



Primrose Bank Medical Centre, Larkhill

Enter and View Report

11th November 2024

healthwatch

Blackburn with Darwen

DISCLAIMER

This report relates to the service viewed at the time of the visit and is only representative of the views of the staff, visitors and residents who met members of the Enter and View team on that date.

Contact Details:

Primrose Bank Medical Centre
Larkhill
Blackburn
BB1 5ER

Staff met during our visit:

Romita Gupta, Deputy Manager

Date and time of our visit:

Monday 11th November 2024, 9am

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen
Representatives

Sarah Johns, Lead Staff

Katie Merry, Staff

Liam Kershaw-Calvert, Staff

Bia Hashmi, volunteer

Introduction

This was an announced Enter and View visit undertaken by authorised representatives from Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen who have the authority to enter health and social care premises, announced or unannounced, to observe and assess the nature and quality of services and obtain the view of those people using the services. The representatives observe and speak to respondents in communal areas only.

This visit was arranged as part of Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen's Enter and View programme to review Accessibility, Approachability and Responsiveness. The team of trained Enter and View authorised representatives record their observations along with feedback from patients, staff and where possible, carers or family.

A report is sent to the practice manager of the facility for validation of the facts. Any response from the practice manager is included with the final version of the report which is published on the Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen website at www.healthwatchblackburnwithdarwen.co.uk

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen would like to thank Romita Gupta, Deputy Manager together with patients, staff, and other respondents, for making us feel welcome and taking part in the visit.

General Information

The practice has 3 GP partners and has approximately 9,800 patients.

The current CQC rating of the practice is Good and was last inspected on 4th January 2017.

Methodology

The Enter and View representatives made an announced visit on Monday 11th November 2024.

We spoke to 13 patients and 5 staff where possible within the constraints of the GP surgery routine, people's willingness, and ability to engage and access to people in public areas. Discussion was structured around 3 themes

- Accessibility
- Approachability
- Responsiveness

The team also recorded their own observations of the environment and facilities.

Our role at Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen is to gather the views of service users, especially those that are hard to reach and seldom heard, to give them the opportunity to express how they feel about a service regardless of their perceived ability to be able to do so.

We use templates to assess the environment of a facility and gather information from respondents, to ensure that reports are compiled in a fair and comparative manner.

Summary:

Primrose Medical Practice is located on Primrose Bank in the Larkhill/Daisyfield area of Blackburn. Patients we spoke with found access to the practice easy, however it may be harder for patients travelling on public transport who have mobility issues due to be located on a hill.

The practice is bright, clean and hygienic, however some areas may need review for accessibility for patients with mobility issues or dementia and there are some areas in need of maintenance.

The website is informative however cannot be translated into different languages and patients we spoke with did not access it. There is a lot of patient information available at the entrance of the building and in the waiting room and on the corridors. However, some of this information is out of date and is only available in English therefore the practice might wish to consider reviewing and rationalising the information currently displayed.

Patients felt that the staff are courteous and polite and that they had enough time with the doctor. However accessing appointments was raised as an issue by patients with some waiting a long time to get through on the phone and whilst patients could book appointments easily for children sometimes struggled to get an appointment for themselves. The practice is currently having to prioritise children and over 65s for appointments and signposts where appropriate to Pharmacy First. The practice has processes in place for both identifying and supporting more vulnerable patients.

There was a sense amongst staff that increased patient education about the different roles within the practice and how primary care operates is needed. There was a lack of awareness amongst patients and some staff of social prescribing, the practice might wish to promote through the new care navigation roles.

Enter and View observations

ACCESSIBILITY OBSERVED

Pre-visit and location

Representatives firstly looked at the practice website (<https://www.primrosebankmedicalcentre.co.uk/>) to establish contact and found the website to be informative. This is a new website launched in October 2024 and we noted that the Practice asked for patient feedback on their Facebook page about it and asked for patients to email their suggestions.

The website hosts details about the services available and a number of useful online documents for patients and an up to date news page which also included a notice of our Enter and View visit.

There is good information about the practice staff and their roles, however we did notice that support staff did not have their surnames included on the website whereas all clinical and senior staff did.

It is not possible to translate the website into different languages and there was no accessibility tools dropdown available therefore may not be accessible for all patients.

Information about how to make a complaint is recorded under 'Frequently Asked Questions' however this is confusing because there are two sections about how to file a complaint, with one stating that patients should email their complaint and the other section stating that they should put it in writing to the Practice Manager. Both state that further information is available in the complaints leaflet, however this is not available on the website and we did not notice any available in the waiting room during our visit.

The Facebook page has 195 followers and shares useful practice and local health information, however representatives noted that comments are limited on posts by the practice.

We did a test call to the practice at 10am on 8th November and were 11th in the queue.

The external environment



The practice is located on Primrose Bank in the Larkhill/Daisyfield area of Blackburn. The practice has a small patient car park with dedicated disabled bays and there is parking available on the road outside the practice. There is a bus to Whalley New Road from Blackburn bus station every 30 minutes but patients would have to walk up the hill to Primrose Bank, which may not be easy for all patients.

The grounds of the practice are well maintained and the entrance is clearly visible from both the road and car park. The grounds are flat therefore wheelchair access to the building is not an issue and the door is push button, allowing for ease of access. Just before entering the practice, there is a shelf of patient information leaflets available.



The internal environment/reception

Reception/Waiting Room

We were welcomed by reception staff asking us to sign in and wear ID badges. We were shown around by the deputy manager who introduced the team to the available members of staff.

The reception and consultation rooms are clearly signposted in bold writing and can be seen on entering the building.



On entering the practice the waiting room appeared rather small and quite cold.

The reception desk is at a good height for patients to talk with the reception staff and at a distance from the waiting room seating to allow for confidentiality of conversations. We noted that there is a hearing loop available for patients with hearing impairments. The self-check-in screen was not working at the time of our visit and the TV screen was not in use.

We observed that patients' names come up on the screen above reception at the time of their appointment but there is no audio announcement which could be an issue for patients with visual impairments or learning disabilities.



There are Covid-19 signs on the floor in the waiting room and on the door to the building which should be removed, however, we are conscious that the floor stickers might be problematic to remove.

There is bench seating available for patients, which although comfortable is all at one height and with no arms so might not be suitable for patients with mobility issues. We noted that the seating and wood panel above it were in need of some repair.



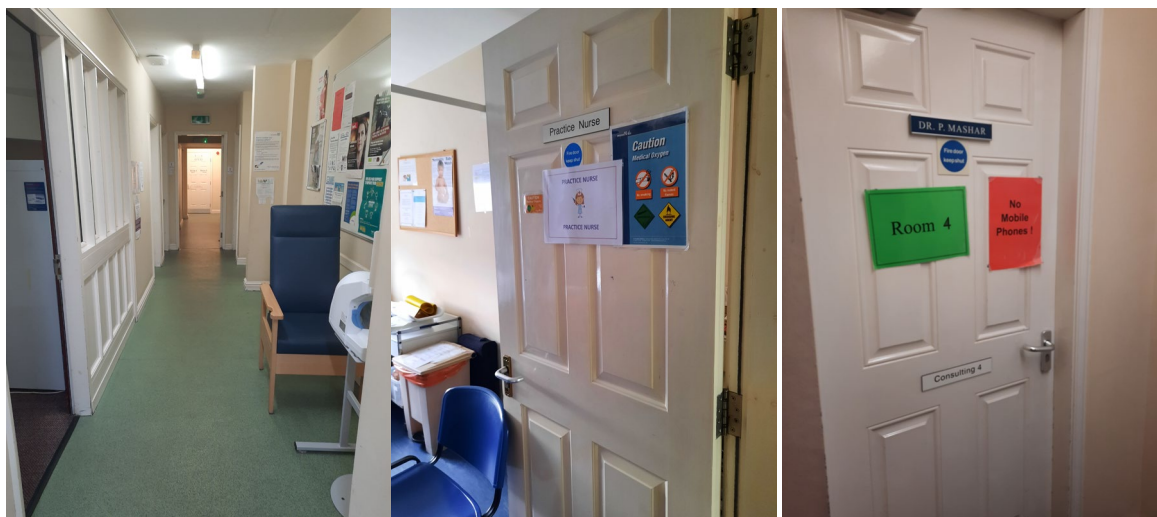
There is a lot of patient information available in the waiting room which is helpful, however some of the leaflets were out of date and posters on the walls as well as the noticeboards made the walls look rather cluttered. All of the leaflets are in English whereas a range of languages might be more appropriate for the patient base of the practice.



Observation of corridors and public bathroom

The corridor to the consulting rooms was well lit and further patient information was on display on the walls. We noted that temporary laminated signs were in use on the doors to the rooms and the health care assistant and practice nurse had appealing cartoon character signs for their doors. We did however note a 'No Mobile Phones!' sign which was less welcoming for patients.

The corridor was noted to be adequately wide for wheelchair access.



There was a toilet available for patients which was light and hygienic however this is not dementia friendly with the same colour seat and there was no baby changing available. We noted in the waiting room that there was a sign for patients to state that the practice does not have the facility to dispose of nappies, however nappy sacs are available on request.



APPROACHABILITY OBSERVED

During our visit, we observed that the patients had short waiting times for their appointments during our visit and there were pleasant and respectful interactions between reception staff and the patients at the reception desk.

We spoke Romita Gupta, Deputy Manager, about accessibility and approachability of the practice for patients.



How easy/difficult do you think is it to get an appointment with the GP?

“It’s been harder since Covid, demand has increased and patient health has worsened. However patients level of tolerance for minor illnesses has also decreased and there are low levels of self-care amongst patients of the practice. The practice does use Pharmacy first and signposts particularly younger adult patients to this as appropriate. The practice prioritises children under 12 and the elderly (over 65s).”

Do people generally get to see the GP on time?

“It varies. In Summer there are less waits and in school holidays but in Winter it gets really busy - October through to February. It’s mainly routine appointments that might get delayed but the practice builds in extra appointments to see as many people as possible.”

Do you have a social prescriber attached to the practice and do you refer to them? Do you have any other additional roles as part of the practice staff team?

“We have two mental health practitioners, a physician associate, clinical pharmacists and pharmacy technicians alongside a practice nurse and health care assistant. We can make referrals to the social prescriber and the admin team can now make those referrals. Not all patients want their support though. Patients need education on how social prescribers can support them, we do have leaflets though.”

How do you identify and support more vulnerable patients?

“We have an alert on the system to identify more vulnerable patients. We have clinics on a Friday for people with learning disabilities to come for their annual health checks. We always get in touch with support workers when booking appointments. We use Language Line for interpreting and we are getting hearing loops for both practices through ICB funding. We are now getting quite a few asylum seekers as patients from Afghanistan and Syria and homeless patients. The Council contact us to arrange registration for these patients.”



RESPONSIVENESS OBSERVED

We noted a significant amount of patient information available about local health campaigns, including women's health and mental health in the practice waiting room. The practice also offers clinics for long term condition management.

We asked the following questions of the Deputy Manager.



How do you manage DNA GP appointments?

“It's a very big issue for the practice. We were getting quite a lot of people not turning up for nurse appointments for chronic conditions, which costs us as a practice and is an issue when demand is so high. We send messages to patients and tell them to inform us if unable to make their appointment at least one day before to be able to manage the lists appropriately.

We have had issues with patients being rude to staff and swearing a lot. We have a zero tolerance policy and send three warning letters before removing a patient but that is the very last resort. The staff work really hard and GP practices are close to burn out.”

Why do you think that some people seem to access A and E rather than primary care?

“Patients do not tend to go up to A and E. If they have concerns about the triage process we will always take these to a GP to decide whether to offer an appointment that day or if it can wait.”

Any other comments?

“We have done a lot of work on care navigation with training for the reception staff. Patient education is the biggest thing that is needed. They need to understand what practices are going through, what goes on behind the scenes and understand better how the system works and what everyone's roles are.”



Feedback from Patients

We spoke with 13 patients, however not all were able to complete the survey because they were called for their appointment.

ACCESSIBILITY

Are the opening hours sufficient for your needs?

All 13 patients stated that opening hours were sufficient. One stated “they are okay” and another stated “yes generally” and two other patients stated that they rarely visited the practice. One patient told us “Yes, I now live in Great Harwood but had Dr Ray as my GP at Ewood and think he’s good so I come here now.”

Is it easy to park or travel to?

All but 1 patient reported that accessing the practice was easy. They stated “I travelled by car but it was hard to find parking as the car park was full.” 4 patients stated that they lived nearby so access was easy for them. Others stated that it was easy to get to the practice by car and found parking ok.

Is the website useful?

Only one patient stated that they had used the website and found it helpful. Another stated that her husband uses it. Most had never used it for reasons including “I’ve never needed it” and “I’m not very good with computers.” One patient stated that they did not use the website but they did receive text messages from the practice.

How did you get your appointment today?

11 of the patients we spoke with had booked their appointment on the telephone with varying experiences of trying to get through to the practice and 2 patients had booked appointments in place from their last visit. Feedback about telephone booking included,

“The issue is trying to get through on the phone”

“It wasn’t too bad getting through on the phone.”

“It’s not easy to get an appointment. It usually takes a while to get through.”

“It’s easy, its good - I got an appointment for the same day”

APPROACHABILITY

- Are staff courteous and polite?

12 of the patients felt that staff were courteous and polite and one patient gave a mixed response stating ““Can get some nice some rude staff”. Positive feedback included, “Yes they are very friendly”, “Brilliant”, “Yes they’re nice.”

- **How do you feel about the waiting room?**

Five patients stated that the waiting room was ok. Other responses included:-

“It is okay for me and it is always quiet when I get here”

“They can modernise it but it is clean. Just needs a little bit of tender, love and care”

“Waiting room is nice- don’t really care too much as I’m not here for a long time”

“Yes it is a bit cold but I like it”

“It can be a bit cramped and not enough room to sit down at busy times.”

“Yes its good, it’s very cold in here today, they need to turn that heater on”

“Before COVID they use to have a table in the middle with leaflets which I found helpful, maybe something for the children to play with also”

“Yeah, I think it could do with a plant.”

- **Do you find asking for a GP appointment a pleasant experience?**

5 patients stated that asking for an appointment was ok. Other feedback included:-

“Considering the climate with the NHS, it’s acceptable.”

“If you get one from the doctor, it’s easy. If you have to ring, you wait.”

“When asking for appointments, sometimes I have to wait longer when the appointment is for me, but when I need an appointment for the baby I always get it on time”

“Have had to wait 2+weeks for an appointment”

“Yes. I had to wait a little but it wasn’t urgent so it wasn’t an issue.”

“It’s ok - I’m more bothered about getting an appointment for my children. It’s harder to get one for myself.”

“No. I never get an appointment for myself, only for the children. If you don’t get on the phone at 8am you can’t get an appointment.”

- **Would you recommend this GP surgery?**

11 patients stated yes with 1 patient stating that they would not. Feedback included:-

“Yes definitely. Doctors are really good, they’re pleasant and they listen.”

“Yes its better than my last GP, I had to move as it was really bad there”

“Yes- I tell my friends to join”

“Yes though it’s been harder to get appointments since Covid but I think everywhere is the same.”

“Yes the doctors are brilliant.”

RESPONSIVENESS

- **Do you feel you are offered appointments in a timely manner?**

Views were mixed amongst patients. 7 out of 10 respondents felt that they were, however others stated,

“Depends. I had to wait half an hour and it can be up to 45 minutes. One time I had to just leave because I had school pick up.”

“Not really after Covid. It feels like the whole system has changed”

“Only for children”

Positive responses included “Get an appointment straight away” and “Yes definitely. Doctors are really good, they’re pleasant and they listen.”

- **Do you get enough time with the doctor?**

All patients stated that they had enough time with the doctor.

- **Do you have any understanding/experience of social prescribing?**

Only 2 out of 12 patients had heard of social prescribing.

- **Has there been an occasion when you have felt you had to attend A and E rather than get a GP appointment?**

Only 2 out of 11 respondents had not been to A and E. Feedback included:-

“Only once 5 years ago when I found out I had DVT.”

“I’ve been twice with the children but they were really ill so couldn’t avoid it. I’ll just manage by myself with my own health mainly.”

“I’ve been referred to A and E by the doctors for the children once.”

“Yes, I went last week because of the baby”

“Yes I had to go due to out of hours”

“Yes it was on a weekend”

“Yes I have but that wasn’t the GPs fault, I have a lot of health problems so it was relating to that”

“Sometimes, I have a heart problem. The doctor won’t see me if its related to my heart they tell me to go straight to A&E”

“Yeah - when Covid hit and there was an issue.”

Staff views

ACCESSIBILITY

- **How easy/difficult do you think it is to get an appointment with the GP?**

“I think its ok, I think other GPs are worse”

“If it’s on the day and urgent ring at 8am but it’s really busy and sometimes difficult. We allow elderly people to book walk-in appointments at 8am and usually they get an appointment.”

“Routine and those asked to come back are usually a few weeks. I do think it’s easy, there are 3 GPs - most of the time on the day.”

“Depends, we do have walk-in appointments though.”

- **Do people generally get to see the GP on time?**

“To be honest, not always but we try our best”

“Depends, we offer according to reason for appointment, try our best to offer on the day if we can. On arrival they are seen on time unless of an emergency, delay or GP on call etc.”

“The majority of people do get to see the GP on time.”

“Some who are late might not be able to see the GP. They start demanding to see GP and the receptionists get abuse - people expect appointments instantly.”

APPROACHABILITY

- **How do you identify and support more vulnerable patients(for example those with learning difficulties.)**

“The system will alert me when somebody has a difficulty. We have a deaf patient so i know i need to speak clearly so he can lip read. I’ve worked here a long time so you get to know the patients and their needs”

“We prioritise them. Elderly, children, LD always book them in. If we can, we make sure to give them the same GP and Advanced Nurse, so they usually can see the same person.”

“There are notes on the records to say - we’re aware.”

“We try to get them to see the same GP.”

RESPONSIVENESS

- **Do you have a Social Prescriber attached to the practice and do you refer to them?**

“No - we just have our pharmacist, i don't think he does that”

“We only have a clinical pharmacist. We have a new system put into place - Care Navigation.”

“Yes they take a few appointments.”

“We have a pharmacist.”

- **How do you manage DNA appointments?**

“We send a text message to the patient to remind them of their appointment, we will ring the patient (if we have time) to ask why they haven't attended. They would have 3 strikes, but that doesn't always happen though.”

“Have an automated message for DNA - we do try to ring the patients about it. There's three strikes before a letter and we look at history and habits.”

“If they miss three consecutive appointments they'll get a letter about being removed.”

“We look at their history, usually ring them.”

- **Why do you think that some people seem to access A and E rather than primary care?**

“Sometimes patients go to A&E because they think they will be seen quicker, which isn't always the case”

“It's because of appointment availability - if they can't get one but feel they need seeing to - the next resort is A&E. We do get information about patients who use A&E.”

“Because they're not getting what they want, they'll go to A&E.”

“Some patients have addictions to medications, and will go to A&E to get that medication, but they don't realise we get informed.”

- **Any Other Comments?**

“I've worked here 10 years now, i used to be the youngest here and now I'm the longest standing receptionist. I feel like i know the patients at our surgery and we do the best for them. Patients don't understand what goes on behind the scenes. Patients aren't interested in what receptionists have to say, they just want to speak to the doctor. It's like we need a big training session for the public. I don't feel confident that it's going to make a difference”

“It's okay. I'm happy here. We try our best. We can only follow protocol GP sets - we're following rules, but the receptionists get the brunt of it. If there is verbal abuse - it is sorted out but we're targeted most. Always 4 people on call, I feel supported but there have been times where things have not been dealt with in the best way. Those on the front desk who speak to both patients on the phone and at the desk are expected to take the same amount of calls as somebody who is in the back. Even if you're at the front desk, it can be difficult to juggle. Can be difficult

juggling management - GPs and the patients. I want to give everybody an appointment, but we just have to follow what we've been told."

"Always enjoyed working here - 22 years here. Everything is ordered and very calm. We're all on the same page."

"I enjoy working here. The staff are all very helpful, we work as a team and help one another. I feel supported by the practice manager - I can approach them."

Response from provider

Hi Sarah,

Thank you for your detailed report, and apologies for the delay in replying. I appreciate the positive points highlighted in the report.

As per your recommendations, our website is now accessible in different languages, and we have added all staff surnames. The complaints procedure has also been updated.

As a practice, we are currently discussing the introduction of a self-check-in system and re-announcement of appointments. In 2019-20, before COVID-19, we took over Ewood Medical Centre, and shortly after the full merger, the pandemic brought significant challenges. Since then, we have been focusing on stabilising the practice while also considering cosmetic improvements. We are taking things one step at a time.

While we aim to provide information in multiple languages, it is not always feasible due to the way these materials are delivered to us. However, we encourage patients to inform us if they require specific information in their preferred language.

Our reception staff work incredibly hard at the front desk, often facing difficult situations. While some patients unfortunately treat them unfairly, many others appreciate their efforts, often dropping off chocolates and flowers as a token of gratitude. Our reception team handles all situations professionally and appropriately. As a zero-tolerance practice, we issue warning letters to patients who are abusive towards staff to ensure a safe and respectful environment for everyone.

To improve access and reduce phone wait times, we are implementing online triage, allowing patients to receive quicker medical advice from clinical staff.

Once online triage is in place, we hope it will alleviate pressure on the phone lines, benefiting both patients and staff. We will ensure that elderly patients and those who are not comfortable with computers or smartphones can still access services over the phone.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you need any further input.

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