

# PPG chairs' quick survey of Swindon GP practices

## Introduction and methodology

As GP practices started to return to a new normal as the Covid-19 lockdown was eased, the chairs of some patient participation groups in Swindon decided to compare their GP practices. They and three other volunteers, made calls and/or visits to their own surgeries between 4 and 22 July 2020.

Data was collected from 12 different GP practices in Swindon out of a potential 24. Not all GP practices have active patient participation groups and not all have chairs. This was a snapshot survey to compare and contrast. Since the survey was completed further changes would have been made in individual surgeries.

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## What did they find out?

When they phoned the surgery how quickly was the phone answered? What day/time was it? What sort of response did they get?

- The phone was answered after ( ) Surgery message Thursday afternoon. In response to customer services. (Good Afternoon etc.)
- 1 minute. Pleasant but formal
- Didn't phone. They called me in response to an online appointment booking.
- Timed out 1st time, 10 secs 2nd time, Tuesday at 3:00 pm
- Almost immediate answer after lunch
- Fairly quickly, the usual intro by Doctor ( ) has become boring & ideally there should be a short cut directly to reception
- Morning on a Monday. After the endless opening message, I didn't have to wait for my call to be answered politely and efficiently.
- 5 rings to answer, 11.30am. pleasant response
- 11.30am. 3 minutes
- They responded to my 5th call. Around 11.30 Tuesday morning. Receptionist pleasant and very helpful. I asked about an appointment for my husband to follow up further treatment after a blood test on 4 August 2020. She explained the correct date after the blood test results and the diary for those dates would be available next week. I then explained that I

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was a volunteer from Healthwatch and would she answer some questions to update the public now there are so many changes due to the pandemic. She agreed to answer as best she could

- Straight to automated response, asked to press 1 for appointments, phone answered straight away after that by a friendly receptionist. This was at 9am
- Between 1-3 Minutes on different occasions

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## Was it possible, at that time, to make a booking online and, if yes, what for?

- Covid-19: Routine online appointments has been suspended until further notice. No update when it will be re-started.
- Yes - GP, Physio, Mental health, Pharmacist
- Yes and have done - Physiotherapist, pharmacist, GP phone call.
- Not yet but coming
- No
- No - don't think you can book any
- I can at the moment but haven't been able to do so since lockdown started and until two weeks ago. Telephone appointments across the board including physio and mental health.
- No on line services at the moment
- No
- No not at the moment. You have to phone from 8 am in the morning to be triaged by a clinician at a phone back
- No online booking at present.
- No. "Due to the ever changing situation with the Coronavirus (COVID-19), we have suspended the online booking service. This is due to the verbal screening process that we need to complete before appointments are made - we apologise for any inconvenience this may cause and ask you for your patience and understanding during this time."

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## How well did they think the surgery was communicating what was currently on offer to patients?

- Intermittent - needs to find most effective way to communicate.
- 5/10
- Ok, regular text messages
- Had two text messages: 18 March "Practice remains open as usual" but if you have Covid symptoms self-isolate etc. Second text requesting that pre-booked non-urgent appointments be changed to tele consultations
- Debatable, but doubt the "average" patient has (much) awareness of the ongoing & changing circumstance
- During lockdown communications were very poor but improved towards the end. Communication is by text or on the website. I feel that the text messaging is not of an exceptionally good standard and texts can be fragmented or not received in a timely fashion. The practice is aware of this and looking to improve. I am not overly impressed by the websites across the board of (our practices) as it would help if the various clinics (days and times) were listed along with their clinicians. It would also help to be aware of any specialties clinicians have. If you have a skin problem it would be better to see a doctor with a specialist interest in dermatology etc. This has been tabled before.
- I found a lot of information on their web site. Not sure if patients (in) the area could all access this. The surgery are very good at telephoning if need be.
- Good
- Best it can. They did answer the bell at the door and make appointments at the beginning of the pandemic but now you must phone. There is a website and there are some notices on the door and windows too. Patients can access information by internet, phone and at the door if necessary so options for all types of people
- I have had regular texts from them regarding use of PPE and accessibility
- I think they have done well so far

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## We asked people to check their surgery website and make any comments about it

- Noticed that PPG page has been removed from the surgery's website. Will bring it up at the meeting next week.
- Well-designed basic information. Could do with biographical information on GPs especially showing specialities.
- Looked earlier this week and suggested amendments to operations manager
- It's good but needs some study to understand options
- Red banner pop up re Covid comes up as soon as you enter website directing you to up to date NHS Covid advice - last 'news' post was 20/2/20 re Covid travellers
- It's OK, but potentially could be updated more frequently especially as the "rules" & services change
- Insufficient information and no newsletter although this is being considered. I would like to see information on the Primary Care Network and explanation of the benefits to patients too.
- More information than expected.
- All up to date
- There is a website clearly labelled update on the 6th July 2020 with a brief, to the point explanation of the present situation as well as the usual ones. It explains why you must wear a mask and not arrive for an appointment more than 5 minutes in advance for safe distancing. It makes people feel safe rather than just doing as they are told. Hopefully people who do not have access to the internet can be helped by someone but can phone the surgery if necessary.
- Warning pop-up re Covid symptoms and a pinned message about Covid arrangements. Phone number at the top so I don't have to search for it. CQC report link. Healthwatch is within the 'How are We Doing?' tab. Lots of ways to feedback which is good.

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- It has been standardised but there is still the same amount of information. It clearly explains what can be expected in terms of booking an appointment - Initially triage then telephone - video or face to face at the surgery.

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**We asked how well overall they felt the surgery had communicated in recent weeks and when they had just called. (Phone calls, texts, newsletters, Facebook posts, PPG meetings by Zoom....? What was the out of hours message like?**

- No communication from surgery - only when I send documents etc, reply thank you. PPG had its 1st virtual zoom meeting in June. No one contacted any of the PPG members during the Covid-19 to see how we were.
- Mainly by text - one article in local magazine. More thought needs to be put into how and when they communicate.
- 5/10
- Ok. Were helpful and I got the required appointment. Introduction message is long. Out of hours is clear
- Just had the two texts mentioned above - no other communications - but when I phoned to enquire about an overdue blood test the staff competently and professionally explained the procedure and booked me in there and then.
- Not particularly well & the web site in particular whilst good in many respects needs to be cleaned up & updated
- I wasn't impressed by two PPG chairs (in our PCN/group) having been booking appointments on line some weeks before I received a standard text advising this to now be available following lockdown. I have asked that information not just be dredged out of the practices by individual chairs (for personal use) but be informed to all chairs in the Primary Care Network at the same time and by the same means....Recent PPG meeting was constructive.
- The surgery (team) are doing well. The out of hours message is long but needed to give clear easy instructions.
- Generally ok. Out of hours message good

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- Fine. There are plenty of choices for each person to choose what is best for them. I feel they are doing their best and the receptionists have been very helpful despite having to explain more to everyone and adapt to the new systems themselves. Most other people have been satisfied. Everyone is suffering from lack of appointments and services. It was lovely hear that staff are using their own mobile phones to help ease pressure on the main surgery phones as so much work is done by phone at the moment. People with long term or chronic conditions have always suffered from lack of continuity of care and this is even worse now due to the pandemic. Change of staff does not impact as seriously as you have not been able to make an appointment with the doctor of your choice for a long long time....
- I am impressed with how easily I can access support from GP during this time. I have not rung them out of hours so unsure of that procedure.
- Very well. We have needed to use services several times recently. The receptionists have been courteous and helpful. We have consulted by phone with doctors, nurse practitioners and also with the new pharmacist advisor....

The [Patient Survey](#) was published on 9 July. We asked people to look at it and the results from their GP practice. Did they have any comments? Not everyone did - but these were their observations:

- Have done surprisingly well especially as it came at a time when they had taken over the struggling ( ) surgery.
- Happy with as Key patient indicator of getting an appointment and satisfied overall was great - Areas for improvements within 5% of local and 2% of national performance
- Reviewing the Patient Survey, one person said of her surgery:
 

“...disappointing that only 39% were offered a choice of appointment, only 35% get to see preferred GP, 48% found it easy to get through on the phone, 55% satisfied with appointment time. Not very good scores on essential provision. However 79% found the receptionists helpful. 87% took the appointment offered “probably out of necessity rather than choice when only 39% were offered a choice”. “A great positive was that 91% were involved as much as they wanted in discussion; 80% were satisfied with the time given at their last appointment and the GP recognised & understood mental health needs.”

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- I agree with the results. I think the surgery has improved no end over the last few years but there are some areas they can do better.

**We asked if there was anything else they wanted to record which we could feed back to the next PPG chairs' meeting (and to GP practices and primary care networks themselves) ?**

- Telephone worker/staff appears to have the authority to look up information on patients' notes and then reads the info out...Do they only have access to certain information?
- It is vital that the practice takes time to reflect on their communications with patients.
- Patients (PPG) involvement in designing processes for patients and communicating them
- Not all surgeries offer the same services, like ear micro suction which is frustrating and means uneven services across Swindon resulting in visits to A&E or expensive private medical care if patients can afford it
- Lessons to learn re (disbanding) of PPG at ( ) surgery (which was one of) the leading lights
- As always it's the ability to communicate across the patient population with timely & updated information
- There must be common ground and practices throughout the NHS for the NHS to be delivering the same services throughout the U.K. I don't feel that this is really being achieved. (*Comments about winter flu vaccine provision in relation to Covid*). Practices should also continue with routine health care should there be a second wave. We cannot have diagnoses, operations and treatment cancelled again. Many people will die before their time.
- The way some patients are with the staff can be interesting. Despite the explanation that due to the pandemic patients must not turn up more than 5 minutes before their appointment time to maintain safe distancing in the building, I have heard people complaining that they were asked to return later when they have arrived more than 5 and up to 15 minutes before the appointment time. These people are not easy to deal with and their response to a survey would be interesting. Now POD (Prescription Ordering Direct) is

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overwhelmed and you can email POD, it is good that people are allowed to take a repeat prescriptions and post them through the surgery door.

## Conclusions

- This report reflects the personal views of some PPG chairs and other volunteers. It is representative of those individuals and is a snapshot.
- There is much appreciation and acknowledgement of the work of GP practice staff during the period. Communication with patients and with patient participation groups during Covid-19 between March and July 2020 has however, been extremely varied. See footnote below in which NHS England gives practices clear guidance from 1 July.
- Irrespective of Covid-19 and any further outbreak or lockdown, all GP practices should work with patients and their patient groups to improve communication.
- Primary Care Networks are well placed to work with their member practices to support or encourage consistency and accuracy - in communication, use of websites and social media for example. Some are beginning to do so. This should be developed.

## Footnote

- [This update was published by NHS England on 9 July](#) and includes an update to GP contracts.

It includes this paragraph

- “From 1 July the requirement for practices to engage with and review feedback from Patient Participation Groups (PPG) is also reinstated as it is important that practices continue to engage patients and citizens in the development and transformation of services over the rest of the year. It is particularly important that practices engage with their PPGs to help understand and shape the changes in access to services to ensure that no one is inadvertently excluded. We encourage practices to conduct PPGs remotely.”

And

- “From 1 July 2020 practices should resume the following services if these have been deprioritised: • New patient reviews (including alcohol dependency) • Routine medication reviews • Over-75 health checks • Clinical reviews of frailty.
- “We recognise that practices will likely have a backlog of reviews and checks to undertake and they will need to sequence these using their clinical judgement and a risk-based

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approach. Healthcare professionals should discuss with the patient, their carer or their advocate the most suitable and safe way to conduct reviews and checks. Where they can be delivered safely on a face to face basis this should be offered. Where this care cannot be delivered safely face to face or where the patient has other medical conditions which still require them to shield or socially isolate the review could be conducted remotely, with as much of the physical review completed as is practicable in these circumstances - or in exceptional cases by home visit.”

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All this and more can be viewed on the web [here](#)

