstairs and another in the waiting area upstairs. A Blood Pressure monitor, which also measures height, weight, and BMI, is positioned in the downstairs waiting area for patients to use. A defibrillator is located in Room 1 downstairs; a staff member gave us this information, as there is no signage to indicate this to patients.

A compliments/complaints box is located next to the reception desk, with paper available for patients to write on. No pens were available, so patients would need to ask a member of staff for something to write with. Staff check the box for feedback weekly. Magazines are available in the corner of the downstairs waiting area.

The waiting area was generally tidy and clean; we did not observe any dirt, marks, dust, or scuffs. The practice is cleaned daily (excluding Sundays), with positive feedback from staff about the general cleanliness and upkeep of the environment. Reception staff also reported that they help with immediate issues using spill kits and gloves.

Signage and information

The reception desk is split into three distinct areas with signage indicating that each window serves a different purpose. However, we witnessed only one staff member behind the desk at any time.

The main fire exit for the practice is the front door of the building. There is sticker signage (not illuminated) directing patients from the downstairs waiting area. There is one sign in the stairwell directing to the fire exit, but no signage in the upstairs waiting area. There is additional signage to another exit on the ground floor, which is also kept clear and free from obstruction.

Information was available in a variety of formats in the waiting area, including notice boards, TV screens and posters placed directly on wall surfaces. Posters and information are displayed from the NHS, local community groups, and health service providers. Pinboards of information are dedicated to: Domestic Abuse, HIV Awareness, Blood Pressure and Patient Liaison. Individual posters covered awareness of services (flu vaccine, NHS app, alternative ways of booking, smoking cessation) and of conditions (hearing loss, Chagas disease, types of cancer).

There are many flyers available for patients in the waiting area, which are well laid out and tidy. It is obvious someone is giving this area attention and maintenance. The practice waiting area is a good opportunity to learn what is available in the local area, such as literacy courses, digital skills workshops, health projects, and health screening options. The practice also had posters about being a Safe Surgery and offering support for domestic violence, written in many languages.

Two TV screens are mounted directly above each other on the same wall of the downstairs waiting area. One was not in use, and the other was showing a range of information. The volume was very low and not audible. The videos did not have subtitles. Occasionally, the screen showed a message about waiting times and showed that the practice was “on track.” However, this information appeared to be outdated.

There is one TV screen in the waiting area upstairs. The videos screened covered topics such as antibiotics awareness, 5 steps for Mental Health, Pharmacy First, “Choose Well” and COVID-19 awareness. The volume was very loud and played constantly.

These screens were also used to call patients to their appointments by displaying their name and consultation room number. This information flashed on screen briefly, and we witnessed more than one patient miss their name come up on the screen or see their name but not the room number and needed to check these details with reception.

Toilets

There are two toilets located downstairs and one upstairs at Herne Hill Road Medical Practice. One of the toilets downstairs is accessible and contains a baby change table.

There is no obvious directional signage to the toilets when sitting in the downstairs waiting area. However, when you enter the hallway off the waiting area, there is signage to the toilets, and they are easy to find. The toilet upstairs is indicated by a sign at the top of the doorframe with a logo.

The toilet doors are labelled with a blue sign and the words "Toilet" and "Accessible WC" downstairs, and upstairs, the toilet is labelled with "Patients WC." It is very clear to read the signage; however, there are many posters on the doors, which may make it difficult for some patients to find the signage easily. There is no visual image of a male/female/wheelchair or toilet symbol.

Inclusive Design

Whilst Herne Hill Road Medical Practice is not a specialist dementia setting, we conducted observations in alignment with the dementia friendly sections of the Patient Led Assessments of the Care Environment (PLACE) checklist¹ as well as a range of quality indicators identified by the Alzheimer's Society². These principles relate to assessing whether the environment is inclusive of, and accessible to, all patients, including people with learning disabilities, memory loss, as well as varied visual and spatial abilities. This assessment was undertaken in the waiting areas.

Floors

The waiting area floors are coloured grey with a non-slip matte effect and not shiny or patterned, making them suitable for patients affected by dementia. There was a slight speckled effect; however, this should not impact patient navigation.

Décor

The floors are a grey colour and the walls are white, giving little contrast to distinguish the two. The furniture was primarily blue, which does provide contrast for patients.

The doors, including the toilet doors, are all wood and are distinguishable from the wall to make it easy for patients affected by dementia to navigate. The only exception is the elevator door, which is the same colour as the walls, white, and does not contrast.

The only light switches available to patients are in the toilets, which are coloured white, the same colour as the walls, offering no contrast between elements to assist patient navigation.

² [Dementia Friendly Environment Checklist.pdf](#)

The toilets were white with a white seat. The flush handle was silver, as were the sink taps (see photos). The sink and hand drying facilities were also white. These features were contrastable with the floor, which was a grey colour, but the contrast between different elements is not clear.

There is no clock visible in either the downstairs or upstairs waiting areas.

Signage

Many signs in the waiting area were placed at the recommended 4ft from the ground, which is considered eye level for most people. Directional signage is consistently coloured blue or has a large font size, making it easy to be seen by patients. There was no tactile signage.

Signs on the toilet doors were consistent in their colour, height, and font; they could only be improved with the addition of images as well as text.

Patient Interactions

Healthwatch Lambeth observed patient and staff member interactions during the visit. Staff were friendly and welcoming to all patients. It was obvious that some patients were well known to staff by the familiar and warm way they greeted them.

Patients name and consultation room is displayed on the TV screen in the waiting area when it is time for their appointment. This information flashes on screen relatively quickly and is accompanied by a gentle ding in the waiting area upstairs. The volume on the TV in the downstairs waiting area is very low, and it wasn't obvious if there was an audible noise to notify patients of their appointment. We observed several people miss their names being called on the screen.

It is not clearly signposted that patients must check in on arrival. However, to get to the seats in the waiting area, patients do walk past the reception desk. An electronic check-in machine is available for patients; it is mounted on the wall directly opposite the reception desk, which you must walk past to get to it. There is no obvious signage to this machine; however, we observed many patients head straight there to check themselves in, whilst others went straight to the reception desk.

The seating area of the waiting room is very open and located close to the reception desk, making it difficult for patients to have a confidential conversation at the reception desk without being overheard by other patients.

Patient & Staff feedback

Service Provision

After-hours support

Patients have access to extended hours appointments on Wednesday evenings until 7:30 pm and Saturdays. Patients requiring support outside of practice hours are signposted to NHS 111 or Seldoc Healthcare, who provide after-hours support. The practice reserves some appointment times for appointments following NHS 111 referrals.

Physical accessibility

Herne Hill Road Medical Practice has many features which assist with accessibility, including:

- Touch-to-enter systems.
- Accessible-height reception desks.
- A lift to the first floor.
- Staff available to assist patients with mobility difficulties.
- Hearing loops for patients with hearing impairments.

Care is adapted to meet patient needs, including extended appointments, home visits, phone check-ins, and flexible locations. If a patient is unable to access upper floors via the lift, appointments are moved to ground-floor rooms. Reception and clinical staff proactively accommodate patient needs.

Translation services

Translation support is available via Language Line, and a Portuguese-speaking receptionist supports direct communication. Double appointments are booked for patients requiring a translator to allow sufficient time for translation. Staff generally reported translation services as effective; one barrier was noted around sign language:

"Language Line only offers British Sign Language, which is a barrier for some patients who use other types of sign language."

Several patients we spoke to have English as a second language; however, when we asked if they had used a translator, only one had done so. This was because they either didn't want to use a translator or their family was able to support them.

"I have used translation services to speak with staff in person. They are helpful, but it's done by telephone, but sometimes the signal is bad."

"I haven't used a translation service; usually, my husband does all that. My daughters also speak good English, so probably don't need a translator."

"I have never used a translation service, because I don't want to."

"I speak enough English to book an appointment by speaking to the receptionist."

Support for patients with additional needs

Patients with additional needs are identified within their patient record, which is flagged to both administrative and clinical staff when they book an appointment. Double appointments are booked for those who require additional time, including the elderly, patients with a disability and all patients who are unable to speak English.

Patients with learning disabilities are identified on the practice system and a Learning Disabilities register to ensure they receive tailored support. This may include extended appointments, home visits, or remote support where needed. Staff reported that they often complete forms for patients with Dyslexia and help them book appointments over the phone.

Staff are encouraged to phone patients with memory loss the morning of their appointment as a reminder.

Staff also monitor vulnerable patients, such as safeguarding concerns and memory loss, and flag relevant alerts on patient records to ensure appropriate adjustments are made. Staff ensure patients are comfortable when they arrive for their appointment, settle them in the waiting area and check on them until they are called for their appointment.

The practice keeps a list of patients who are house-bound and unable to visit the practice and allocates patients to a specific doctor. Clinicians review their needs annually, or more frequently if needed.

Personalised care plans are managed by clinical staff for patients with long-term conditions such as Asthma, Diabetes, and end-of-life care. Patients have a named doctor and are discussed in weekly clinical meetings. A paramedic attends the practice weekly and has two slots allocated for home visits to people with long-term conditions or the elderly. Reception staff support by coordinating appointments and logging housebound patients.

Daily (10am) and weekly (Wednesday) clinical meetings support continuity, planning, and collaborative problem-solving. Paramedics and HCAs carry out home visits for elderly or housebound patients based on team discussion.

Referrals to external services such as social services, memory clinics, district nurses, and Age UK are common, particularly for older or vulnerable patients. However, staff reported long waits for hospital and community services.

"We do refer to social services... but it takes a lot longer now than it did a few years back."

Herne Hill Road Medical Practice previously had a Social Prescriber, the current absence of which is strongly felt by nursing staff who described feeling *“a little bit lost”* when trying to support patients with non-clinical issues like housing, benefits, or social isolation, especially during learning disability reviews. There was a clear desire from staff for the role to be reinstated to bridge the gap between medical and social needs.

“Since COVID, social problems have escalated... and when we did have a social prescriber, at least we had somewhere to send the patient to... there’s a massive gap now.”

Appointment Management

Appointments are made through the Accurx system, which requires patients to submit an online request for appointments or call the practice. Receptionists triage these forms daily, prioritising urgent cases and booking appointments accordingly. Urgent cases are added to the duty doctor list for a prompt callback, and same-day appointments are available for urgent needs such as children under 5 and elderly patients. Reception staff aim to respond to requests on the same day. Physiotherapy appointments are booked directly by the reception staff and do not require a patient to see a doctor first.

The online booking request form is open from 7:30am until 2pm, Monday to Friday. If the system reaches the capacity of requests for the day, then it will close earlier than this.

Staff were very positive about this system and have heard positive feedback from patients about how quickly they respond. The main challenge raised by staff was that the number of appointments available could be increased.

“I think the appointment system is working very well. The only thing I think could improve is the amount of appointments that were given.”

Consultations are offered in multiple formats, including face-to-face, video, and text messages.

Reception staff support patients who struggle with digital access by:

- Completing online forms on behalf of patients over the phone.
- Inviting patients into the surgery to guide them through processes on their phones or using staff laptops.
- Providing clear instructions and links for future use.

“We always say to patients, you’re welcome to come down and we’ll show you how to do it.”

Some staff noted that elderly patients were often more willing to learn new systems than younger patients.

"The older generation want to learn. Younger people often leave it until it's urgent."

Patients explained that to book an appointment, they need to complete a form online and await a call back from the practice to make an appointment. Many receive these calls the same day or the next day, and then appointments are available either on the same day for emergencies or scheduled for a time in the future. Patients shared that if they call the practice to book an appointment, the staff direct them to the online system.

"I make appointments online. You fill out a form, then they call you to book an appointment. Sometimes it's easy, but others it takes a while for them to call you to book an appointment. It's not always the same day."

Patients shared that they wish they could have appointments sooner, as they call/request an appointment as they are ill now, and they do not wish to wait a few days to see a doctor when they are feeling unwell.

"Long wait times for appointments. I have been waiting one week; I called twice in that time. They say there's no appointments. We first tried online, and it said there's no appointments."

"I don't want to wait 4 days; I call when I need an appointment, not all the time. For a check-up, I don't mind waiting a week, but not when really sick."

"[I] want to get an appointment when I need it. A check-up can wait, but when sick, we want it that day."

Others shared experiences of receiving appointments very promptly.

"You get seen to very quickly and everyone is friendly."

"It depends on how urgently you want to be seen. Appointments are always on the day because my son is a child and he's given priority."

Most of the patients we spoke to on the day of our visit were positive about the online booking system. Many told us that they used to book by telephone but now book online, and that the new system is fairly easy to navigate. They also shared that the system has been updated a few times lately, based on feedback the practice has received from patients.

"I used to do it on the phone; now I do it online. It's fairly easy to use; had to make some adjustments."

"They have improved the online system massively. I find it very easy to use. Today I logged my form online and got a call within 2 minutes offering me an appointment within an hour. It is for my 6-month-old baby, but I have had similarly good experiences for myself. They have changed the system a few times; the most recent change was a few months ago as a result of feedback from patients. Now it is very streamlined. It's easy to make appointments."

"I usually make appointments online. You fill out a form then you're called the next day. It depends on how early you are in the morning. You used to have to call at 8am, and when you got through, you were 79th in the queue, and there were no slots. Also, every time you call, you are met with an automated message."

"It's easy, I usually do online, and it's easy to follow."

Patients also shared their understanding that booking online may be a challenge for some patients, such as those who are very unwell or computer illiterate.

"I am computer literate, I can imagine it would be awkward for someone who isn't."

"The website is a challenge to use; it is a long form and a lot to do when you feel unwell."

One patient we spoke to shared frustration with the new system, which is largely due to the nature of their work, which does not allow them to take phone calls. When they submit their request online for an appointment, the practice calls them back, which they cannot do when they are working. As a result, this patient must take time off work to await the triage call, which at times results in an appointment on another day, which requires another day away from work.

"No, it's terrible."

"You can only book last-minute appointments."

"You can only book online and at certain times of day. I need to drop my daughter to school and juggle work. When I fill in the form, they need to call me back to triage me, but I can't take calls in my work, so I need to take the day off work to wait for the call. It is all impossible, I can't do it."

Another expressed similar frustration with not knowing when the practice will call them to book their appointment.

“When you make an appointment, you're told that they'll call you in the morning or afternoon, but not the precise time. What if you're busy? They should be more precise and keep you updated.”

Patients explained that the online appointment request form is only available at certain times of day, and until all appointments are booked. If they try to book an appointment outside of those times, they will be directed to try again the next day.

“The online system has too many steps. When they are full, you can't even get on the website like we had a few weeks ago. It's impossible.”

“One thing – if no appointments are left for the day, you have to fill out another form. You can also only phone when the surgery is open.”

Staff also mentioned that the number of appointments available can be a challenge, and that the need to give priority to urgent appointments can cause complaints from patients. Some staff suggested that additional locum support could help with this.

“Sometimes when you're limited to appointments, it can cause more complaints in that sense ... when anything that comes through Accurx, we try to focus on what's urgent, what we feel needs to be a same-day appointment.”

Quality of care

Patients were very positive about the care and treatment that they received. They feel it meets their needs, and the doctors treat them with dignity and respect. They also feel that the information they receive from the practice is easy to understand.

“I think the care I receive meets my needs. I also think the information shared with me was easy to understand.”

“The care is always very good.”

“Yes, I'm happy with the care and treatment I receive. The care meets my needs.”

“I feel involved in my care, staff are very respectful.”

"The care is as expected; I've had good experiences."

"I feel like the care meets our needs. You are usually able to discuss all of your concerns during your appointment. All information shared is easy to understand. I feel like staff treat you with kindness, compassion, and dignity."

"Individual GPs are all excellent. I'm very impressed, I've had a very good experience."

"I've had a really excellent experience with all of the Doctors in the practice. They are very good at referring matters – all very quick. We have been on the 2-week system for some things with the children. We were seen very quickly and had good follow-up. They are very good at sharing information regarding policies and procedures. They are good at providing medical advice. I've had follow-up texts with information and recap about appointments, or follow up once they have spoken to colleagues with more details. They also have a good physio who I saw postpartum, this was quick and excellent."

Patients also reported feeling included and consulted in the care they receive from the GPs in the practice.

"I feel well included in my treatment and care."

"I feel included in the care, treated well."

Appointments are 10 mins in duration, with doctors consulting about one or two queries in that time. Reception staff will book double appointments if they know a patient has a few queries to discuss. Multiple patients raised that they would like to be able to talk about more than one issue during an appointment. Some had experiences of GPs asking them to complete additional forms to request another appointment, whilst others had experiences of GPs who did allow them to speak about more than one issue.

"I'm not usually able to discuss all concerns in one appointment, today I need to discuss a few because they are all interconnected."

"Some Doctors let you talk about a few things and give you more time, others don't."

"I am given enough time to speak about my issues. I particularly like Dr Roberts and Dr Giona. They give me lots of time to speak, they listen to me and give good advice."

"Some doctors give you more time to discuss a few problems, others say you need another appointment."

“You are usually able to discuss all of your concerns during your appointment. ”

“Some clinicians allow you to cover multiple issues in one appointment, but others say you should book another appointment.”

As a result, one patient shared that when they are requesting appointments online, they complete multiple appointment request forms, one for each issue.

“One thing I would change is the request to only discuss one matter in each appointment. Sometimes I need to fill in multiple request forms for all the different issues; it would be easier if I could do them all at once. It would be good to structure the appointments so I can speak about all issues at the same time. In fairness, GPs have been willing to discuss more than one issue at times.”

Patients raised mixed preferences when it comes to continuity of care and seeing the same GP for every appointment. Some patients are happy to see any GP who is available, whilst others prefer to speak to the same GP to ensure they do not have to repeat their history at each visit.

“It's always a different doctor, and that's a problem. It's easier for you if they know you. If it's the first time, the doctor has to read your Medical History, and that takes time. And then the next time you come, it will be a different person again. I feel like I only see people once and then never again.”

“I don't book with a specific GP; all are very good. I don't mind any of them. I am comfortable talking with all of them about anything. I don't feel a need to request anyone specific. I am impressed with every GP.”

“You can request to see the same doctor each time, but at the risk of having to wait longer for an appointment.”

“I've been with this practice for 20 years. It's always been good. Usually, you get an appointment with the doctor you want, one that knows you well. It depends, but I feel like I can choose.”

One patient expressed frustration because they find it difficult to get an appointment, unless it is for an emergency. Another suggested a different booking system for children.

“I feel you can only come when it's an emergency; all other issues are left behind.”

“They need another system for booking appointments. Especially for children—it's harder for them to wait.”

The issue of waiting times for appointments was raised by a couple of patients. On the day of the visit, we observed patients waiting extended periods for their appointments, and as a result, they provided feedback about this. One patient acknowledged that this was not the usual experience.

“Waiting to be seen for your appointment once you're in the GP is too long. For example, I had an appointment for 9 but wasn't seen until 9:30, so I was late for work.”

“Normally, you don't have to wait so long in the waiting room.” [On this occasion, she waited for over 10 minutes]

Communication with the practice

Overall, patients reported that it is easy to communicate with the practice, and that staff are friendly and kind.

“Reception staff treat you well. I usually sign in on the machine but have at times popped in to try make appointments or collect things, and they are always very good and friendly.”

“Reception are nice, the doctors listen. I can't say anything bad about them.”

“Staff are easy to communicate with on the phone; in person, they are very respectful.”

“Staff are relatively easy to communicate with.”

“Reception are easy to communicate with.”

“Staff are very polite and nice; I have no complaints about them.”

Digital services

As in all GP practices, Herne Hill Road Medical Practice is increasingly using its practice website and apps to communicate with patients. The practice has an internal IT lead who plays a critical role in troubleshooting and liaising with external services.

Staff are familiar with multiple IT systems like Accurx, Swiftqueue, My Chart and the NHS app, and spend time supporting patients with these digital tools and setting up their NHS account.

"We can sit outside [in the waiting area] with the patient on the laptop and show them how to do the forms... nine times out of 10 they want us to do the forms anyway... not everybody has internet or, you know, phones and things like that."

If patients have trouble with the Accurx booking system, reception staff direct them over the phone or invite them into the practice so they can show them on their screens how the system works and talk them through the steps. If patients are having difficulty, they will also complete the form on their behalf.

"If a patient calls in the morning and they're still having difficulty, we do it on their behalf, but we also offer them to come in, because obviously this is a new thing going forward. It's not going to change for the meantime, obviously, we don't know what's going to happen, but this is the way going forward."

"It surprises you how more of our patients are elderly, are more keen into being online and doing the forms than the younger patients."

Some patients support the move to online tools, whilst others find it to be challenging.

"I use the website. I have tried to use the app, but there isn't a way of booking appointments there, so what's the point?"

"It's all pretty much online, but it's easier than the 8am scramble on the phone."

"I use the app to order repeat prescriptions."

"I use the website, but I have no access to the app. I don't know what I need to be able to use it."

What works well at this practice

Patients offered positive feedback about what works well at the practice, with many praising the staff. The responsiveness to patient feedback and the check-in machine were also mentioned.

"Reception are nice, the doctors listen. I can't say anything bad about them."

"You get seen to very quickly, and everyone is friendly. I don't see anything that can be improved."

"The care is always very good."

"I'm very impressed with the GPs."

"I like the check-in machine, it's very quick and you don't have to line up to wait to check in."

"They changed the appointment booking system in response to patients' feedback; they do listen and try to make it a good experience."

Staff appreciated the openness of communication between management, administration, and clinical teams.

"We have open access to be heard...we are all listened to"

Improving the patient experience

Opportunities to improve the Patient Experience were evident from our observations and conversations on the day of the Enter & View visit. Notice boards are up around the practice with lots of information for patients about a variety of topics and events happening locally.

There are many feedback mechanisms in place to improve patient experience within Herne Hill Road Medical Practice, including:

- Friends and Family Test (FFT) surveys are collected and reviewed monthly.
- A comment box is available at reception for patient suggestions and is checked weekly.
- Staff follow up proactively on patient referrals to ensure timely care, especially for urgent (two-week wait) cases.
- The practice is re-establishing its Patient Participation Group (PPG), with the first meeting scheduled shortly. *"I'm the chair of the PPG. We've sent out feedback forms to patients to gather their views on improvements."*

Patients we spoke to generally felt they would feel confident providing feedback about the practice but did not know the official steps to do so.

"If I have any issues or complaints, I would feel comfortable raising them, but have never done so."

"I wouldn't know how to make a complaint if I wanted to, but I would feel comfortable to do so."

"I assume so. I would just tell reception."

"I provided feedback about the last appointment system; it was easy to find online how to do this and to give the feedback. The practice even responded to me to explain they want to make changes as they'd had feedback from a few patients."

Staff listen to and learn from the feedback received by patients and were proud to report that they receive few complaints.

"We do try to learn from patient experiences."

"We have very, very few complaints...and they are handled very quickly, and most of them are resolved in-house."

Suggested changes

Staff discussed changes they would like to see implemented, which included continued use of locum support whilst the practice is recruiting more doctors, making more appointments available to patients, and offering longer appointment times to discuss multiple queries.

Several staff also mentioned their desire to reinstate the Social Prescriber Link Worker role within the practice. Staff felt the value of this role as they don't feel confident in supporting their patients' non-clinical needs. At present, a healthcare assistant is filling this void; however, staff feel the needs may fall outside of their expertise.

"Since COVID, social problems and social issues have escalated in a ginormous way, and when we did have a social prescriber, at least, we had somewhere to send the patient to, and I feel like I'm a little bit lost."

"I'd love to be able to forward them on to a social prescriber again."

"In terms of the social prescribing, I would feel more supported if I had somewhere to send the patients to."

Staff experience

Staff consistently described the team environment as strong, supportive, and "family-like." Many highlighted the long tenure of staff, some working at the practice for over 20 years, and low turnover rates.

"People here, we're like a family. Everyone's helpful. We work as a great team."

"We are always there for each other."

There was a strong sense of mutual respect between staff at different levels, with managers described as approachable and committed to creating a positive workplace culture. Senior management and practice partners are described as approachable, responsive, and supportive during conflict resolution and interactions with challenging patients.

"If someone is disrespecting one of my staff members, I don't tolerate that at all."

Staff noted that even in situations of short staffing due to sickness or absence, teamwork helps manage the workloads effectively.

Staffing levels and capacity

Staff generally felt there were enough reception, administrative, and nursing staff to meet demands. However, some noted that clinical staffing, particularly doctors, had been stretched following recent departures. Efforts to recruit new doctors and increase locum cover were acknowledged as positive steps. Staff were optimistic that capacity would improve shortly with new permanent hires.

"We've had two or three doctors leave, but we're expecting new doctors to start soon."

Reception and administration teams reported that time management and prioritisation helped them manage busy periods effectively.

Training and support

Staff felt well supported in their training needs. New staff undergo an initial induction week with check-ins to assess progress. If staff need further support or training beyond induction, they can access additional learning through South West London's resources.

Mandatory training is completed through Practice Index (covering areas such as Health and Safety, Data Protection, Information Governance, Autism Awareness, and Caldicott Guardian training). Staff receive automated reminders when training modules are due. Several staff members highlighted opportunities for further development, including training on registration systems, referrals, IT systems, and specialist modules for managing specific patient needs. One team member shared:

"When I took on this role, I didn't expect to be learning and doing what I'm doing now. So, I'm quite happy with that."

Ongoing support

Staff reported regular one-to-ones with their direct managers (weekly or monthly, depending on the role) and open-door communication with senior leadership.

"We have one-to-one meetings every week with the operations manager and monthly with reception staff."

Staff feel able to raise concerns or feedback both formally in meetings or emails, and informally, and described the management as approachable and respectful of their input.

"We can go and chat to them like it's quite open door."

"We've got good communication between staff management."

Regular team meetings give staff the opportunity to discuss anything they are concerned about, any significant events, and learn from patient experiences.



Conclusion

Healthwatch Lambeth carried out an Enter and View visit to Herne Hill Road Medical Practice, observing the environment and interviewing patients and staff. Our purpose was to understand patients' experiences at the practice, identifying both positives and areas for further improvement.

We found that the external and internal environments are accessible for most patients; minor adjustments will improve inclusive design for all. The waiting area is full of information and flyers, and gives a great opportunity for patients to be informed about the support available in the local area.

We found that the practice offers a welcoming, supportive service for patients. We observed that staff are very welcoming of patients when they attend the practice for an appointment. Patients spoke very highly of both the administrative and clinical teams. There were clear efforts to support and accommodate patients with additional needs.

The shift to online appointment booking has been well received by many patients; however, it does present challenges for certain groups, particularly those with limited digital literacy. We learned that staff are proactive in supporting patients who experience challenges by offering in-person and phone support.

Patients are very happy with the quality of care they receive from the GPs. Many reported that doctors take time to explain treatment options clearly and involve them in decision-making.

Staff feel very supported in their roles at Herne Hill Medical Practice and spoke highly of the open communications that exist across management, administrative and clinical teams. The practice staff regularly discuss patient feedback and opportunities to learn from the patient experience.

Based on our observations and the feedback we received from patients and staff, there are clear opportunities for improvement. We have developed recommendations for Herne Hill Road Medical Practice.

Recommendations

We recognise the hard work clinical and non-clinical staff do to provide care and support to individuals in GP practices. Whilst our findings highlight several positives and good practice examples, our findings also show some room for improvement.

Healthwatch Lambeth encourages Herne Hill Road Medical Practice to consider these recommendations and implement change where possible.

Recommendation 1: Consideration should be given to improving information about accessibility and ensuring consistent signage throughout the building. This would include

- Parking and drop-off information, which could be displayed on the website and outside the building
- Providing consistent signage
 - At the front entrance to advise patients to press the button to open the automatic door.
 - Upstairs waiting area that directs patients to the closest fire exit.
 - In the downstairs waiting area directing patients to the location and accessibility of toilets.
 - In the downstairs waiting area directing patients to the electronic check-in machine.

Recommendation 2: Consideration should be given to enhancing visual and audio communication in waiting areas. This would include

- Extending the display duration of patient appointment information, for example, name and clinical room
- Maintaining a consistent and comfortable volume for audible announcements both upstairs and downstairs
- Adding subtitles to information videos where possible.

Recommendation 3: Consideration should be given to improving and optimising inclusive design in waiting areas. This would include:

- Ensuring doors are kept free of posters and flyers which may detract from signage.
- Adding visual images (male/female/wheelchair or toilet symbols) to aid recognition
- Ensuring that there is contrast between:
 - The elevator door and the surrounding walls
 - The light switch and walls

- Toilet seats and toilet bowls, as well as the sink and hand dryers, to assist those with visual or cognitive impairments
- Installing a visible clock in the waiting areas will support accessibility in line with PLACE guidance.

Recommendation 4: Consideration should be given to recruiting a social prescriber to support staff working with patients with additional needs.

Recommendation 5: Consideration should be given to improving appointment access and flexibility. This would include:

- Offering clearer information on when triage call-backs will take place to support patients who work or have caring responsibilities
- Exploring alternative ways of communicating an appointment
- information if patients are unable to take calls, for example, via SMS
- Introducing appointment windows or SMS updates where possible
- Ensuring the online appointment request form remains open during core practice hours in line with GP contract requirements for non-urgent appointments, medication, and administrative requests (October 2025) ³
- Ensuring that the above changes are communicated to patients

Recommendation 6: Consideration should be given to offering extended or double appointment times to patients who have multiple or complex needs and wish to discuss more than one issue during their appointment, and ensuring patients know this option is available to them.

Recommendation 7: Consideration should be given to displaying clear information on notice boards for patients about how to raise issues and concerns about the practice staff, as well as the quality of care they receive. This could include signposting patients to the feedback box in the waiting area.

Recommendation 8: Consideration should be given to reviewing and, where possible, implementing the additional suggestions and changes provided by staff and patients to enhance service quality and patient satisfaction.

Provider Response

"Change & Actions:

- Add signage to the front door entrance
- We have added a sign on top on the check in screen at reception to let patient know they can use the self-check in
- We have ordered defibrillator signage for the ground floor
- We have ordered signage for the stairwell to indicate fire exit
- One TV screen has now been removed from the ground floor
- The patient call in message on the TV screen has been extended from 5 sec to 30 sec so patient can read it longer
- There is a new TV screen on the second floor, so the noise has reduced
- We have order signage for the toilet Baby changing /Disabled
- Removed the posters in the toilets
- We have recruited a social prescriber that will be working for the PCN by with HHR one day per week at the request from our staff
- We have recruited 2x more salary GP to help with workload
- We have ordered 2x clocks for the waiting rooms
- We have removed posters from doors"

Comments and Responses

The seating area in the waiting area is very open difficult for patients to maintain confidentiality.

"We offer patient a private room to speak or offer them paper if they wish to write, and the reception staff can read it."

The website is a challenge to use, it is a long form and a lot to do when you feel unwell.

"Reception staff always offer to help patients complete the form, whether in person or on the phone."

Patient and staff have mentioned that they would like more appointments.

"The forms are now open all day in surgery hours that is no longer a 2pm cut off. We have more clinicians employed to offer more appointments. There is also 1x GP working 7am on Wednesday and 2x GP working until 8pm on Thursdays.

NHS app directs patient to Accurx via our website to book appointment."



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