



Enter and View Visit Report

Highley Medical Centre

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About Healthwatch Shropshire



Healthwatch Shropshire is the independent health and social care champion for local people.

We work to ensure your voice counts when it comes to shaping and improving services. We address inequalities in health and social care, to help make sure everyone gets the services they need. We are a charity.

There are local Healthwatch across the country as well as a national body, Healthwatch England.

What is Enter & View?

Healthwatch Shropshire gathers information on people's experiences of health and social care services and there are times when it is appropriate for Healthwatch Shropshire to see and hear for ourselves how services are being provided. These visits are called 'Enter and View', and can be 'announced', 'semi-announced' or 'unannounced'. For 'semi-announced' visits the service provider is told we will visit but not the date or time of the visit.



The responsibility to carry out Enter and View visits was given to Healthwatch in the **Health and Social Care Act 2012**.



Enter and View visits are carried out by a team of specially trained and DBS checked volunteers called Authorised Representatives. They make observations, collect people's views and opinions anonymously and produce a report.

Enter & View visits are not inspections and always have a 'purpose'.



Details of the Visit

Service	Highley Medical Centre
Provider	Highley Medical Centre
Date / time of visit	Thursday 23 rd January 2020 10am
Visit team	Two Healthwatch Shropshire Enter and View Authorised Representatives (ARs)

Purpose of the Visit

Advertising and ease of access is one of the core requirements for improving access to general practice. The purpose of these visits is to see if GP Practices are meeting these requirements as set out by NHS England¹:

- Ensure services are advertised to patients, including notification on practice websites, notices in local urgent care services and publicity into the community, so that it is clear to patients how they can access these appointments and associated service,
- Ensure ease of access for patients including:
 - all practice receptionists able to direct patients to the service and offer appointments to extended hours service on the same basis as appointments to non-extended hours services
 - patients should be offered a choice of evening or weekend appointments on an equal footing to core hours appointments.

¹ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/gp/gpfv/redesign/improving-access/>

Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings observed on the specific date set out above. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experience of all patients and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

The Context of the Visit

Healthwatch Shropshire (HWS) has received many comments regarding the availability of GP appointments in the last year. The public seem generally unaware of extended access appointments (appointments available outside normal surgery opening hours) being available. HWS are gathering further information about access to GP appointments through a hot topic. A hot topic is targeted activity looking at one particular aspect of health and social care and inviting views from the public.

We decided to visit GP surgeries across Shropshire to discuss appointments and see how they are offering extended access appointments, if they are advertising them in the surgery and if they are making patients aware of them when they ask.

We visited GP practices representing a range of list sizes and in different areas of Shropshire.

What we did

Two Authorised Representatives visited the medical centre on a Thursday, mid-morning.

The visit was “announced” meaning the Practice Manager had been informed that we would be visiting in advance.

On arrival we met and talked with the Practice Manager, Deputy Practice Manager and Finance & Payroll Manager.

Later, we spoke to the senior receptionist and then 2 patients in the surgery waiting room.

We looked around the waiting room to see what information, if any, was available for patients to read about making appointments and in particular, Extended Access appointments.



What we found out

Environment

The practice has approximately 3,200 patients on its list at the current time. We were advised that the area is predominantly elderly and that the practice was very much rural in nature.

The surgery is located in what looks like a large, fairly modern, family house with direct access to the main road running through Highley.

Our first general impression of the surgery was that it offered cramped accommodation internally and that there was inadequate car parking externally.

The waiting area was friendly and welcoming and had bench seating, which, although a little firm, was comfortable and adequate for the number of patients. A large artwork produced by the pupils of a local school was displayed. A great number of leaflets and posters were displayed around the walls and on poster boards. In addition, there was a large LED screen giving an array of health advice.

A cohort of 3 new reception staff have been trained. The staff tend to live locally, avoiding travel difficulties.

The surgery has 2 male and 1 female GPs. In addition, there is a Nurse Practitioner, Practice Nurse, Health Care Assistant and a range of specialist colleagues who attend clinics at specific times during the week such as the Phlebotomist and Clinical Pharmacist. There is currently a vacancy for the Nurse Practitioner role and recruitment is underway. The Practice Manager oversees Highley and Claverley Medical Practices.

Public transport links to the surrounding towns are poor making it more challenging for older patients to visit alternative surgeries in neighbouring towns.

Around the time of our visit the practice was receiving media attention, both locally and further afield, in relation to the impact of poor road surfaces and the ability to appoint locum GPs. The media attention was not initiated by staff at the practice.

Appointments

The standard opening hours are 8.30am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday. Extended hours are offered via a shared practice arrangement with Bridgnorth (who are able to offer daily extended hours) and Cleobury Mortimer. Highley offer extended hours 1 in every 8 Saturdays between 8.30am and 12.30pm.

Between 80 and 90% of patients requesting an urgent appointment get a same day appointment with an appropriate medical professional. GPs see 30-40 patients a day.

Some patients who insist upon seeing a specified doctor only, have a longer wait for an appointment of up to 2 weeks.

Blood testing is available at the surgery twice a week. Gynaecological services are not available within the Highley practice and referrals are made to a practice at Cleobury Mortimer.

Unlike many more urban practices, the practice offers a home visiting service, even, on occasions providing GPs with drivers for more remote areas.

Some appointments are kept available each day for emergency situations.

There are some missed appointments amounting to some 300 last year, despite the Practice sending text reminders to customers prior to an appointment.

Most people book appointments on the telephone, but some patients come in to the surgery to book. Although online appointments are also available, there is a more limited take up of this facility.

A Patient Participation Group (PPG) has been running for some 10 years. It is presently chaired by the local Shropshire Council Councillor and has recently been set up as a Facebook Group. The last meeting of the PPG, attended by the Practice Manager and Assistant Practice Manager, saw an audience of some 80 people. The PPG is seen as being very positive for the group itself and the practice.

Higher patient expectation, rather than an increase in patient numbers, is seen as a reason for the increase in demand for appointments. It was felt that many patients opted to try and see a GP first, rather than speak to an alternative health professional despite the fact that receptionists try to signpost patients to the appropriate clinician.

The patients we spoke to had different views on how easy it was to make an appointment. One said that it was very easy, the other said that it was difficult. That patient made it quite clear though that there was no difficulty in getting through to the practice on the telephone nor in the speed of referrals within the practice. It was the original appointment to see a non GP health professional that caused delay.

Extended access appointments

The practice is a member of the South Shropshire group of practices. This group provides Extended Access appointments to patients on a rota basis. The long geographical distances between these practices, taken with the poor public transport infrastructure, tends to limit the take up of extended access appointments. The doctors at Highley contribute to the rota, providing out of hours appointments at Highley every 8 weeks.



Receptionists are trained in sign-posting patients to the most appropriate practitioner within the practice.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the high volume of information displayed in the waiting area we didn't see any information specifically about the availability of extended access appointments.

The receptionists have had training on offering extended access appointments. These will tend to be offered if patients can't get an appointment or cannot

attend the appointments available. These appointments are not popular as they often involve travelling considerable distances from Highley which is difficult for some patients. In those circumstances, we were advised that patients prefer to wait.



Neither of the patients we spoke to had heard about Extended Access appointments. When we explained what Extended Access appointments were patients said they thought it was a good idea.

Website

We looked at the website for the practice.

- The practice website provides patients with a great deal of information.
- The online appointment booking system presently only appears to cover appointments with GPs. We discussed extending this to other practice staff with the team, who confirmed that unfortunately it was difficult to administer



because patients would not know how long an appointment they required i.e. with the Nurse a treatment may take 30 minutes. GP appointments are offered for 10 minute duration.

- Some of the information on the website appears to be out of date, eg opening hours (Wednesday afternoon closure is still shown), the effective date of the Extended Access initiative is given in the future tense and the date of the Patient Participation Group meetings appear out dated.
- The practice website clearly identifies the opportunity to book appointments within the Extended Access arrangements.

Summary of Findings

- The practice is housed in a building that is cramped. The senior practice staff are aware of this shortcoming and longer term, are attempting to resolve the matter through relocation to a new build property within the locality.
- The number of patients on the practice list has remained reasonably stable over the last decade and there is an ageing population with potentially higher needs.
- The surgery is experiencing high demand for appointments and able to meet 80-90% of requests for urgent appointments.
- The waiting time for a routine appointment with an appropriate health professional is very short. Same day, or following day, appointments are normally available.
- If patients ask to see a specifically named GP there can be up to a two week wait time.
- The surgery is normally able to offer patients with urgent need same day appointments and always offers a child under 5 a same day appointment.
- The surgery offers Extended Access appointments when people cannot get an appointment on the day.
- Appointments are available with a Nurse Practitioner, Nurses and a Pharmacist but some patients insist upon seeing a GP.
- Both patients we spoke to were very happy with their treatment at Highley Medical Centre.

- Neither of the patients we spoke to were aware of Extended Access appointments.
- There was a vast array of different posters on display in the waiting area. It would perhaps be difficult to place information posters relating to Extended Access prominently enough that patients would definitely see them.
- There is a longstanding and active Patient Participation Group (PPG), which is presently chaired by the local Shropshire Council Councillor.
- The PPG now makes use of a specifically set up group on Facebook.
- Senior practice staff attend PPG meetings and there seems to be a positive rapport between the practice and the PPG.
- The practice website provides patients with a great deal of information.
- The practice website enables patients to book appointments through a “live” system which interfaces with the booking system used by the receptionists.
- The practice website clearly identifies the opportunity to book appointments within the Extended Access arrangements.
- The online appointment booking system presently only appears to cover appointments with GPs. Perhaps this should be extended to embrace other practice staff, such as nurse practitioners but we appreciate the system’ is not currently structured to provide this more flexible facility.
- Some of the information on the website appears to be out of date

Recommendations

In order to improve the patients’ experience we suggest:

- Continue to progress a move to relocate the practice to a more appropriate building.
- Review and regularly update website information to ensure that it is kept up to date.
- Review information on display in the waiting area to ensure that Extended Access arrangements are clearly and prominently displayed.
- Take opportunities within the waiting area, on the website and through liaison with the PPG, to emphasise the availability of other, non GP, health professionals.
- Extend the online booking of appointments beyond that for GPs to other health professionals.

Service Provider Response

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your visit to our practice and subsequent report which we received earlier this year at the beginning of the pandemic.

As a medical practice we have obviously gone through quite a challenging time during these past few months of Covid-19 which has caused the delay in our response to the report. However we thank you for your very encouraging and motivated report.

We acknowledge that the Extended Access posters were not advertised as well as they should have been in the waiting room due to the high volume of other information, although we did have a poster on the main door and on one of our very full notice boards. This has now been rectified to make the posters more visible. We would like to confirm, however, that the extended access information has always been on our website. We also acknowledge that our opening hours had been amended on our website in one area, it had not been amended on another part of the website. We rectified this immediately and thank you for pointing it out. We also removed the PPG meeting date. This pop up part of our website now gives information regarding Coronavirus and is updated as soon as Government guidance is updated.

Covid-19 has meant that we have been unable to extend our online booking appointments to other health professionals yet but we will endeavour to do this in the future.

We now have a Social Prescriber linked to our practice and we have advertised this on our website and our local PPG have circulated it on our local social media groups. Since your visit we have commenced e-Consults to give patients more flexibility during these difficult times.

Once again may we take this opportunity to thank you for the report and we aspire to continue to provide the highest possible quality of services for the improvement of the population.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Shropshire would like to thank the surgery staff and patients for their contributions to this Enter & View visit.

Get in Touch

Please contact Healthwatch Shropshire to share your views and experiences of this service or any other health and social care service in Shropshire. We gather comments anonymously and share them with service commissioners and providers to highlight areas of good practice and identify areas for improvement.



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