

Saxonbrook Medical Group Visit to Northgate Surgery

Festive Listening Tour
December 2016

Healthwatch West Sussex would like to thank everyone who has contributed to our morning in Northgate Surgery and in particular, the people who took the time to complete share their views and to those who have entrusted us with their personal stories.

Background

Healthwatch met with the partners of this practice in December 2014 to learn about their proposal to move the practice from Northgate to Crawley town centre. For more information see our previous [report](#). The practice has been in its current location (Cross Keys House, 14 Haslett Avenue West, Crawley. RH10 1HS) since April 2015.

Engaging with local people

On Monday 28 November 2016 the Healthwatch team spent the morning engaging with local people at the Northgate Surgery, in the area near the pharmacy (first floor) and waiting room.

We asked people to write on a star for our Christmas tree what they felt Healthwatch should concentrate on in 2017. In return, people were entered into a free draw to win a hamper. All the responses from this and the rest of our Festive Tour have contributed to the insight and evidence we collect from the public throughout the year to inform our future priorities.

We also encouraged people to share their experiences of local services to help us in understanding what is working well and not so well for people. 10 people shared their experiences with us.

We only spoke to patients who were willing to engage with us.

Further feedback can be given anonymously in only a few minutes by calling 0300 012 0122 or online <http://www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk/feedback/>



What people told us?

One family were **very complimentary about the support** received from (GP named) and said that 9 out of 10 times they could get an appointment to see her. This was particularly important to them because one of the family members is living with complex and multiple health conditions.

The following reflects the views of patients on the morning.



All patients had got their appointment easily.
Felt the staff were positive and treated them with respect.



1 in 3 patients were unhappy with delay in getting treatment *
All patients unhappy with appointment waiting time

- * The common theme for those who were less positive about their experience at the surgery, was a feeling of not being listened too and this had led to what they felt were unacceptable delays in getting treatment resulting in anxiety/stress.

As well as receiving feedback about this surgery, we also gathered feedback on other local health and care services. This is reported on in our quarterly [Insight & Evidence Reports](#) which are published here.

Our observations during the visit

The call answering system

Healthwatch was invited to visit the call handling office to learn about the call handling system that was introduced two months ago. The introduction of this new system shows the partners and practice have responded to patients concerns over not being able to get through on the telephone.

We were told, the surgeries telephone lines open at **8.30am** and there is always a very high call volume as the lines open. However, calls are now being answered quickly and patients are advised they will get a call back. The call handling team included three clinicians, who assess each patient's need to see a doctor and the urgency.

We visited the office at about 11am and by this time the medical group had received 134 calls and reduced the call waiting time to about 4 minutes. **There were still a number of same day appointment slots available to patients.**

We would like patients to note that we were also told, the practice offers pre-booked early morning appointments from 7am on Tuesdays and Wednesdays (at Maidenbower Practice) and late appointment to 8pm on Tuesdays. The attending GP advised that these early appointments are more difficult to fill and have the highest 'did not turn up' rate.

The practice builds in time to allow for over-running appointments throughout the day.

Signage

Our location allowed us to see people coming up the stairs for their appointments. We directed at least four people in the right direction, as they appeared unsure as to where to go.

We noted there were no signs on the walls or the entrance doors to indicate where to go. There was also a completely blank notice board facing the entrance doors (which may belong to the pharmacy), which could be a useful area for displaying directional signage and important information. What looked like an unused reception area did have a notice on it with an arrow but this was further back and the lack of lighting, made the whole area look closed.

There was only one sign in the entrance of the surgery and this explained to patients that there is a national shortage of GP's and therefore it may be difficult to get an appointment, but for patients to not abuse any of the staff in the surgery as it is not their fault. The language used in this poster we felt was rather abrupt and unwelcoming and may not change the behaviour of those who may become frustrated and take this out on the practice staff.



The Lift

The surgery is on the first floor of the building and therefore must have a lift. We recognised the challenges the practice has with the lift due to the lack of space above the lift (see our previous report for more information). However, having only a manually opening door, we observed, created difficulties for mothers with pushchairs to get into the lift. This would suggest that someone with mobility issues, or a lack of arm strength, would also struggle to access the surgery on their own.

We did discuss this with one of the partners, on the day and were told that the lift is being used by far more people than was expected and including those who could walk up and down the stairs. During the morning we saw people arriving at the top of the stairs and commenting on being 'out of breath', which can be understood when people are unwell.



We used the lift at the end of our visit to get ourselves and our resources down. We noted a particular dirty upper wall/shelf, which is highly visible. We recognise this is not an easy area to reach to clean but due to its visibility, we would suggest is something people will notice. There is also a grease 'run' in the lift (over 2 meters in length) that may also give an impression of lack of cleanliness.

Healthwatch Recommendations:

1. Review the spacing of 'catch-up' slots, with the aim of reducing the appointment waiting time and anxiety this may create.
2. Consider implementing a simple way of checking with a patient if they feel their symptoms have been understood, so people have the opportunity to offer more information to the doctor, to avoid repeat visits to the surgery and give patients access to the right onward referral.
3. Put up directional signage to make it easy for people to understand where to go to reach the check-in and waiting area.
4. Review the appropriateness of the notice on the entrance door to avoid communication that may not affect a change of behaviour.
5. Explore the option for installing an automatic door on the lift, with the aim of making the lift accessible in the most independent way to those who need to use it.
6. Arrange for the lift and top of wall to be cleaned, so these area reflects an image of cleanliness to all visitors.

Next Steps

Healthwatch will be seeking to discuss with the Practice how they can take forward the recommendations. We would like to share best practice for and with the practice patient participation group and are offering to support in any future development of signage/posters so these can be more patient friendly.

We hope the Practice will have a positive and sustainable link with Healthwatch moving forward.

Contact Details

If you are interested in finding out more about Healthwatch, what we do and how to become involved visit our website: www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk.

For support with Information and Advice, independent health complaints advocacy support or to share your story call us on 0300 012 0122.

