



Enter & View
Eve Hill Medical Practice
February 2024

healthwatch
Dudley



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 local 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.

Eve Hill Medical Practice invited Healthwatch Dudley to visit following a general invitation to all GP surgeries in the Dudley borough to take part in a series of Enter & View visits.

This report provides a snapshot of the conversations around access to appointments at Eve Hill Medical Practice. The findings from this Enter & View report will inform a borough-wide report about access to GP services.

The visit

Two members of Healthwatch Dudley staff and one volunteer visited the surgery between 9.30 am and 11.30 am on Friday, 2 February 2024.

Eve Hill Medical Practice has one waiting room where patients wait to see any of the health professionals.

Patients were invited to speak to Healthwatch Dudley to share their experience of booking their appointment. As part of our conversations, we asked which method was used to make the appointment and enquired about the level of knowledge around the other health professionals they could be seen by 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 22 people during our visit.

Conversations

We spoke to a range of patients, many of whom had booked an appointment by telephone.

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



Getting through on the telephone

Several people said they joined the queue and waited between five to ten minutes for their call to be answered.

One patient told us that after waiting in a queue for their call to be answered, they put the phone down. They then received a call back from a member of staff within 24 hours.

"It can be a bit difficult to get through, you need to call at 8.00 am or the appointments have all gone."

"I would rather speak to someone, you know where you stand."

"If using the phone, I would call at 8.00 am and it is answered quickly."

"I called for my mother this morning, I find the phone is engaged a lot."

"I called this morning at 8.00 am, I never have an issue getting an appointment."



Online services

Some patients said they used an online service to order repeat prescriptions.

None of the patients we spoke to had booked their appointment online.

“I use the online system to book appointments for my mother, I don’t really want to use online for myself.”

“I don’t use online services, but my husband does.”

“I can’t do online and I am not interested, because I don’t need to.”

“I book blood tests online, but not doctors’ appointments, as I am not the best online. I am confident that if I wanted to use the online method, they would give me the information I need. I now book my prescriptions online as they told me how to do it.”



Extended healthcare team

All the patients we spoke to told us they were either waiting to see a GP or a nurse.

Several patients had limited or no awareness of other health professionals, often happy to rely upon reception staff to signpost them to the appropriate clinic or person.

Some patients had a greater awareness of other health professionals, saying that they had seen a physiotherapist or paramedic previously.

“I know you can see a pharmacist, paramedic, dietician as I saw it on the TV screen in the surgery. The pharmacist rings me due to changes in my medication recently.”

“I have been offered an appointment with the physio previously, but I wanted to see a GP.”

“I am aware they have a physio here and have seen the information on the screen about other health professionals. However, I would like more information about them.”



Additional comments

Several patients said they would like to see the same doctor for continuity as they had a long term health condition or were returning about the same issue.

Two patients seemed to be unsure if they were allowed to walk into the surgery to make an appointment.

“I can’t fault the surgery at all, it is a good, robust service.”

*“The doctors and nurses are very good, the service has always been good.
There has been an increase in telephone consultations since COVID, it’s better to see a GP face to face.”*

“They don’t always stick to appointment times, but otherwise, it’s fine. Last time I visited I had to wait 20 minutes.”

“I feel there’s not enough staff to answer the phone and they can’t answer the phone if they’re speaking to someone on reception. ”

“I think if you have an ongoing condition, it is important to see the same member of staff.”

“Relationship with the practice is important, you need a good rapport with staff. They are as helpful as they can be.”

“We are lucky here.”

Our observations

We were pleased to note that the notice boards contained up-to-date and relevant information for patients.

After our visit, the Practice Manager provided us with an overview of the telephone system at the practice. We observed the telephone system 'dashboard' and the display showed that the average waiting time for calls to be answered at that point was around five minutes.

The Practice Manager told us that staff levels are increased each morning to manage the volume of calls.

We were informed that patients who ring and hang up after waiting for several minutes receive a call back within 24 hours.



Considerations



Support with online services

It may be useful for the practice to share clear information with patients about how to seek help online which may alleviate pressures on the telephone lines at peak times. Patients could be given details about how to use the surgery website or directed to the NHS app/Patient Access* if appropriate.



Making appointments in person

Patients appeared to be uncertain as to whether or not they were allowed to walk into the surgery and book an appointment. It would be helpful if this could be clarified for patients.



Telephone system

It may be helpful to share some information with patients about how the current telephone system works.

Also, patients may benefit from an increased understanding of staffing levels at peak times.

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



Response from Eve Hill Medical Centre

"We are happy with the report. Following your report we have undertaken the actions listed below."



Support with online services

Eve Hill will be holding a digital workshop in April 2024 to support patients to access online services.



Online services

The practice will be texting all patients with mobile numbers to inform them of the online services on offer.



Making appointments

In the next practice newsletter Eve Hill will write an article of how to book an appointment (to include in person) and how the telephone system works.





Thank you

We were pleased to listen to patients at Eve Hill Medical Practice, the majority of which were more than willing to share their views.

We heard a range of responses and hope that the experiences of patients and the points we have raised for consideration can be used to improve services.

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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