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DIGITAL HEALTHCARE SOLUTIONS

Accessibility:
Failings found leaving patients frustrated

- Recent reports find huge failings around the inclusion and accessibility features of most GP websites

- Many patients are being misdirected to the reception telephone causing further delays

- Effective provision of digital health advice, videos and information can massively reduce the need to see a doctor

- Learn how our cutting-edge GP websites and social media solutions could help your practice

For more information visit: www.new-medical.co.uk/gp-websites

Accessibility is a mandatory legal requirement.

A huge disparity can be seen in the digital experience's many patients receive from practice websites across the UK. Results from last year's NHS patient survey found that 24.7% of patients experienced difficulties when accessing GP services digitally. 1 out of 4 patients are finding it difficult to look for information or access services on their GP practice's website.

https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/resource/access-to-gp-services#background (1)

A recent review from Healthwatch of GP practices highlights a need for improved accessibility standards. Healthwatch conducted a review of over 80 GP practice websites and found that the overwhelming majority did not meet the requirements set out in the NHS Accessible Information Standard.

Out of all the websites reviewed, only 1 had any EasyRead versions of text directly available on the website, with the others requiring patients to submit a request and wait anywhere from 5 to 28 working days for a reply. None of the websites also provided any British Sign Language translations of text.

Many vulnerable patients have found it difficult when they are expected to use websites to access healthcare services which do not have the required functions or support to allow them to do so.

https://www.healthwatchmanchester.co.uk/report/2021-09-23/good-practice-review-gp-practice-websites (2)

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Accessibility makes the NHS available to everyone

The Accessible Information Standard makes accessibility a legal requirement.

https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/information-standards/information-standards-and-data-collections-including-extractions/publications-and-notifications/standards-and-collections/dcb1605-accessible-information (3)

Today, in the UK around 20% of people are living with a disability and many more have a temporary or situational disability, like an illness or injury. The NHS is for everyone, so NHS digital services should be accessible to everyone too. That is why practice websites must be easy to use and must meet the needs of all patients.

https://service-manual.nhs.uk/accessibility/what-all-NHS-services-need-to-do (4)

A good GP practice website is key in achieving this goal. Patients should be able to submit a request for help via a practice website's online form or find advice about a medical issue as an alternative to phoning the GP practice.

The NHS Long Term Plan commits to every patient having the right to be offered digital-first primary care by 2023/24.

https://www.england.nhs.uk/gp/digital-first-primary-care/ (5)

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Patients are increasingly turning to their practice website

In 2021, 52.7% of patients tried to use their GP practice website to access information or services, compared to 42% in 2020. That is an increase of 10% in 1 year. (1)

https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/resource/access-to-gp-services#background (1)

The COVID-19 pandemic has quickened the pace of change, moving services and functions online due to the restrictions on face-to-face meetings. (2) Since the pandemic, the national and community response to COVID19 has revealed digital as a universal need. Digital participation has become essential for our lives, for our health and wellbeing.

https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/what-we-do/our-partnerships/health-and-wellbeing/widening-digital-participation/ (6)

The need for improved, streamlined digital services in primary care has significantly increased but many practices are still trying to catch up.

Undoubtedly from our experience, when looking at some GP practice websites, we can, regrettably, see lots of potential concerns. Content is often written for offline consumption and poorly translated when viewed online, and accessibility issues make online transactions difficult if NHS Digital Service Manual standards are not met. (Need your blurb about what you think is needed)

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Patients want up-to-date information, clearer signposting and greater choice

From the findings of a current review Healthwatch recommends;

- That all GP Practice websites should be compliant with the NHS Accessible Information Standard.

- Information should be provided in a way which avoids complexity and decreases the need for navigation around the site. 6.

- Where possible, virtual appointments should be provided as an option to patients.

- The out-of-hours extended access service needs to be brought into greater clarity on websites, detailing its function and how to access the service.

- All GP Practice websites need to provide information in as many languages as possible.

Almost half of the websites (47%) recorded a score of either very poor or poor for information about flu vaccinations.

16% of websites scored poorly for making an appointment online this was due to either a lack of the option to make an appointment online, with often a listing of the practice phone number to call, or a confusing appointment process.

For a clear majority of websites (78%), we could not find any information regarding an offer of virtual appointments.

The overwhelming majority (95%) of websites did not offer any extra, directly available audio/visual support. For those patients who required further support, the vast majority of websites had an accessibility page that provided an e-mail contact for any requests for extra audio/visual support.

https://www.healthwatchmanchester.co.uk/sites/healthwatchmanchester.co.uk/files/%27Good%20Practice%27%20-%20Healthwatch%20Manchester%20GP%20website%20review.pdf (7)

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Use digital inclusion to deliver better patient outcomes

To conclude, evidence indicates greater digital inclusion can support patient and system outcomes. Results from the NHS Widening Digital Participation Programme, show the potential positive impact of supporting vulnerable patient groups to build digital health skills. (6)

Of individuals who learnt to use digital platforms through the programme:

Impacts at a system level show:

59%
felt more confident in using online health information

52%
felt less lonely or isolated

21%
made fewer calls or visits to their GP

10%
made fewer calls to NHS 111

54%
would go to the internet first for non-urgent medical advice

51%
have used the internet to look for ways to improve mental health and wellbeing

6%
made fewer visits to A&E

The programme's evaluation also estimates £3.7m in saved GP visits, £2.3m saved in A&E visits and savings of £6 million in just 12 months.