



**Enter & View
Wordsley Green Surgery
January 2024**

Background

Healthwatch Dudley listen to people's views and experiences of access to all types of health and care settings.

The national NHS England GP Patient Survey (2023) highlighted the difficulties some patients were encountering when trying to get an appointment at their surgery. Following our engagement with people living in the Dudley borough, we decided to conduct a wider piece of research.

All Healthwatch have powers of Enter & View, which allows conversations to take place with people in health and care settings.

Wordsley Green Surgery was randomly selected for an Enter & View visit as part of our wider research into access to GP surgery services.

This report provides a snapshot of the conversations around access to appointments at Wordsley Green Surgery. The findings from this Enter & View report will inform a borough-wide GP Practice surgery access report.

The visit

Two members of Healthwatch Dudley staff visited the surgery between 2.00 pm and 4.00 pm on Monday 22 January 2024.

Patients were invited to speak to a member of Healthwatch Dudley staff to share their experience of booking their appointments. As part of our conversations, we asked which method was used to make the appointment and enquired about the level of knowledge of the other health professionals they could see at the surgery.

Patients were also asked if there was anything else they would like to add about the surgery whilst speaking to us.

In total, we spoke to 26 patients during our visit.

Conversations

We spoke to a range of patients who had booked an appointment by telephone, many of whom had rung the surgery that morning.

Other patients were attending for routine follow-up appointments which had been pre-booked for them.

Another patient's appointment had been booked via NHS 111.

A few patients had completed an online form, following which they had been allocated an appointment.

Getting through on the telephone

Most patients said they didn't wait particularly long on the phone once they got through. They reported being in a queuing system, the length of which could vary depending on the time of day the phone call was made.

However, some patients we spoke to found they had to re-dial a lot of times. Other patients said the phone was often engaged, particularly between 8.00 am and 8.30 am but once they got through, they were either first or second in the queue.

One patient said that if they had not been able to get an appointment on the day of our visit, they would have to wait until the following week. They added that if it had been urgent, they would have to have gone to the Urgent Treatment Centre.

"I phoned at 8.30 am this morning requesting an urgent appointment, I was number two in the queue, receptionist said there were no appointments but told me to use the surgery's website and complete a request online. Five minutes later I had an email offering me an appointment for this afternoon."

Getting through on the telephone

"I rang the surgery 151 times before it was picked up and I could join the queue. Once I got through, I was third in the queue and did not have to wait long for it to be answered by the receptionist.

My husband just does not bother trying to book appointments at the surgery and has given up."

"When there haven't been any appointments left, I have been told by the receptionist "if it is urgent, go to the Urgent Treatment Centre." Lockdown wasn't good, with virtual appointments."

"I always phone to make an appointment, you are not allowed to go into the surgery to request one.

We used to pop in to make appointments but since the pandemic, you have to ring. So I rang at 9.00 am this morning to make an appointment for my husband, I was number one in the queue and got an appointment straight away for this afternoon. Sometimes you have to wait longer to get through so I was really pleased."

"The receptionist just told me there were no appointments, she didn't ask what it was about. When I used the form on the website, I was able to put lots of information - is that why I got an appointment?"



Online services

Only a few patients told us they used online methods to request an appointment. One patient was instructed to complete a form online, following which they were allocated an appointment.

Another patient told us about the 'Ask The Doctor A Question' facility on the surgery's website. They felt it was helpful for non-emergency issues and they got a response within a couple of days.

One patient perceived that they had a better choice of the professional who they could see when making appointments by telephone as opposed to completing the online form.

"I tried calling at 8.00 am, but it was busy, so I completed the online form and received a swift response - the online service is 'really good'. I use the online form system for issues I know can be dealt with over the phone and not requiring a face to face appointment. I can ask the doctor a question online, I receive a response and the surgery will book a timely appointment if required."

"We liked the Patient Access system where you could book a GP appointment, we think it probably stopped because of Covid. There don't appear to be any advance appointments anymore. It would be good to be able to pre-book from a self care point of view - I am my husband's carer but tend to leave my own health needs aside. If I could book an appointment in advance for myself it would be helpful."*

"We still use online [Patient Access] to request medication but there are no bookable online appointments now to our knowledge."

*Patient Access connects you to local health services when you need them. You can book GP appointments, order repeat prescriptions and discover local health services for you or your family via your mobile or home computer.

Extended healthcare team

Besides a GP, most patients we spoke to knew they could alternatively be seen by a nurse in certain circumstances and for different clinics.

A few patients said they were aware of other health professionals, such as the physiotherapist, paramedic and physician's associate.

Several patients said they knew about other health professionals because they had been allocated an appointment with them, or had seen information on the screen in the waiting room.

Patients' assumptions appeared to be that they would be seen by a GP or a nurse but said they would be open to seeing other health professionals when necessary. However, some patients felt that they knew when it was a GP they needed to see.

"I am aware there is a nurse you can see. It has never been discussed with me about what other health professionals you can see."

"We are aware of some of the other health professionals at the surgery, such as the podiatrist, nurse, physio and just heard they have a physician's associate."

"I am not aware of the other health professionals in the surgery, I have only ever been given appointments with either a doctor or a nurse. I saw a student once who took all my details and then went to speak to the doctor."

"I have seen the associate physician and paramedic at the surgery. This caused a problem as they were unable to prescribe medication, so I had to wait a long time to get the prescription from the GP."



Additional comments

Some patients made additional comments during our conversations.

"I used to do patient involvement at the hospital and one of the things we checked was how regularly notice boards are updated."

"The notice boards in the surgery have a laminated card where the date when the notice board was last checked should be completed - they are all blank."

"The service is much better at this surgery than at my previous surgery in London - it is one of the best I have been registered with."

"I have never had a problem with the surgery."

"Nice people (staff)"

"I have been a patient for nine years, I am happy with the service I receive, it is a good surgery and I would recommend it to other people."

Our observations

Some patients may not be using online services for various reasons, such as confusion about how to use it and the different methods to use.

Other patients were happy as they could get through by phone and therefore did not feel the need to explore using technology.

Some patients commented that they were not allowed to go into the surgery to make an appointment.

Overall, the patients we spoke to were happy with the service they received from the practice.



Considerations



Contacting the surgery

Clarity around the ways of contacting the surgery may be helpful to patients. This may possibly reduce the number of telephone calls being received at peak times.



Making appointments in person

There were differing views on whether or not patients are allowed to walk into the surgery to make appointments. It would be helpful if this could be clarified to patients.



Support with online services

Patients may be encouraged to seek appointments or help online by being provided with clear instructions. How to do this could be incorporated into the automated message which patients hear when they ring the surgery before being connected to a member of staff. This would enable the patient to decide whether to complete an online form or to continue to wait in a queue to speak to someone.



Notice boards

The surgery notice boards contained lots of information which appeared to be relevant and useful, though it was noted by a patient that the laminated cards which should contain the 'last updated' date were blank. Also, whilst information about the Patient Participation Group (PPG) was on the notice board, there did not appear to be any details about the date of the next meeting. The notice board could also be used to display details of how to contact the surgery in different ways.

Response from Wordsley Green Surgery

"Thank you for the feedback it has been highly appreciated."

-Practice Manager

Response to considerations



Contacting the surgery

Posters are now displayed in the practice, on the front door and on the practice website, giving clarification how appointments can be booked.



Support with online services

The practice would rather speak to patients on the phone to signpost to the appropriate clinician. However, when they are fully booked they do encourage patients to complete an online for with an aim to triage and respond on the same day.

They promote online services in the practice



Notice boards

The boards have been updated to now include the date they were last updated and cleaned.

The PPG were asked to add the date for their next meeting, this request was actioned and the date was displayed.

The PPG will continue to update the board with dates of meetings and upcoming events.



Thank You

We were pleased to listen to patients at Wordsley Green Surgery, the majority of whom were more than willing to share their views.

We are pleased that patient feedback has been considered by Wordsley Green Surgery and they have taken action to improve access to services and information.

We hope that Wordsley Green Surgery continues to listen to the voices of its patients and will evolve to meet their needs.

Healthwatch Dudley will be collating the feedback received from all GP Enter & View visits, survey responses and discussions with patient groups to explore access experiences to GP surgery services across the Dudley borough.

References

NHS England (2023) GP Patient Survey Available at <https://www.gp-patient.co.uk/surveysandreports> [Accessed February 16 2024]

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