GP Websites

How easy is it to find information?

An observational review by Healthwatch Wokingham of information provided by GP websites in Wokingham Borough.

Introduction

In Wokingham Borough there are 13 GP practices, under 4 primary care networks. (North, South, East and West) GP contracts are managed by NHS Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group.

In May 2020 Healthwatch Wokingham launched a survey to understand more about how people in the Borough were experiencing the changes in health and social care due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Early analysis showed that access to information about GP services was difficult for 11% of people who responded. 14% of people had delayed seeking treatment for the following reasons: they were worried about catching coronavirus, didn't want to bother the health service or they thought their problem could wait until after the pandemic.

Accessible information that helps the public to understand the necessary changes to services is key to managing the COVID-19 response. GP websites are an important communication tool and play a wider role in linking the public to other support in their community.

The most recent patient survey results from Berkshire West CCG show that Wokingham surgeries had varied feedback about their websites. Patients were asked 'How easy is it to use your GP practice's website to look for information or access services?' The results ranged from 58% to 87% satisfaction.

To find out more we reviewed the websites of the 13 GP practices, with the aim of providing public information and sharing best practice. A mystery shopping approach was taken and included members of CLASP a local learning disability charity to ensure that the information provided was accessible to this group.

This report will be shared with the public, service providers and commissioners and we hope it will be useful for the on-going COVID-19 response and when planning for similar events in the future.

What we did

Every website was reviewed by 2 staff members and a selection of volunteers from CLASP adult learning disability group.

The websites were reviewed between 27th July 2020 and 18th August 2020. The information we found was a snapshot of the information held on the sites in the given time period.

Where a result is indicated as 'unclear' it means some reviewers could find the information they were looking for while others could not find the information.

The questions we asked were based on a previous survey undertaken by Healthwatch Portsmouth.

Key Findings

The majority of websites did not contain information about what to expect if a patient needed to visit the practice, including wearing a mask, social distancing and whether you could be accompanied.

Only 15% of websites provided clear information about how to book a telephone consultation and 8% for E-consultation. E-consultations could include video consultations or messaging services depending on the practice.

Information on making a complaint or providing feedback was difficult to find in some cases.

Patient surveys were not made available by any of the practices.

The information regarding patient registration needs to be clearer in terms of your rights to register and rights concerning proof of ID if asked.

Recommendations

Websites to be regularly reviewed by members of Patient Participation Groups, including those with accessibility issues. As of 23rd September 2020, all GP websites will need to meet accessibility standards for public sector organisations. During our review there were issues with finding read aloud and language translation tools on the websites. The following link may also be helpful https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/doing-a-basic-accessibility-check-if-you-cant-do-a-detailed-one

Information about the environment in the surgery and safety measures should be easily available to re-assure and prepare people for their appointment. As guidance continues to change, often with short notice, this will become more important.

Consider alternative ways of presenting information such as a video tour of waiting areas, precautions taken in treatment rooms, PPE and hand sanitisers.

Sharing of best practice within the Clinical Commissioning Group and Primary Care Network should be undertaken. Some websites were easier to navigate and shared more useful information.

None of the websites signposted to the latest patient survey results. We have raised this with the CCG, and while we understand this is not a statutory requirement, it would provide useful information for the public

Sharing a full range of options for people to provide feedback and complaints and labelling them appropriately.

Some websites guided the public towards contacting the surgery directly if the feedback was negative and sharing publicly if it was positive. It is understandable that the practice wants to resolve issues, but the individual should be able to make an informed choice about which route is best for them. Only one practice mentioned Healthwatch which as the independent champion for people using health and care services in our area.

Options for providing feedback should include; Contacting the surgery directly, Healthwatch, SEAP (advocacy) and Care Opinion website.

Clearer information needs to provided about the new patient registration process in terms of patients rights and more information about individuals rights when asked for proof of ID. Some of the web sites mentioned that new patients will have to provide ID when registering. The following NHS website https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-practice/

states: You should not be refused registration or appointments because you do not have a proof of address or personal identification at hand.

It's not considered a reasonable ground to refuse registration.

This also applies if you're an asylum seeker, refugee, homeless patient or overseas visitor, whether lawfully in the UK or not.
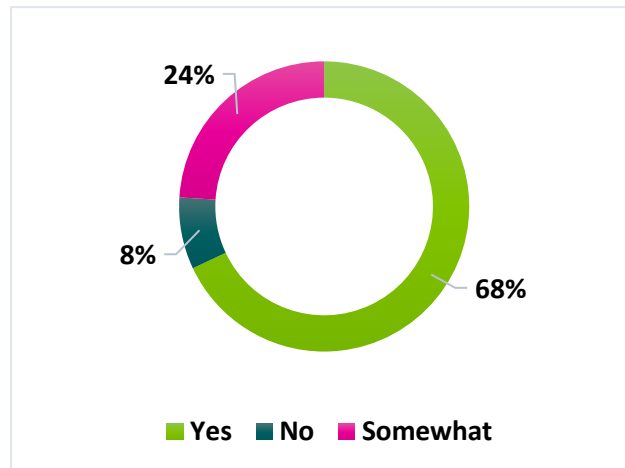
Detailed Findings

Does the Practice have a website?

All 13 practices had a website, and all were based on the same template. This should encourage consistency between surgeries.

The websites all provided basic contact information including, address, phone number, opening hours and email address.

Does the website have GP staff profiles?

Some surgeries only provided very basic information such as name and qualifications.

Others had photographs and a biography for each GP and nurse. There was disparity about which staff were profiled, some practices just focused on GPs while others included nursing and auxiliary staff.

We Liked: New Wokingham Road Surgery were highlighted as having excellent information about their staff.

Registration

Could you find information about how to register?

All but one surgery provided easily accessible information about how to register.

There needs to be clearer information about your rights when registering as a new patient and your rights if asked to provide ID which you are unable to do. More information in line with the information provided on the following NHS website would help inform new patients. https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-practice/

Does the surgery request or suggest that ID would be required in order to register?
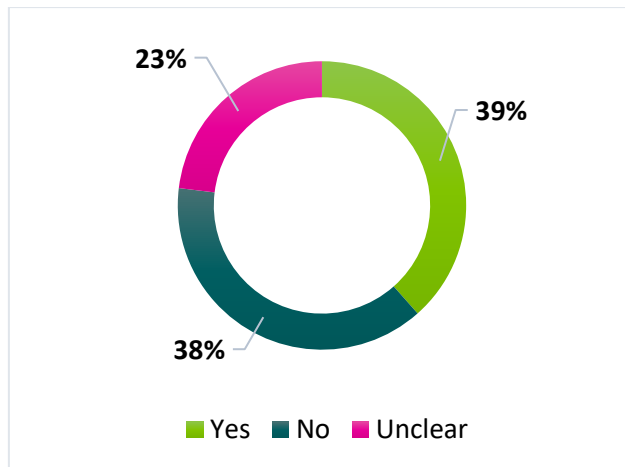

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Registration is possible via:
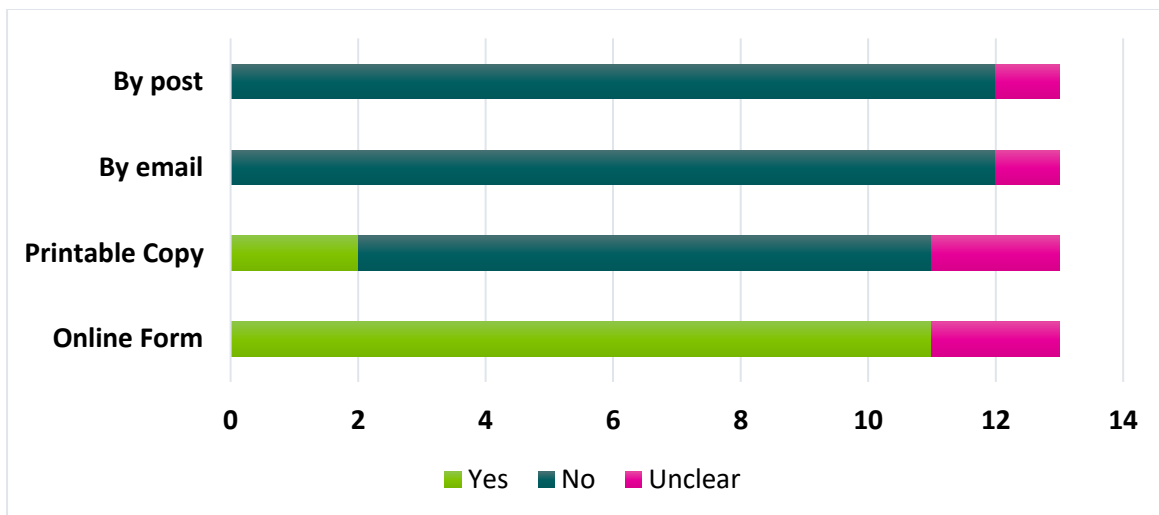
Providing clear information about what is required, and different methods of registration help those who need extra support and reduce calls to the surgery reception.

Is there information on how to access medical assistance when the practice is closed (Out of Hours)?

15%

85%

■ Yes ■ No ■ Unclear
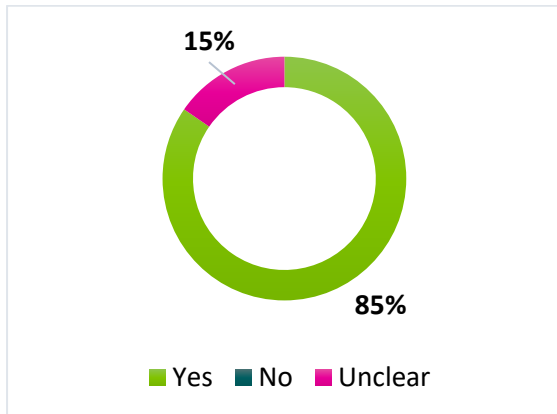
In one case this information was out of date, directing people towards Reading walk in clinic where service has been suspended due to COVID-19.

Was there an option for information to be translated into other languages?

Some of the reviewers could not find this option on the websites although it is present.

Was there a Read Aloud tool on website?

Again, some reviewers could not find the tool which links to 'My Web, My Way' or an accessibility link. The information was often in small print and located towards the bottom of the screen.
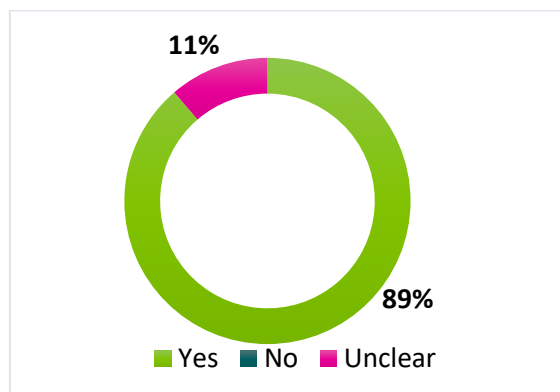
Were links and/or contact details of external specialist services and other service providers listed?

All the websites provided links.

Giving feedback or making a complaint

Does the website tell you how to give feedback?

11%

89%

■ Yes ■ No ■ Unclear

Does the website tell you how to make a complaint?

All the websites provided information on this, however in some cases this was not easy to find. While most surgeries called it 'complaints' one had labelled it 'feedback and comments' which could be confusing.

The methods for giving complaints were different too with some practices offering online methods and others advising the patient to visit the surgery. One surgery only gave the option of contacting the practice manager so there was no method for giving anonymous feedback. This practice also had no information about other methods of making a complaint such as independent advocacy.

Overall the quality and breadth of information provided here was variable. Some surgeries seemed more transparent in their processes than others.

Does the website tell you how you can join the patient participation group?

All the websites provided information on this.

Does the website display the surgery Care Quality Commission (CQC) report?

All the websites provided clear information on this.

Does the website display the patient survey results?

None of the websites included this information. We have contacted NHS Berkshire West CCG who confirmed that this is not a requirement nevertheless, it would be useful information for the public.
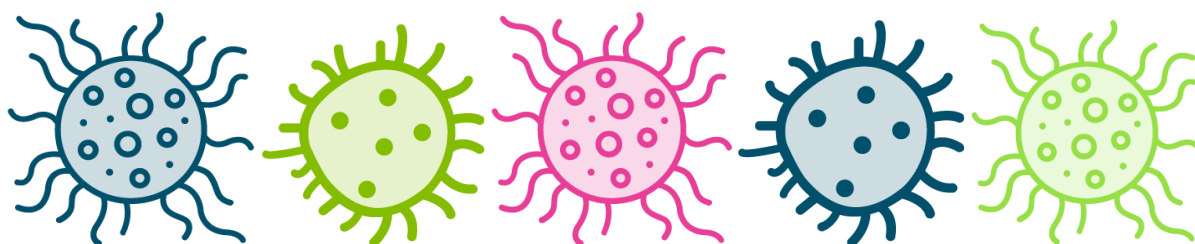
COVID-19 Information
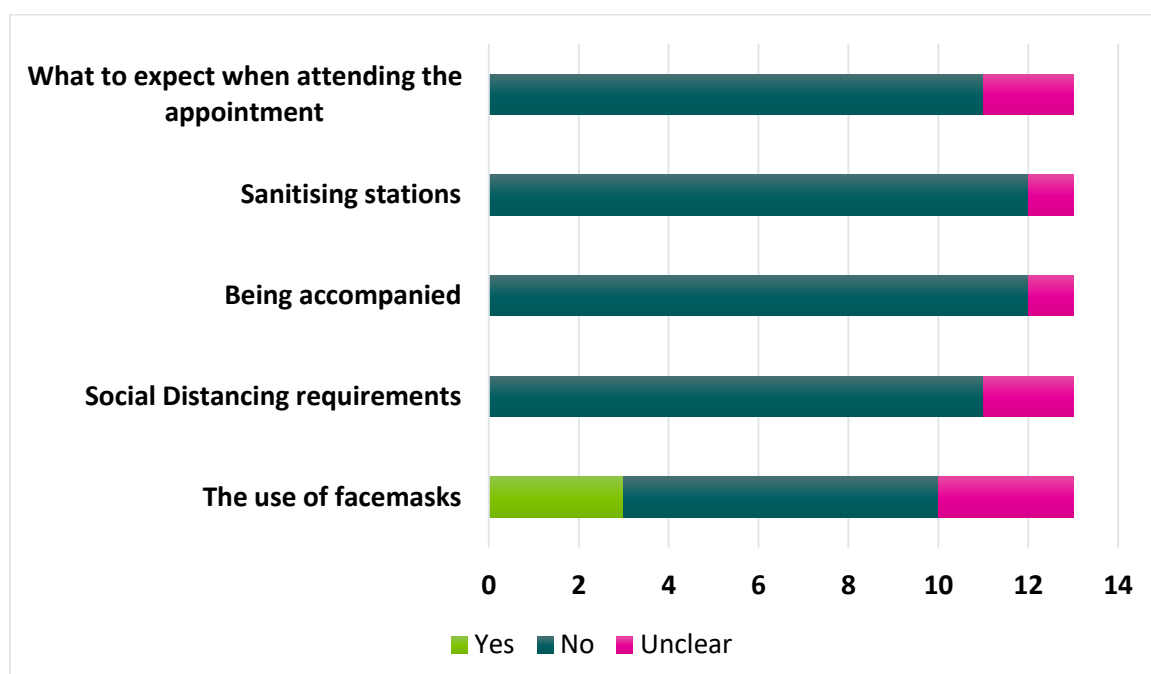
ADVICE AND INFORMATION

0118 418 1418   enquiries@healthwatchwokingham.co.uk

Was updated COVID-19 information displayed on the front page of the website?

Yes, all surgeries used the same information box.

**Did the website give information on the following (for face to face appointments)?**

The information provided was lacking. The way it was given was also inconsistent. One surgery provided a 'news article' which was detailed but wasn't obvious on the website so only one reviewer found it.

In our Covid-19 survey (linked here) 14% of people in Wokingham told us they had delayed seeking treatment and would wait until after the pandemic before seeking help. Providing up to date information about safety precautions and re-assurance that GP practices are open for business would encourage people to seek the care they need.

Did the website display information about COVID-19 symptoms and did this include what to do if you have symptoms?

All websites gave this information on a pop-up on the front page. However, there was no way to navigate back to this once the pop up had been dismissed.

Could you find information on changes to prescription services during the pandemic?
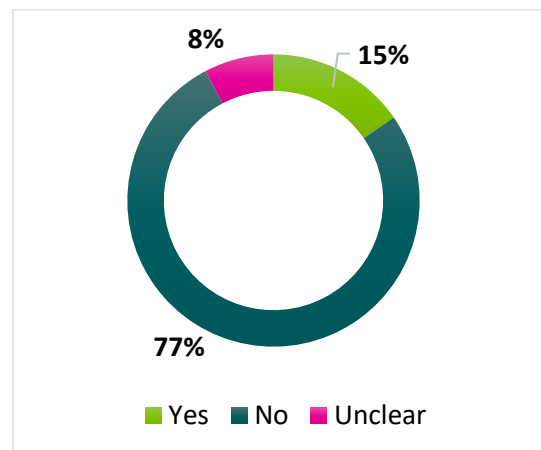

8%   8%

84%

Yes   No   Unclear
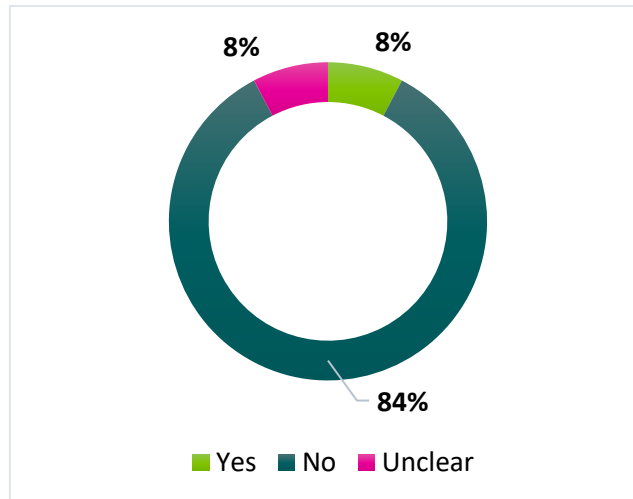
Booking a virtual appointment during the pandemic

Was there information about booking a telephone consultation?

15%

46%

39%

Yes   No   Unclear
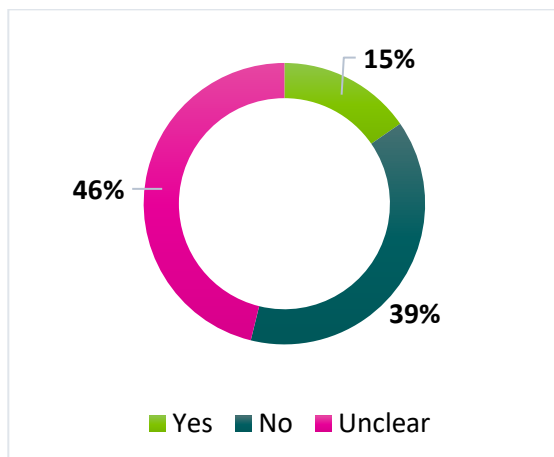
Was there information about booking an E-consultation?

8%   15%

77%

Yes   No   Unclear

Only one surgery mentioned using an App called 'Patient Access' for E-consultations. It would be useful to let patients know what technology they need to have in order to use

video consultation. In our COVID-19 survey 55% of patients were very satisfied or satisfied with their video consultation, 36% undecided and 9% dis-satisfied. (linked here)

Overall given the information provided did you feel informed and confident about accessing medical help?

35% **65%**

■ Yes ■ No
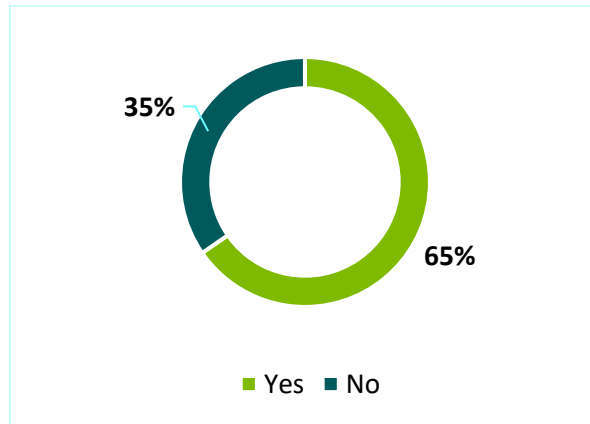
❝ **Not enough information relating to how the system works under COVID and the process for having an appointment if you have to visit the surgery.**

❝ **More information needed on how it works during COVID, video/telephone appointments, what to expect and details about face masks, hand sanitisers.**

Response From Berkshire West CCG

Healthwatch Wokingham Borough has reviewed the web sites of the 13 general practices in Wokingham. The report makes six main recommendations covering web site review, guidance on visiting practices, the sharing of good practice, signposting Patient Survey results, information about feedback, and information about patient registration.

The CCG and practices across Berkshire West have made significant progress in migrating to a new web platform, bringing a common format to practice websites for the first time. This has taken considerable effort, and only now are we able to put sufficient focus on "benefits realisation," taking advantage common functionality, and the opportunity to deliver system-wide communication to patients. This will take the form of a partnership approach between the CCG, practices and the web site platform. It will form an integrated part of the development of PCN/practice communication strategy, alongside other media and channels.

As such, the publication of the Healthwatch Wokingham Borough report *GP Web Sites How easy is it to find information?* Is both timely and relevant. The CCG will incorporate the report's recommendations into its wider benefits realisation work stream.

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