



Woodbridge Practice Follow-up Visit Report July 2016



Rationale of follow-up visit

In 2015, Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees carried out an Enter and View at Woodbridge Practice, Thornaby Health Centre, Trenchard Ave, Thornaby and made a number of recommendations to improve patient experience based on feedback which was gathered during the investigation.

A follow up visit was arranged by Healthwatch and welcomed by the Practice Manager. This was conducted on 19th July 2016 to assess if improvement to patient experience had been achieved based on these recommendations. The recommendations addressed waiting times, the appointment system, telephone triaging and patient choice.

The Healthwatch team spoke to staff and patients who attended the practice on that day and carried out patient interviews to gather feedback. A meeting with the Practice Manager was held after the follow-up visit to discuss the findings.

Although the staff working in the practice that day had not been informed of Healthwatch's visit they were happy to support the team in gathering data.

Observations

Healthwatch observed a queue of patients at reception during the first hour of the day, the staff were quick to ask them politely if they could use the self-service option for checking in for their appointment.

The environment was tidy, clean and bright, it was also noted that the phones could not be heard ringing in the waiting room which made the area quiet and calming. The phones have the volumes turned down and are set back from reception with four staff allocated to answering them during the time Healthwatch conducted the follow up visit.

'Who should I see?' signs are displayed in three locations to inform patients on a range of illnesses or conditions and who can deal with this e.g. GP, Practice Nurse, Nurse Practitioner or Health Care Assistant. This may support the patients understanding of the triaging system and give confidence in the delivery of their care. However, although the signs are displayed on three walls, Healthwatch felt they could be larger as patients informed us they had not noticed them.

A compliment and comment box located near to reception is visible and clearly signed. Patients sat waiting for their appointment faced two TV screens, one with health information and the other calling patients to appointments and displaying information, such as the number of patients who did not turn up for

appointments. It was displayed that 457 appointments had been wasted in the previous month.

Whilst waiting for their appointments, patients also face notice boards which display information on how to feedback to the Patient Participation Group (PPG). This information is only displayed as an acronym without explanation of what a PPG is, or when the next one is due to take place. Healthwatch were informed that the next PPG had not yet been arranged. An option for feeding back to the PPG by email is also displayed.



Healthwatch observed a sign that was not clearly visible behind the reception area which informed patients if they were 10 minutes late for their appointment they would be asked to make another. Healthwatch observed that a number of patients had waited for their appointments for more than 10 minutes and one patient informed Healthwatch that the wait was usually between a half hour and an hour.

In January 2016, the practice withdrew a telephone line for prescriptions. Healthwatch questioned the reception staff about this and they informed the team that there has been some impact on patients not being happy about this although the reception staff are confident that patients are getting to know that it's no longer in use and now use the other lines.

Patient feedback: **Please note quotes from patients are highlighted in pink*

The common theme highlighted during the follow up was that patients continue to be dissatisfied with the lack of availability of appointments and length of wait to attend.

50% of patients Healthwatch spoke to had pre-booked in advance by telephone, 37.5% had booked in person with a receptionist, 12.5% had secured an appointment for that day in the morning. No patients Healthwatch spoke to had used the online booking system to book their appointments that day.

The table below shows how patients rated the process for booking appointments.

Very easy	17.65 %
Easy	23.53 %
Relatively easy	5.88 %
Difficult	11.76 %
Very difficult	41.18 %

Patient comments:

'Easy to book an appointment however I have to wait weeks'
'Always told no appointment's available'

Healthwatch asked patients when they book their appointment if the receptionist asks for health or medical information. 68.23 % told us they had not been asked, 30.77 % informed Healthwatch they had been asked. Patients were also asked if they secured an appointment with the GP, had they been offered an appointment with a Nurse Practitioner first. 42.88 % had been offered an appointment with the Nurse Practitioner, 57.14 % informed the Healthwatch team they had not been offered one. Additional comments from patients included:

‘Always asked if I want an appointment with the Nurse Practitioner, no matter when you come you can’t get in. Lack of confidence in Practice Nurses. It’s three weeks or something even longer before you can get an appointment’

‘Text reminder on same day of appointment - should be in advance. Wait can be variable to see doctor, sometimes half an hour, up to 1 hour’

One patient told Healthwatch they were seeing the doctor today but had waited four weeks and wasn’t offered an alternative. This patient commented ‘the phone is always engaged and when you get through it’s full’

‘Wait for appointments can be three weeks and asked if it’s urgent. You have to wait so long to get an appointment never used to, by the time you go, you feel fine!’

‘Appointment times could be closer instead of 3-4 weeks’

‘Service from reception is good’

Another patient also informed the team that she experienced lengthy waits but also wanted to feedback that she felt the service from the receptionists during a relative’s recent illness was very good and that Karen Stephenson should be recognised as having provided ‘an exceptionally good service during this time’

One patient felt that their experience of telephoning the practice to secure an appointment was that the phone rang for a long period of time at 8.30am and when they rang back they are put to the end of the queue. This patient felt it would be more helpful to be kept in a queue similar to a call centre.

Another patient with children told the team they had used the walk in centre the previous week as they couldn’t get an appointment at the practice, this parent confirmed they would do this again. They informed Healthwatch that they liked the telephone consultation service.

Receptionist feedback:

The staff were asked about training they received in their administrative roles. The e-learning tool kit has been implemented and the staff Healthwatch spoke to had accessed it and felt it was beneficial to their role.

One member of the team felt that the 3-4 days shadowing experienced staff when new to the role wasn't sufficient.

Staff informed Healthwatch that they had recently asked the Practice Manager if dementia training could be delivered to the team. This has been agreed although no date has been arranged for this. The North Tees Dementia Collaborative highlighted to Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees that free dementia training was offered to all GP Practices in the locality in Spring/Summer 2016. Healthwatch liaised with the training provider to inform them that this practice did not take up this opportunity at the time but as a result will communicate directly to see if this can be arranged.

Staff confirmed that they ask for health and medical information during initial telephone calls from patients to secure an appointment.

There was a mixed response regarding patients with additional needs, with one patient stating that '**nothing is in place**'. Although staff were aware of the prompts on the computer system which flag if a patient requires additional support. No specific training is given to administration staff for supporting patients with additional needs.

Additional Information from Woodbridge's Practice Manager

A meeting was held with the current Practice Manager of Woodbridge to discuss the findings from Healthwatch's follow up visit. He welcomed the feedback and informed Healthwatch that he was relatively new in post at Woodbridge, joining six months after the Enter and View visit had been conducted.

The Practice Manager informed Healthwatch that the practice distributes a survey yearly, to patients. The previous survey results showed that 98 % of patients won't tell a receptionist what's wrong with them and feel unhappy giving this information over the phone to a member of the administration team.

The Stockton-on-Tees Healthwatch Lead and Practice Manager discussed the benefit of raising awareness and re-educating patients in the assessment process and the benefit of understanding the triage system. Improving patient awareness of the variety of clinicians available at the practice, their roles and also a greater understanding of their suitability to treat the patient will

enhance patient experience at both the time of booking the appointment through to treatment.

The Patient Participation Group (PPG) has been developed with the members now seeing the impact of the views which were voiced to the team. Some changes that have been made include large signage within the practice. The group recently ran cancer awareness and weight management information sessions. The members of the PPG wanted more information and current hot topics in health displayed in the waiting area, they also questioned how up to date the knowledge of consultants was.

Woodbridge now host a 'lunch and learn' where consultants come to talk to clinical staff and patients, this has enabled the clinicians to audit and share learning and knowledge across other practices along with informing the team and patients of current issues.

The Practice Manager also has plans to celebrate the improvements at Woodbridge with a notice board to demonstrate this.

The PPG group and staff are looking forward to being the first GP practice in the country to trial advanced technology scales which measure a range of patient statistics such as body mass index and total fat percentage by scanning the body. In addition to this, they will also receive 12 health monitors which members of the PPG will trial, these read and send information e.g. blood pressure to the practice. This is a tool that could be offered to high risk patients in the future as an early warning system. Woodbridge Practice Manager has kindly invited Healthwatch to the demonstration of this equipment at the next PPG meeting which is scheduled for September 2016.

Conclusion

The ongoing issues highlighted around access and waiting times continues to be a problem locally and nationally. There is also a trend that recruitment and retention of GP's is difficult, particularly in Teesside. Woodbridge has 10 GP's, some who work part-time.

Woodbridge have addressed patient choice in a variety of ways including working with the PPG as well as developing on-line services and electronic check in. Good use of visual material for patients to access health information and guidance is also available with displays of 'who should I see?' posters and the comments and complaints box.

To further enhance patient experience with regards to the understanding of assessment processes and to gain confidence in the Nurse Practitioner, Practice Nurse and Health Care Assistant roles, the Practice Manager has plans to use the TV screens more effectively in the waiting area to highlight these issues and educate patients. Further advertising and education on the triage system for patients would also benefit the practice's booking/appointment process.

The Practice Manager is keen to work with Healthwatch in the future to develop some of the ideas to further improve the practice and patient experience. Healthwatch have been invited at a later date to revisit the practice and look forward to meeting with the PPG group.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees would like to thank Woodbridge Practice Manager and staff for their support. Healthwatch were met by a friendly and professional team who were extremely accommodating and cooperative during our visit.

Healthwatch would also like to thank the patients, family, friends and carers who gave their time to provide information about their experiences at Woodbridge Practice.

References

Enter & View: Woodbridge Practice, Wednesday 6th May 2015:

http://www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk/sites/default/files/woodbridge_enter_and_view_final_with_response_sept_15.pdf