

July 2017



# Complaints Audit of West Sussex GP Websites

*Independent observations regarding the accessibility of complaints information on West Sussex General Practice (GP) websites, to see what may work for patients and what may not.*

# Why did we do this?

We regularly provide anonymised patient insight to GPs to support them to learn from peoples' lived experiences. A fairly common comment we hear back from GP Practices' is that we should be encouraging patients to share their concerns directly with practice staff.

Whilst we understand this would enable GPs and Practice Managers to investigate individual concerns and hopefully use their findings to make practice improvements, we recognise not all patients wish to speak up.

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman report that *'half of those who do complain to their GP, are concerned it will affect their care and treatment, despite the NHS Constitution which states that 'complaining ... will not adversely affect your future treatment.'*



**Parliamentary  
and Health Service  
Ombudsman**

Reported on the quality of complaints handling by GPs and key areas for improvement, stating:

A service that is safe, responsive and well-led will treat feedback, concerns and complaints as an opportunity to improve. We found that often opportunities are missed to respond to issues before they become complaints, as practices do not do enough to welcome feedback. Care Quality Commission inspectors and local Healthwatch found that practices commonly didn't have information clearly displayed in the waiting area or on their website about how to feed back or complain. Furthermore, evidence from Care Quality Commission inspections showed that not all staff in the practice knew how complaints policies, if they existed at all, should be implemented.

As the Care Quality Commission asks the question of practice: are practices responsive to people's needs? We wanted to carry out a lay-person audit to look at how easy it is to raise a concern for those who wish to speak up directly to practices.

## What we did?

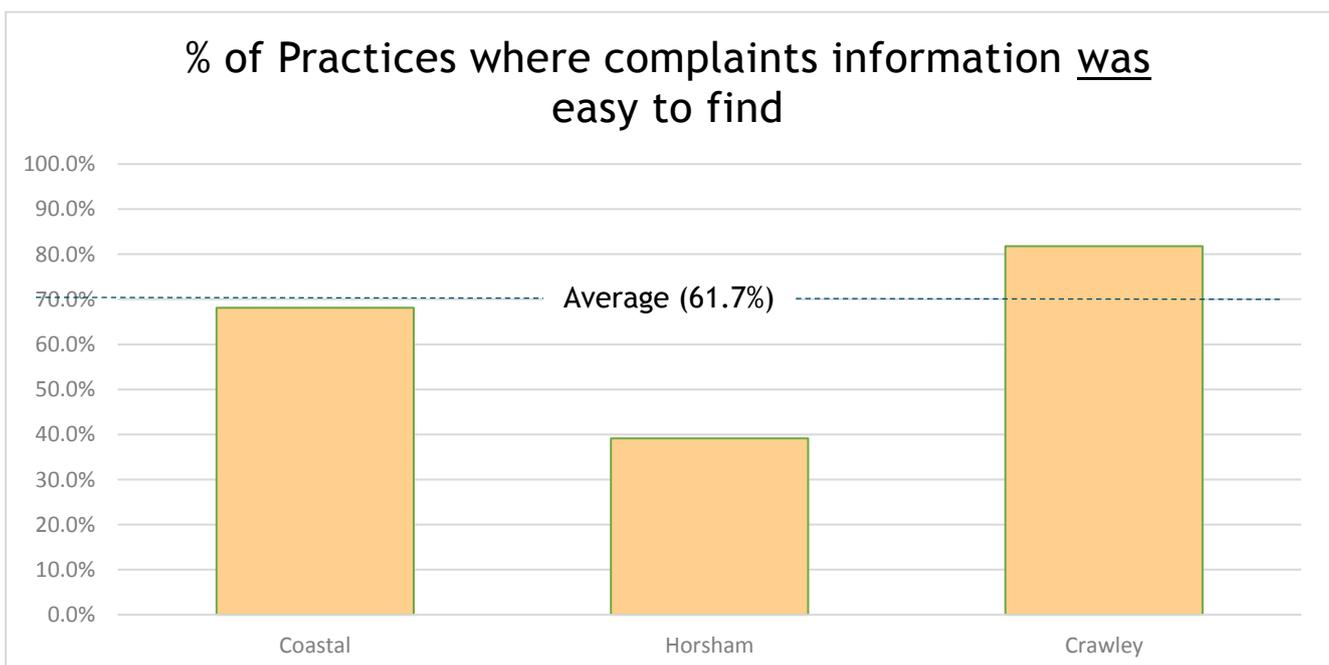
We looked at 81 GP websites, during April and May 2017, to answer the questions:

- Is the practice's complaints information easy to find?
- Is there any information about our Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service (IHCAS) in their complaints section and is this correct?

We visited each website, and firstly looked to see if it was obvious how to complain. If not, we then used the site's search facility (where available) where we entered 'complain', followed by 'complaints' and then 'Making a complaint' to find information. It is on these search words we have drawn our conclusions on the accessibility of each GP complaints service.

Where we were unable to find information with these searches we tried other ways of finding complaints information.

## This is what we found



We found:

- Some websites easy to navigate
- 12 websites impossible to find any information about how to complain
- Lots of variety in how patients were expected to raise a concern or complaint
- wrong or misleading information
- A few surgeries described very longwinded processes.

## What next?



For practices to learn from patient experience they need to encourage feedback, in all its forms, which includes make sure people can make a complaint easily.

Taking what we have learnt from working directly with local people we have produced a short guide to support local practices in encouraging people to share feedback, concerns and complaints.

Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) have a responsibility to improve quality in primary care<sup>1</sup>, and we **recommend** each CCG seeks to support and monitor their member practices to demonstrate good practices in promoting and encouraging feedback, concerns and complaints. We have provided detailed findings to the CCGs to help them with such discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2012 Act gave CCGs responsibility for commissioning the majority of secondary and community care services, and a legal duty to work with NHS England to improve quality in primary care. In 2015, under a new policy of primary care co-commissioning, CCGs were given the option to commission general practice either themselves or in collaboration with NHS England (NHS England 2016h).

The insight and learning opportunities gained from this work was shared with:

- **NHS Coastal West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)** who are responsible for planning, buying and monitoring many of the local health services
- **NHS Crawley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)** who are responsible for planning, buying and monitoring many of the local health services
- **NHS Horsham and Mid Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)** who are responsible for planning, buying and monitoring many of the local health services
- **Local GPs** and through the Local Community Network
- **West Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board**, which leads on improving the co-ordination of commissioning across the NHS, social care and public health services
- **West Sussex Health and Social Care Select Community**, which is the means by which proposed decisions are scrutinised, the effectiveness of existing policy is reviewed and the budget and performance monitoring of service delivery is undertaken.

These organisations are invited to consider the information in this report, and to tell us how they intend to respond.

Our work does not stop with this publication and we will continue to use influencing platforms, along with our statutory powers to support NHS organisations to improve on their complaints information and handling.

**We want to hear from local people about their complaints experiences. If you would like to share your experience or comment on this report please contact us on 0300 012 0122.**

Our publications are also shared with the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England.



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