

Impact Report: People's experiences of accessing GP services via technology

June 2022

healthwatch
Solihull





Introduction

Healthwatch Solihull investigated 276 people's experiences of accessing general practice (GP) services via technology (e.g., by telephone, the GP's website, apps or video calls). There are positive aspects to the use of technology for GP access, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, for patient/staff safety and infection control. However, we heard that the information and the language regarding accessing GP services via technology needs to be simpler and clearer for some people. This will help ensure that services are accessible to all.

Our initial report encouraged general practices to:

- offer clear instructions about how to access and use these services.
- address issues that patients may experience due to having consultation via telephone/video rather than face-to-face consultation.
- tackle poor access to booking appointments and call-back systems.
- assure people that they can trust that technology-based methods to access GP services are confidential.

Addressing such issues would be helped by good 'patient and public involvement' (PPI) in the design and development of services. For example:

- asking for feedback on the information provided.
- involving patients in the development of information sources.
- finding out from patients whether they are experiencing barriers and removing these, when possible. And when not possible, explaining to patients why this is so.

Healthwatch Solihull shared what we heard from patients with all Primary Care Networks (PCNs) in Solihull (Solihealth^[1]). We also shared the draft report with the Birmingham and Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group. The PCNs acknowledged the need to improve on the issues we found during our investigation and they committed to improve services.

Actions Taken

Solihealth said about our report “the technology report has aided the PCNs and respective Practices within Solihealth to identify and plan work for improvements based on service user feedback. In some areas, the learning has provoked more efficient and innovative ways of working or includes evolving current processes. In other areas, the report offered reassurance of what the PCNs were doing well.”

These are the actions that Solihealth reported to have implemented since the publication of our report:

- All PCNs are actively updating and developing their websites.
- All PCNs include face to face bookings as part of a personalised and flexible approach. Additional, weekend and extended appointments have been offered as well as telephone appointments which are preferred by some patients.
- The practices are multi-disciplinary with expertise including; clinical pharmacists, care coordinators, paramedics, physician associates, nurses and phlebotomists.
- Contact and communication with patients happen through telephone calls, texts, emails and letters.
- All PCNs have processes to manage telephone appointments should patients miss the call.
- PCNs are including the link to Healthwatch Solihull on their websites so people can access our Feedback Centre or contact our Information and Signposting Service.
- Solihealth said that data handling and GDPR are treated seriously, and any software used is NHS/government compliant.

For Solihealth's full response see the appendix.

^[1] Solihealth is a General Practice provider alliance. Joining 24 GP practices together in collaboration, covering a population of 220,000 across Solihull, West Midlands.

Birmingham and Solihull ICS have committed to work with Healthwatch Solihull to support improvements in access and patient understanding and engagement. Birmingham and Solihull CCG have said they will:

- Clear jointly owned communication and engagement plan and processes to support patient/citizen awareness and understanding of primary care and the changed operating model
- Cross check and alignment with Fuller review and the three key themes – primary prevention, urgent and episodic care and continuity of care through mdt working for those patients who need that support
- The operating model changed very quickly, we need to continue to review, understand feedback and inform and listen to patients and citizens to continually improve awareness / understanding and models of care

Next Steps

Healthwatch Solihull will continue to engage and hear the experience of people's experiences of accessing general practice (GP) services via technology and use this to drive improvement. We will continue to work in partnership with Solihealth and the Birmingham and Solihull CCG. We also encourage people to share their experiences of services of other health and social care services in Solihull.

You can share your experiences by:

- Visiting our Online Feedback Centre at www.healthwatchsolihull.org.uk
- Calling Healthwatch Solihull on 0808 196 3912
- Emailing enquiries@healthwatchsolihull.org.uk

healthwatch Solihull

Healthwatch Solihull
Enterprise Centre, Solihull, B37 7TP

 www.healthwatchsolihull.org.uk 0808

 196 3912

 enquiries@healthwatchsolihull.org.uk

 @HealthwatchSol

 @Healthwatch.Solihull



The need to improve website information and accessibility

GPS Healthcare

- Development of the GPS Healthcare website with signposting information for patients and the option to request repeat prescriptions and sick notes through it.
- Development of a Health & Wellbeing team to look after those with health inequalities, fostering a personalised care approach. Our social prescribing team have showed impact in their interventions with patients and our care coordinators will be working hard to pick up patients with constraints from the registration process and working with them to ensure their healthcare needs such as access to primary care or cancer screening, is met.
- We use a text messaging service called AccuRx to keep in touch with patients, ask them to send in photographs or blood pressure readings or to send patient information leaflets or website links.

NSC

- All practices in NSPCN are part of a website update programme initiated by BSol CCG to ensure a uniform website approach across practices.

Solihull Healthcare Partnership

- Solihull Healthcare Partnership recognised that it needed to improve its web site and accessibility, so we invited Solihull Healthcare Partnership PPG representatives to work with us on a web site project and invited members to join us for a web forum event, to seek patient input into the development and delivery of the web site and our online services
- We have set up a number of project groups with members of Solihull Healthcare Partnership PPG. We invited members to a web forum event to give us input into our web site and online services, from a patient perspective, and to provide two-way communication and engagement with patients.
- As a result, updates to the web site contents, site navigation and access to key information have been delivered, including a full analytics review resulting in ensuring the content most searched for is the most prominent, and updating the Home Page to reflect a focus on Online Services and Prescriptions.
- Further actions agreed are in progress and a next web forum meeting is due to be held in April, to continue patient input into this key platform. This project is part of an action plan created by the PPG to give patient insight and input into improving the patient experience and services at Solihull Healthcare Partnership.
- The PPG is also working with us on a new online booking initiative, trialling the patient journey and experience, to ensure it is robust before we launch to patients.
- Our PPG is a group of patients who meet with practice staff to discuss practice issues and patient experience to improve our services. The patients' voice is central to this and Solihull Healthcare Partnership fully recognise this, and understand the benefits of patient engagement.

Rural

- Our websites have access to certain forms that allow people to request med3s/med reviews etc. rather phoning, so phone queues are managed better

South Central

- During the Covid-19 pandemic South Central PCN have used each practice website and social media to advertise how to access gain to their Covid Vaccination either at the Richmond Hub or elsewhere in the community. During this time social media has been the forefront of information for patients as well as the general media the latter has somewhat been a challenge for most practices with incorrect information advertised. In addition to this, practices have been calling and sending letters out to those patients who do not have the technology to gain information. Currently a review of websites is being undertaken to improve website information and accessibility.

How to access face to face consultations if technology is a barrier

GPS Healthcare

- We have responded to the request for face to face appointments in accordance with national and local guidelines and the safety of patients and our team members through the pandemic. Every patient who needs a face to face appointment has been offered an appointment following a telephone appointment or guidance from the clinician. We will evolve as our access, demands and resources dictate always keeping patient safety and timely access to the right care by the right person at the fore.

NSC

- Our 11 practices take an individual and personalised approach to appointment booking, utilising the technology where possible.
- Additional appointments have been made available on the day via the Hurst Lane Clinic and the Winter Access Service to both face to face and remote consultations.
- NSPCN utilises the CPCS to increase capacity for professional advice. NSC has also reintroduced extended access appointments on some weekday evenings and weekends.
- All of these schemes have increased access in North Solihull.

Solihull Healthcare Partnership

- All our surgery sites are open for patients to access from 8:30am to 6:30pm, Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays), for patients to ask in person about booking an appointment, repeat prescription requests and for general queries.
- Face-to-face appointments have continued to be available to all patients, as they were during the pandemic, where there is a clinical need and if a patient requests a face-to-face consultation they may be offered one, if appropriate, following Care Navigation.

Rural

- Patients are able to access F2F appointments in a variety of ways across the PCN. Following the IPC guidance all patients are still triaged to ensure no risk of infection, and then, based on either patient preference or due to the nature of the medical matter they wish to speak about, patients are booked in F2F. We are finding many patients preference is to have telephone consults rather than F2F as it suits the lifestyle of many

South Central

- Accessing face to face consultations has become a lot easier for patients, with the availability of an extra 500 appointments being offered within the PCN, both weekday and at weekends. Providing the opportunity of appointments out of normal working hours for easy access to those with constraints.

The plurality of options to access surgeries to support people with constraints, such as: work, caring responsibilities, disabilities, language barriers, etc

GPS Healthcare

- We are evolving our team into a highly skilled, multidisciplinary model making more use of the expertise of Community Pharmacists, Clinical Pharmacists, Care co-ordinators, specialist nurses and in the future Paramedics and other allied health care professionals.

NSC

- All practices have increased their F2F appointments since the beginning of the pandemic, whilst maintaining safe infection control and triaging processes.
- Also increased the F2F appointments on the day via Hurst Lane Clinic and the use of special clinics runs by Paramedics and Physician Associates.
- Also increase F2F appointments for MSK problems through the new provision of specialist FPC physio services.
- Also, use of Clinical Pharmacists for routine advice including F2F appointments,
- And CPCS in local pharmacies.

Solihull Healthcare Partnership

- We are still open and here for our patient population. We are continuing to provide services as we have been doing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and prioritise delivering care and services based on clinical needs.
- Solihull Healthcare Partnership's services can be accessed by telephone, online or in person at one of our surgery sites.
- If patients need medical advice or treatment, they can call us on 0121 705 1105. Our telephone lines are open from 8am to 6:30pm, Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays).

- Patients can also access us face-to-face by visiting one of our surgery sites to ask in person about booking an appointment, repeat prescription requests and for general queries. Our sites are open from 8:30am to 6:30pm, Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays). This ensures we are able to prioritise our focus on patients being able to access us through our telephone system when demand is high and support improving patient access for the majority of patients.
- Our online services currently provide patients with access to their medical records, repeat medication ordering and COVID-19 vaccination status. Using the service helps patients to manage their own health and access healthcare features whenever they need to. Patients can visit our web site, and order repeat prescriptions and access your medical records on the NHS App and Patient Access
- We are also planning to offer online booking appointments with a Care Navigator, where the Care Navigator will contact the patient at a pre-booked time to discuss their healthcare needs and where appropriate book the patient an appointment with the most appropriate person based on clinical need.
- All our sites are fully accessible for patients with disabilities, and we are fully committed to supporting patients with disabilities and additional needs to receive accessible information, this includes support for service users, and for parents and carers. Please ask if you require any assistance.
- Interpreting services are also available for patients needing translation or those who are hard of hearing or deaf. Please ask at reception for more information. If you feel you need a longer appointment or need British Sign Language, an interpreter or a translator, please let us know when booking your appointment.

Rural

- Some practices are still offering video consultations where appropriate
- We all use Accurx to allow patients to send photos as part of the triage process, and some practices allow photos to be sent by email if they do not have access to smartphones
- We use Accurx/SMS/telephone/e-mail or letter – all avenues are used to ensure all patients have options & access to care. Where possible, a direct link to booking appointments is made available to some cohorts of patients, saving them from having to ring the surgery (this is being used for patients due a cervical screening appointment; Diabetic reviews with bloods, Covid vaccinations & those due regular blood tests). Where patients do not have mobiles/smartphone technology, personal phone calls are made
- Across rural locality we are running a project alongside the Red Cross charity organisation. The aims of the project are to improve digital access for older patients who are digitally isolated.
- We are running a project with asylum seekers based in Solihull who need primary care. The project facilitated registration and health assessment using a combination of face to face and digital consultations using face to face, phone and video interpretation

- All practices use the Word360 service – the translation service - for a variety of F2F & telephone interpreting (that includes sign language)

South Central

- A Multidisciplinary team of GPS Healthcare, Nurses, Advanced Clinical Pharmacist, Pharmacist and Phlebotomists have all been available. Appointments are booked via the patient's own practice and available daily. Practices have now commenced online booking to help with the demand on the telephones, freeing up the phone lines for those who do not have the ability of digital technology.

Processes around missed calls and if practices will phone again and how many times

GPS Healthcare

- We have improved our telephone wait times and have a queuing system on the phone system. This means that a patient or family member can hang up and retain their position in the queue to get through to one of our receptionists. We will try to call patients twice unless they are vulnerable. As far as possible, we will leave a message or send a text message letting patients know that we have been trying to get through to them.

NSC

- Whilst there will be some practice variability, north Solihull patients are offered morning or afternoon slots and advised to keep their phones available during this time.
- Processes around missed calls and if practices will phone again and how many times all clinicians try again at least once dependent on pressures of each individual clinical session. In reality most patients are called 2-3 times at least if the call fails to connect.

Solihull Healthcare Partnership

- For clinical appointments we have a robust and consistent policy for attempts and reattempts to call patients for their booked appointments.

Rural

- When contacting patients for recalls, all practices are adopting a variety of ways to call the patient. This allows the cohorts of patients to still access care whether they have the technology or not (a fair & equitable process for all based on patient need)
- Phone back minimum twice with gap in between – pts are ask them to keep phone with them not on mute, explain the number withheld so pts know it is the surgery trying to contact them. Practices also aim to accommodate call back times where pts have time-limited capacity (due to childcare/working patterns)
- Surgeries have email access for patients for prescription requests/'admin' queries, that can save making telephone calls to the practice
- Some practices have employed more staff to handle calls volumes & demand

South Central

- Whilst a large number of face to face consultations are being undertaken, telephone consultations also take place. Patients are advised of a time when the clinician will call and so should be prepared to answer the call when needed. On the odd occasion whereby they are not able to get through to the patient, the clinician will try again, leave a message for the patient to call back and also document the number of times they have tried to call. There is the unpredictable times of no signal or a clash of calls but the practices endeavour to connect to the patient.

The confidentiality of digital tools

GPS Healthcare

- Our website links for online forms and patient records are kept completely confidential and follow data protection rules

NSC

- The digital software we use (e.g. AccuRx and Unity) are NHS approved and encrypted to ensure confidentiality.
- Call handlers are trained in Data Handling and GPDR.
- Clinicians will rarely leave messages on answer machines in order to ensure confidentiality.

Solihull Healthcare Partnership

- Solihull Healthcare Partnership will continue to use digital tool that are approved and compliant, and following government guidelines.
- We take confidentiality very seriously. All staff realise the importance of this and it applies throughout our practice. Information is not given out to third parties without the consent of the patient. We ask for personal information so that patients can receive appropriate care and treatment. This information is recorded on computer and Solihull Healthcare Partnership is registered under the Data Protection Act.
- To ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), we must ensure that information is provided to patients about how their personal data is processed. We take the care of patient data very seriously and work hard to keep medical records up to date and accurate.

In addition:

GPS Healthcare

- We welcome patient engagement through our patient participation groups and are looking for additional members of our community to join and help us shape our services. Please get in touch through our reception team

Solihull Healthcare Partnership

- As a result of significant increased demand on our telephones, with 9 out of 10 of our registered Solihull Healthcare Partnership patients contacting us by telephone, we continue to focus on patients being able to access us through our telephone system. We have listened to our patients and redirected resource accordingly, and support improving patient access for the majority of patients and telephone answering times.
- We are continuing to deliver our action plan to improve patient access. As well as recruiting and training Care Navigators, we are constantly monitoring and reviewing our telephone system to try to respond to the maximum number of callers we possibly can.
- We are currently dealing with high levels of sickness absence due to winter illnesses and cases of staff members isolating after testing positive for COVID-19. We apologise to any patient that may have experienced long telephone answering times, and we hope this is a temporary situation. Our team of Care Navigators are working hard across all our sites, dealing with patients face-to-face at our surgery site receptions and answering telephone calls.
- Following recent patient feedback from the 25th February 2022 regarding reports of some patients experiencing intermittent telephone technical issues, we are also working with the telephone system supplier to resolve this as quickly as possible. Direct patient feedback on their experiences has been invaluable as part of our investigation.
- We continue to encourage patients to feedback directly with their concerns, questions and suggestions. We really value personal experiences and concerns being raised and shared directly with us. We do want to hear from patients, listen and respond. Patient feedback and working with our independent patient-led Patient Participation Group, is invaluable in improving our patient care and services. Patients can share their feedback, using the appropriate routes below:
 - 'We are listening' Online Form: online form can be accessed by copying the link into your web browser – <https://forms.gle/Qkg76YTRZ7RpbtYD9>
 - Have Your Say: online feedback forms on our web site www.solihullhealthcarepartnership.nhs.net
 - Directly via email: admin.SolihullHealthcarePartnership@nhs.net
 - Write to us: Solihull Healthcare Partnership Management, Shirley Medical Centre, 8 Union Road, Shirley, Solihull, West Midlands, B90 3DT, or drop off at any one of our surgery sites
- We are continuing to offer and prioritise delivering care and services based on clinical needs. We continue to provide services and face-to-face appointments with our healthcare professionals, in a safe way to keep our patients and staff safe, as we have been doing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Face-to-face appointments are available to all patients where there is a clinical need.
- When patients call, we continue to assess the most appropriate way to provide patients their care, which may include a face-to-face consultation and also ensure it is provided by the most appropriate person, for example a pharmacist, Health Care Assistant, Social Prescriber or Physiotherapist.

Rural

- Some practices, when offering appointments for managing long term conditions such as respiratory conditions, plus pts with Learning Disabilities are offered their preference of F2F or telephone calls
- Patients can access home visits, after triage over the telephone
- Online consult is soon to be introduced to all 4 practices, allowing patients digital access to consultations/med3's/prescription request & reviews, as one option to contact the practices, in addition to manned 'phone lines

South Central

- As practices, patients and staff members are more familiar with the various types of digital technology platforms available to connect with the patient, systems are improving and changes are made continually to make the experience effortless and valuable for both the patient and clinician.