

healthwatch
Walsall

Enter and View Report

Blakenall Family Practice

Announced Visit
15th March 2023



Engaging
Communities
Solutions

Enter and View

Part of Healthwatch Walsall remit is to carry out Enter and View visits. Healthwatch Walsall Authorised Representatives carry out these visits to health and social care premises to find out how service users access, use and understand what the overall service user experiences are, highlighting findings and potentially making recommendations that may lead to areas of improvement.

The Health and Social Care Act allows Authorised Representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families and carers on premises such as: hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists and pharmacies.

Enter and View visits can happen if people tell us there is a problem with a service but, equally, they can occur when services have a good reputation so that we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first hand.

Healthwatch Walsall Enter and View visits are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues. However, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit, they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch Walsall Safeguarding Policy, the service manager will be informed, and the visit will end. The local authority Safeguarding Team will also be informed.

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Acknowledgments

Healthwatch Walsall would like to thank the Practice Manager and all the patients who took part for their co-operation during our visit.

Disclaimer

Please note that this report is related to findings and observations made during our visit made on the 15th March 2023. The report does not claim to represent the views of all service users, only those who contributed during the visit.

Authorised Representatives

Tom Collins - Healthwatch Walsall

Lynne Fenton - Healthwatch Walsall

Who we share the report with

This report and its findings will be shared with provider, the Walsall public, Black Country Integrated Care Board (Walsall Place), Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Healthwatch England, PCN (Primary Care Network). The report will also be published on the Healthwatch Walsall website and can be available as a hard paper copy if requested. Call 0800 470 1660.

Provider details

Name of Service: Blakenall Family Practice/Harden Health Centre (operating under one practice, Blakenall Family Practice).

Address: Blakenall Village Centre
79 Thames Road,
Blakenall, Walsall
WS3 1LZ

Telephone: 01922 927220

Service type: e.g. GP practice and medical services

The practice is combined surgeries of Blakenall Family Practice and Harden Health Centre as listed under the umbrella provider Modality website: <https://www.modalitypartnership.nhs.uk/harden-health-centre>

Purpose of the visit

This was an announced visit. Enter and View A3 posters of the visit were distributed in the main reception areas to enable patients to be aware and take part.

We sought to gather patient experiences of accessing and using the GP and nursing services offered at the venue.



What we did

We arrived at the building at 7.50 am and observed a queue of around 8 patients waiting to enter the practice at 8.00 am. We spoke to agreeing patients from 8.10am to approximately 3.00 pm. Patients had a choice as to whether they wished to participate. We used a pre-set list of questions/prompts and recorded patient and staff responses.

In total we spoke to 13 patients (1 patient did not complete the process as they were sent to hospital), the Practice Manager and another staff member, a total of 15 people.

Environment

External

The practice is situated in Blakenall Village Centre on the ground floor near to the centre reception area.

The practice reception, offices and consultation rooms are rented so the exterior of the building is maintained by the landlord but has good ground floor access for wheelchair users and mobility scooter users.

Internal

When we arrived at the practice entrance we noted:

- A secured door to the practice prior to general opening times
- Hand gel dispenser in place at entrance to patient reception area
- There was access for wheelchair and mobility scooter users
- We entered at 8.00 am upon the opening of the doors and conducted an initial visual scan of the main patient reception area and we noted the following:
- There was a 3-sided reception desk with 2 staff attending to speak to waiting patients and also to answer any incoming calls
- The patient reception/ seating area was clean and tidy
- Seating for approximately 30 to 40 patients and seats appeared clean and well maintained
- There was easy access for wheelchair users and mobility scooter users with clear pathways to main desk and other rooms in the practice

- Main reception was clearly marked
- There was good patient information across various patient notice boards
- There was a toilet in the waiting area locality for patient use
- We were told there is a Hearing Loop for patients who may be hard of hearing/deaf
- Two wall mounted TVs that notified/summoned patients when and where to attend their appointment
- There were two wall mounted suggestion boxes
- There were a number of patient information boards which included a dedicated Patient Participation Group (PPG) board, general health information and freestanding 'You said, We did...' information
- There was a range of patients from various communities and age groups

Practice Services

We were told that:

- The practice services approximately 12,500 patients
- There are 8 GPs generally on a day, 6 available which include the use of Locums
- The GPs also visit some local care/nursing homes
- They can undertake patient home visits if the patients are bed/home bound
- There are 2 practice Nurses 1 of which is a prescribing Nurse, 2 Health care assistants

Access

Physical access is by an automated door entrance to the practice with a working hand gel dispenser. Walkways were clear and used by young mothers with pushchairs and patients that used mobility scooters.

Access to the services can be by telephone, in person and using previously E Consult, but now Accurx online (a form of E Consult). There is a hearing loop available. There are two TVs that notify patient appointments with the clinician and room number.

For more information about Accurx, here is an introduction from their website and a further link to their website.

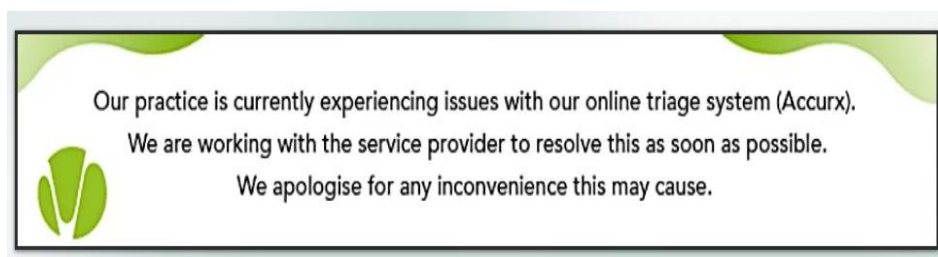
'Improving your experience as a patient'

Accurx is a software provider, trusted by the NHS and chosen by your GP or other caregiver to help coordinate your care.

Your healthcare professional uses our platform so they can contact you easily, manage your care remotely and offer you the best patient experience possible.

Link: <https://www accurx.com/patient>

The Accurx system was not accessible due to server issues. We checked on their website on the 20th March 2023 and it was not accessible.



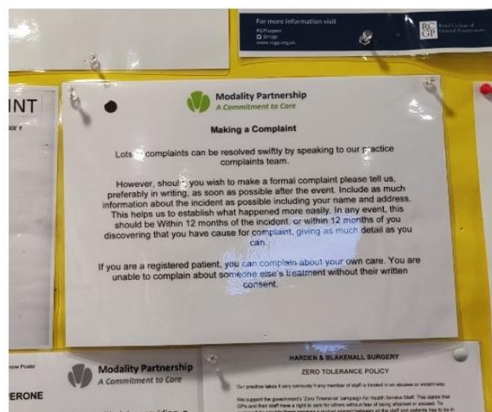
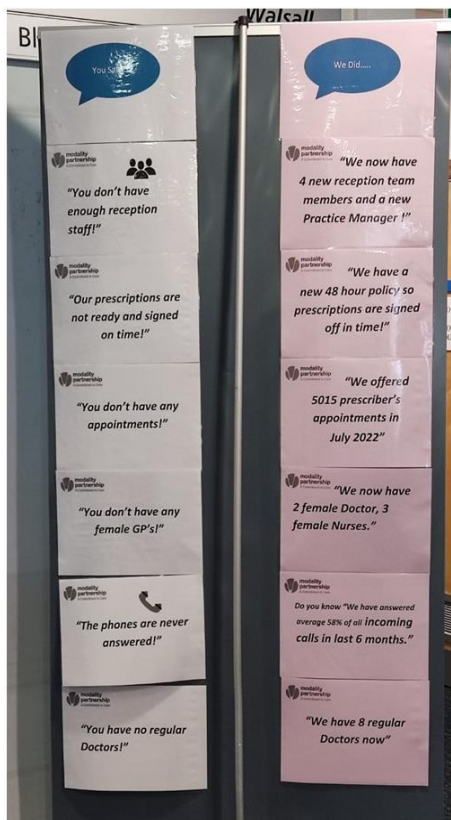
The phones switch to another Modality practice for general enquiries between 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm to allow staff to catch up on with notes, administration duties and lunch breaks.

Patients who were queuing were doing so to access appointments on the same day if available. In many cases this was opposed to calling in by telephone, as many of the in patients we spoke to later indicated that they:

- Had in the past telephoned but could not get through
- Were waiting a while
- A couple of patients who had used the call back system to book an appointment. When they did receive a call back, all appointments for that day were now unavailable
- They were far down the queue, 30 plus, and when they did get through appointments for the that day were unavailable

Patient information available

In the main patient waiting area there are a number of patient information boards relating to healthy living styles, a carers board and general notice board, with posters and information flyers. Displayed on the general notice board was the practice opening hours, the procedure/process for patients to raise a concern or a complaint.



There is a dedicated Patient Participation Group (P.P.G.) board with the last meeting minutes and useful, condition related or support information should patients need it.

How to access 'Extra GP appointments' which may be known as 'out of hours or WALDOC' posters and leaflets were distributed in the main reception area.

Patient interviews & responses

We spoke to and collated 13 patients experience(s) and view(s) over the visit either before or after booking or seeing a medical professional. One of the 13 patients was advised to go to hospital and did not complete their session fully with us.

We asked 13 Patients how often they sought to make contact with the practice, whether it be to book an appointment.

- 8 patients as needed
- 1 patient daily
- 1 patient weekly
- 1 patient monthly
- 1 patient other

A patient who had a long-term condition and had an operation mentioned that they had not had any follow up contact, they said they been calling but could not get through. That day of our visit was the first face to face contact they had with a GP.

Another said they call daily. They had walked to the practice and got an appointment with the nurse.

We asked them how they currently communicate with practice?

The responses were:

- 6 patients tend to walk in
- 4 telephone in
- 1 telephone or walk in
- None used online
- 1 patient tries a mix
- 1 patient uses NHS111

Note.

- A patient mentioned they call NHS111 as they don't use technology to see a GP

We asked if patients are given alternative routes of care if appointments are not available?

- 9 patients answered yes there were offered alternative routes of care
- 1 patient answered no
- 1 patient could not remember
- 1 patient did not answer

It appears that a majority of patients are offered alternative care pathways, this may include: NHS111, Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC), Emergency Care Centre (A&E)

We asked if the patient(s) knew of Extra GP appointments?

Note: Extra GP appointments may also be known as 'out of hours' or WALDOC'.

- 8 patients have knew Extra GP about appointments,
- 3 said no
- 1 person did not answer

We asked if patients feel they are listened to around their health needs?

- 9 patients answered Yes with one saying, "when you can access",
- 3 remaining patients felt that they were not listened to by GP but were by Nurses.

We asked what barriers do they face at the practice?

Their responses were:

"More receptionists needed to deal with patients in the morning"

"When you call at 8.00 am (telephone lines open) you are 30th patient in queue waiting"

"More appointment phone lines"

"Worker, so can't call at 8.00 am"

"Can't see a GP face to face, can't get through on phone and terrible music on phone when on hold"

"Telephone access an issue"

"Phone calls not answered, can't get appointment"

Clearly some patients spoken to felt that the telephone option and getting through was a barrier and that by walking into the practice they were more likely to be dealt with and have their needs met. Also with all patients calling in at 8.00am as the lines open creates substantial queues and waiting times and may mean you do not get an appointment.

4 patients felt that there were no barriers.

Patients' comments around positive and negative points to do with the practice

Positive(s) highlighted by patients:

"Ask and they will spend time talking to patients"

"Good staff"

"Nurses good"

"Have made efforts to improve"

"Staff always accommodating"

"Clean and tidy"

"GP and staff are respectful"

"Feel involved in my care, Nurses are very good"

Negative(s) highlighted by patients:

"Younger staff not always as bothered to help"

"Getting through on phones is difficult"

"Can't get face to face appointments"

"Can't get GP, can't get through on phone, don't use I.T."

"Having to call at 8.00am as everyone else does"

We asked if they had choice of hospital if they are referred?

- 1 patient responded that they were not offered a choice
- 5 patients answered not aware of choice
- 6 patients said they have been offered a choice

Some patients said they preferred to attend New Cross Hospital. One patient said they are always told Manor Hospital.

We asked if the patients understood the information given and if they are able to ask questions or ask for explanations?

All patients asked (12) answered yes they did, which included face to face explanations with them

“You just have to ask and they spend time with you to tell you”

“My doctor explains once you can see them, I can ask questions and explains medication”

We asked how are patients notified of any changes at the practice?

- 9 of the responding patients said that they receive text messages from the practice. This was mixed with also being informed by letters
- 2 patients did not answer
- 1 patient said they had received a voicemail (call) to cancel an appointment
- 1 patient said they are not told of any changes

We asked if the patient knew how to raise a concern or make a complaint?

Over half that was asked knew how to make a complain. This may mean the patient did not have a need to... or has not raised any concerns/complaints. And or they do not know how to?

The concern/complaints process is pinned on the general notice board.

We asked if the patient could change/improve anything what would it be?

- The music on the phone when on hold
- Telephone waiting times, queues can be 30 plus waiting
- To see a GP face to face, they say they will call you back and they don't call you back
- 4 patients commented around better telephone access
- Would like specialised female services such as dealing with the menopause
- 1 said no

Staff interviews

We spoke to a senior staff member and the Practice Manager in two individual interviews.

We asked if there was a Patient Participation Group (P.P.G.)?

We were told yes. It comprised of about 9 patients who meet approximately every 3 months. A 'P.P.G.' notice board contained last meeting notes, useful information, how to join, etc.

We asked what alternative care pathways are offered to patients and how?

We were told:

- NHS111, 999, Extra GP appointments, A&E, Walk In at the hospital.
- Mainly verbally given over the telephone or in person. There is also information on their website.

We asked the staff to highlight any positives and negatives around the practice?

Positives:

- Good team
- Offer a large number of services
- Staff try and help patients
- Mondays and Wednesday's bloods are taken at 7.30am and GPs start from 7.00am

Negatives:

- Not enough consulting rooms to see patients
- Patient appreciation of services, staff and sorting out patient issues that may not have been caused at practice level

We noted that there are no 'Thank You' cards displayed in reception though we were told that chocolates, cards and gifts are brought in by patients for staff.

We asked how the staff give patients choice?

We were told:

- Type of appointments offered
- A female Doctor can be available if patient wishes
- The practice can engage interpreters
- Staff can note patient call back times if patient prefers
- Nurse specialists to meet patient needs
- Choice of hospital if referral/treatment time

We asked if the staff/practice encounter anti- social behaviour from patients/relatives and how they deal with it?

We were told:

- Seek to diffuse the situation
- Staff have undergone conflict and resolution training
- Call the police
- Practice has a 'Zero Tolerance Policy'
- Can issue patient 'Zero' tolerance letters
- Patients can be removed from patient list and sent to a 'special allocation service'

We asked how do they support patients who wish to raise a concern or make a complaint?

We were told:

- Practice has a complaints process/policy (this was displayed on general notice board)
- Visit practice website for details
- Offer to speak to Practice Manager

We asked how do staff educate/ inform patients about the person person/professional to see to meet their care needs?

We were told:

- There is a 'Meet the Team' board in the waiting area which highlights who does what
- Practice website
- Initial patient triage

We asked how does the practice update patients of any changes

We were told:

- Text messaging
- Letters

- Notices in surgery
- Ringing patients (i.e. if appointments changed or cancelled)

We asked staff if they could change one thing about the practice what would it be?

We were told:

- More rooms for patient consultation/appointments
- Offer later appointments for school children/ parents/workers such as NHS staff

We asked how do they meet the communication needs of patients such as those who are visually, hearing impaired, learning needs and language needs?

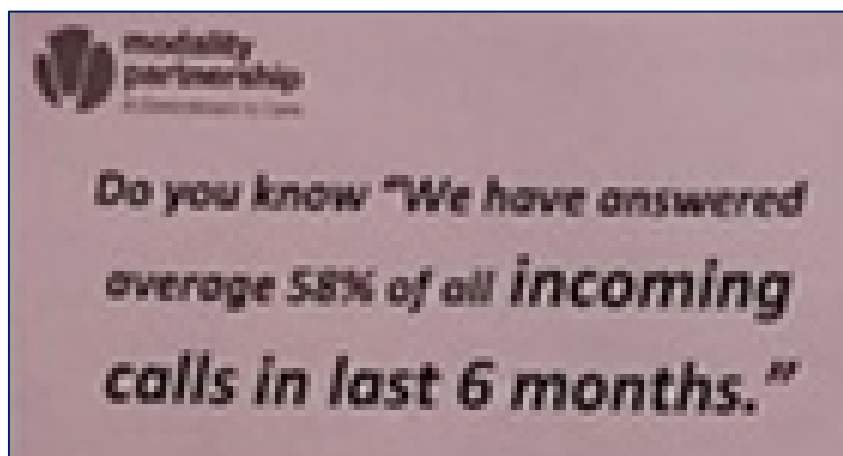
We were told:

There is a hearing loop installed.

They engage interpreters via a service called 'Global translators' which offer multi languages and may include British Sign Language (B.S.L.)

During a feedback session with the Practice Manager we asked if the 'Do not attend' rate was high. It appears to be higher with Nurses than GPs. Specific numbers were not disclosed at the time. There is also a high level of abandoned telephone calls by patients.

A patient facing display stated that the practice over the last 6 months had answered 58% of incoming calls. This may appear that 42% were not answered. But it does not mention or reflect the number of patients abandoned calls.



Findings

- Patients attend to book appointments in person as the preferred way
- Patients had issues with: getting through on the telephone, waiting times on the telephone, queues and in some cases telephone calls not being answered
- Patients are requested to call at 8.00am for appointments, this causes a funnel of all waiting patients to call and unsuccessful patients are asked to call back the next day at 8.00am if no alternative care pathway accepted
- Text messaging seems to work well for patients who can access text messaging
- Majority of the staff seem to be attentive, caring and helpful
- There were mixed responses about been given choices when it came to hospitals for further treatment
- A lot of patients knew of alternative care pathways such as 'Extra GP Appointments' this may be due to the information practice staff give out
- It may appear that some patients do not know how to raise a concern/complaint
- Staff told us that there had been quite a number of abandoned telephone calls by patients
- There was a mix of very positive patient comments and some negative comments. Complimentary once a patient can see a clinical professional but negative about being able to access such professionals
- Many patients we spoke to were not aware of social prescribers, their role and the support that they can give
- Patient abandoned calls may reflect the frustrating waiting times patient mentioned being kept on hold, the telephone system later hung up
- It was mentioned that some staff are helpful 'others are not'

Recommendations

- Assess whether having the 'call back' option on the telephone system is having a negative effect on patients seeking to book appointments by phone
- Address how the 'You said, we did'; information is listed as it may appear negative to patients i.e. you stated that during 6 months 58% of telephone calls were answered but no mention of abandoned patient calls
- Assess numbers 'abandoned calls', how long people are waiting before abandoning calls, it may be because patients do not wish to wait an excessive time on hold
- Consider having complaints process displayed on the reception area and other places as it can get lost amongst other notices/posters in the practice
- Consider giving patients more choice of other services when available
- Explore opportunities to promote social prescribers and the support, or other services they can signpost patients to
- staff do
- Consider, if not already in training, a customer service training element for all patient facing staff
- Consider mystery shopper experiences around practice contact and patient experience to identify any areas of good and practices or attitudes that could be improved
- We noticed that there were no patient compliments or thank you cards though they are received. Suggest any are displayed in reception area so waiting patients can see and reflect the good work

Provider feedback

The provider was sent a copy of the draft report to comment on and was in excess of our usual of 10 working days to respond. We did not receive a response so it is considered that this is now a final report and published.

If you would like this report in a different format please let us know. Our contact details on the back page.

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