



Enter and View Visit Report Pontesbury Medical Practice

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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	Pontesbury Medical Practice
Provider	Pontesbury Medical Practice
Date / time of visit	Wednesday 11th December 2019 10.00am
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.

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 service users and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

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

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 Practice. We met and talked to the Practice Manager. We then spoke to three staff (Receptionists) and seven patients. We looked at the information on access to appointments on the noticeboards in the waiting room and on the website. This was an announced visit.

What we found out

Environment

The surgery was purpose built twelve years ago. It is a two storey building with clinics and surgeries held on both floors. There is a good sized car park. The practice has approximately 8000 patients. There are five GP Partners, three salaried GPs and one GP Registrar. The Practice Manager told us that they do not regularly use Locum GPs.

The waiting room is on the ground floor with plenty of seating and several noticeboards. We did not see any notices or information about access to appointments or extended access appointments.



Appointments

The Practice Manager and all the staff we spoke to told us that there are no issues with patients getting an appointment with a GP. Doctors see patients daily (Monday - Friday) between 09.00- 12.00 and 15.00- 18.00.

The Practice Manager told us that there are a variety of appointments available;

- Same day appointments (bookable from 08.30 when the surgery opens)
 - Monday a.m. 18 available appointments
 - Monday p.m. 22 available appointments
 - Tuesday - Friday
 - 12 available appointments each a.m.
 - 16 available appointments each p.m.

In addition the Duty Doctor can book an additional 6 same day appointments each day for patients who need to be seen after having had a telephone conversation.

- Appointments that can be booked for 3 days in advance (these are released 3 days in advance)
- Advance booking appointments up to 6 weeks ahead.

As the Practice currently has additional funding from the Clinical Commissioning Group to provide extra appointments due to the winter crisis period; they have been able to appoint a Locum to see more patients and two Pharmacists to review patient medication. One Pharmacist works one day a week and one Pharmacist works one morning a week.

The Practice Manager and Receptionists told us that if a patient cannot get an appointment on the same day, they are offered a same day telephone call back by the Duty Doctor. A receptionist told us that if there are no call back appointments available the patient is asked to call the surgery the next day.

However, the Receptionists told us they are usually able to make appointments for patients and there are no issues for them in finding suitable appointments.

All the patients we spoke to said that it is difficult to get a same day appointment² and it is difficult to get an appointment with a named Doctor. The Patients said that they can get an appointment in a few weeks' time. Patients said they always seem to see a different doctor, usually a Locum. One patient said "there appeared to be a large turnover of doctors". The Practice Manager told us that staffing at the surgery is stable.

We asked the patients:

	Good	Reasonable	Poor
How easy is to get an appointment?	6	1	1*

*One patient who we spoke to said it was easy getting a routine appointment but poor in terms of getting a same day or emergency appointment.

If you can't get through on the phone to make an appointment what do you do?		
	Call 111	1
	Go to A&E	3

There are five receptionists on duty at any time. All the receptionists answer the telephone calls with one person also speaking with callers to the front desk.

The Receptionists and Practice Manager told us that the Doctors prefer patients not to be asked why they need an appointment. The surgery does not signpost

² The Practice Manager has told us that they 'keep a total of 47 same day appointments available on a Monday and 28 every other day of the week. If a patient wants to be seen on the day they are not questioned as to whether their need is urgent or not, we fit them in to see a Doctor. If we do use all of the appointments up the patient is offered a triage phone call with a Doctor and if it is felt they should be seen they are allocated an appointment in an extra slot added to an existing surgery. In the National Survey responses from patients score us higher than the averages regarding access.'

patients to Advanced Nurse Practitioners, as Nurses at the surgery are busy with routine dressings, and regular clinics.

Due to the rural location of the Practice the Practice Manager told us that signposting patients to external services is not appropriate. The Practice Manager said that staff have been trained about signposting patients some time ago, but said “signposting is not used”. A Receptionist told us that they may refer patients who need a form for a driving licence to a provider in Shrewsbury as it is cheaper for the patient and it means the Doctors can focus on poorly patients.

A Receptionist was aware of a community car scheme (a local taxi service), which patients can be told about if they need help with transport.

The Practice Manager did not have any statistics from the telephone system or staff to see how many patients do not get an appointment or for example how long they have to wait for the phone to be answered.

Extended access appointments

The Practice Manager told us that there is information on the website about the Extended Access Appointments. Only one patient we spoke to had seen any information about Extended Access Appointments on the website, but as they had not understood the heading they had not read further. We told them what it meant and they said that had they known weekend or evening appointments are available they would have found that useful.

All the staff we spoke to said that as patients are able to get an appointment at a suitable time they do not routinely offer weekend or evening appointments at the hub at Marden in Shrewsbury. The Practice Manager told us “not many people use it - it’s too far from here”.

Six months ago the Practice introduced out of hours calls which are booked by Receptionists. There are 4 slots available each session.

Tuesday a.m. 07.00 - 08.00

Tuesday p.m. 18.30 - 19.30

Thursday p.m. 18.30 - 19.30

The surgery is not open during these extended hours.

One patient told us that they had called the surgery for a same day appointment, none had been available so they had been asked to ring the next day. Their condition got worse and the patient had to go to Shropdoc. The patient said that if they had known about evening appointments they would have gone to Marden.

We asked patients if they knew about extended access appointments.

	Yes	No
Are you aware of the extended access appointments?	1	6
Would extended access appointments be useful?	7	0

Website

The website has a page with information about how to book an appointment. The page says that appointments can be made up to two weeks ahead, but we were told appointments are bookable up to six weeks ahead.

There is information on Extended Access Appointments on the Appointments page on the website but it is not specific to the hub in Marden, Shrewsbury and patients said it was not clear.

Additional Findings

There are several housing developments currently being built in and around Pontesbury which will increase demand on the services the surgery provides and potentially increase the number of younger families.

The Practice offers a number of additional services including counselling, midwife clinics, memory clinics, health visitors, limited podiatry, asthma clinic, physiotherapy and Green Oak (a voluntary counselling service).

The Practice Manager told us that the Patients Participation Group (PPG) always attends the two annual flu clinics providing refreshments and a raffle. There have been no meetings of the group recently.

The Practice Manager told us that the Practice has no plans to pursue e-consulting e.g. skype calls due to the current age profile of patients and the weak broadband signal.

We saw a poster in the reception area about the Accessible Information Standard, but the information on the web does not appear to meet the standard.

Summary of Findings

- We did not see any information about Extended Access Appointments on the noticeboards in the waiting area.
- The website has some information on Extended Access Appointments.
- Only one patient we spoke to was aware of Extended Access Appointments.
- One patient said an Extended access Appointment would have been useful if it had been offered.
- All the staff told us they were able to offer patients the appointments they needed.
- All the patients told us it is difficult to get a same day appointment.
- The practice does not routinely offer or promote evening or weekend appointments.
- Six months ago the Practice introduced out of hours GP telephone calls.
- The PPG is not actively involved in promoting new ways of working.
- The Practice Manager told us that the surgery does not regularly use Locum GPs.
- Patients told us they usually see a different doctor, usually a Locum.³
- The Manager told us staff had received signposting training some time ago but signposting is not regularly used⁴.
- The surgery is not currently involved in e-consulting.

³ The Practice has provided Healthwatch with their Locum usage which is on average 1 locum per month (with no locum usage at all for 5 months of the year). The Practice Manager wonders if there is confusion due to Registrars working at the practice.

⁴ The Practice Manager states 'The Doctors have asked that Reception staff do not ask anyone requesting an appointment why they want it unless it is for a Practice Nurse and then we need to know how much time to allocate for the appointment. This means that we do not have the option to signpost from Reception. We do, however, have an excellent Community & Care Coordinator who all the staff are happy to refer to, her knowledge is invaluable and through her signposting she has helped many people.'

Recommendations

We suggest that the practice considers the following:

- Retrain staff so they are routinely offering Extended Access Appointments.
- Survey patients to find out if evening and weekend appointments would be useful.
- Involve the PPG in promoting new ways of working.
- Analyse data from the phone system to understand the calls made, the number of times patients are not able to make an appointment etc.
- Display information about Extended Access Appointments on noticeboards and consider new ways of promoting this to patients through social media.
- Review the signposting policy to ensure it meets the needs of patients.

Service Provider Response

The response from the service provider appears below our recommendations in blue:

- Retrain staff so they are routinely offering Extended Access Appointments.

This has been done by the Practice Manager in December 2019.

- Survey patients to find out if evening and weekend appointments would be useful.

There is no immediate plan to carry out a survey, funding for extended access has been given to Darwin Health Ltd who offer these appointments on our behalf.

- Involve the PPG in promoting new ways of working.

There is a plan to meet with the PPG in March 2020 and this will be discussed with them at that time. The Practice Manager will oversee this and the meeting has been arranged.

- Analyse data from the phone system to understand the calls made, the number of times patients are not able to make an appointment etc.

Training has been arranged with the phone provider. This was arranged by the Practice Manager and is taking place in February 2020.

• Display information about Extended Access Appointments on noticeboards and consider new ways of promoting this to patients through social media. Information has been put on notice board and our website updated as suggested by Healthwatch Representative. The Practice Manager has overseen this.

• Review the signposting policy to ensure it meets the needs of patients. This has been reviewed without change as our Reception staff do not question the patient about why they need to see a GP. All members of staff are able to refer to our Community and Care Coordinator who is able to signpost when appropriate.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Shropshire would like to thank the practice, patients, visitors and staff for their contribution to this Enter & View.

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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