



Enter & View
The Limes Medical Centre
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 our 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.

The Limes Medical Practice was randomly selected for an Enter & View visit as part of our wider research into access to GP surgery services.

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

The visit

Two members of Healthwatch Dudley staff and a volunteer visited the surgery between 2.00 pm and 4.00 pm on Friday, 23 February 2024.

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

Patients were invited to speak to a member of 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 13 people during our visit.

Conversations

We spoke to a range of patients, the majority of which had booked an appointment by telephone.

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

Some patients said that they walk in to make to their appointments.

Getting through on the telephone

Several patients said they found it quite difficult to get through by telephone and sometimes walked in to make appointments.

Waiting times once connected varied, with some patients reporting ten minutes and another at thirty minutes.

Other patients said there was not much of a wait when they rang.

One patient said there did not appear to be a queue number when they got through before speaking to someone.

"I would usually phone to make an appointment, calling at 8.00 am. It has not been too bad recently not much of wait."

"My son books my appointments by phone. They send a text message if I need to book an appointment and he helps with making the appointment, which the surgery then confirms by text. My son says there can be a long wait to get through by phone."

"I use the phone to book appointments, I can be offered same day, next day or one in a week's time. I usually wait about 10 minutes to get through."

"Phone appointments are difficult as I have a poor mobile phone signal."

"Sometimes it just rings out, once you are connected you can be waiting 30 minutes to speak to someone. They don't tell you where you are in the queue."



Online services

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

Some patients said they used to book online via Patient Access* but that was not available now. The patient wondered if there was another way to make appointments online.

Other patients were not interested in using online services due to the expense and the need for a smart phone.

A few patients said they used Patient Access to order prescriptions and found it useful.

“We used to be able to make appointments via Patient Access and I also used to order my meds online but we cannot make appointments that way now.”

“I used to make appointments online but access to this is currently unavailable.”

“I don’t use online services. I don’t need the expense and I don’t have a smart phone.”

“I would like to know if there is another way to book an appointment online.”

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



Extended healthcare team

A few patients said they only knew they could see a GP or a nurse.

More patients had either been seen by a paramedic in the past or knew they could have an appointment with one.

One patient had seen a health care assistant and another patient said they had previously had an appointment with a social prescriber.

“I am aware there are both a male and female paramedic we can see”.

“The paramedics are great, but although they can prescribe meds, they cannot authorise the prescription so you have to wait for it to be signed off.”

“I don’t know anything about other staff other than the GP.”



Additional comments

Some patients made additional comments during our conversations.

"It isn't so good now here, if it wasn't for the paramedics, I would move to another surgery. A recent experience has put me off."

"I used to receive Friends & Family surveys via text but I don't any more"

"GPs and nurses are excellent when you see them."

"It seems quieter in the surgery these days. It is alright here."

"I have no complaints about the staff or doctors. We receive good treatment for my husband who has dementia."

"The GP was helpful when I needed the results of a scan. They said they would ring at 6.00 pm but didn't ring until 7.45 pm."

"I rang to make an appointment with the nurse but couldn't get one until 16 days after the surgery."

"Getting an appointment is my only bugbear."

"The nurse called me in for a health check. I haven't needed to see a doctor for over two years."

"I sometimes have phone consultations but if I am really bad I prefer to come in"

Our observations

Overall, patients seemed quite happy with the service being provided.

Patients' experiences varied regarding the ease of getting through to make appointments and subsequent waiting times once connected.

Some patients may not be booking online due to barriers faced in terms of digital skills, access to technology and lack of information about the ways in which appointments can be made.

There appeared to be greater awareness of the paramedics than any of the other health professionals which patients can see besides a GP or nurse.

The TV monitor displayed information about the wider healthcare team as well as information about safe food preparation/cooking.

There was a vast amount of information for patients on several notice boards and in leaflet holders. However, some of the information was out-of-date. Patients may benefit from information being grouped into themes, with appropriate headings, so that this can be identified more easily.



Considerations



Notice boards

Headings/themes on noticeboards would help patients find the most appropriate information for them. Keeping the noticeboards and leaflet holders up-to-date would be of more benefit to patients.



Online services

It may be helpful for patients to have clear instructions on how to book online (if available) and who to speak to for more information as this may alleviate pressure on telephone lines, especially at peak times. Details could be made available on appropriately headed noticeboards.



NHS app/ Patient Access

Patients could be given details about how to use the NHS app/ Patient Access, if appropriate.



Response from The Limes

"Thank you for taking the time to visit our surgery and providing the report."



Getting through on the phone

The practice is currently in the process of replacing the current phone system with a new one, the hope is that it will address the issues patients are experiencing.



Online services

The Limes have since added some online appointments into some clinics. There is a plan to review appointments and adjust as appropriate.



Online services

The practice have said they will look at more promotion of online services, the website and the NHS app.



Freinds and family feedback

Since mid-February, patients have received requests for friends and family feedback via text.



Notice boards

The practice will be updating the notice boards and removing anything that is out-of-date.



Thank you

We were pleased to speak to patients at The Limes Medical Centre.

We listened to a mixture of responses and hope that the patients' experiences 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.



healthwatch

Dudley



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