

Is your GP listening?

Healthwatch Barnet have received feedback from patients saying they find it difficult and confusing to give feedback, positive or negative, to their GP practice. In November 2015 a group of Healthwatch volunteers surveyed Barnet GP websites since this is the first point of reference for many patients wanting to give feedback. There are 62 GP practices in Barnet. Our volunteers looked at the 49 separate websites available.

Is it easy to find out how to make a complaint? Only 23 sites had 'feedback', 'complaints' or 'suggestions' as a direct link on the home page.

Is such guidance easy to follow? 38 sites had some guidance, often basic, outlining how to make a complaint or give feedback. This was often very basic and not clearly signposted from the home page.

Are the details of who to contact, timescales and next steps outlined for making a complaint? 37 sites gave the role of the person to contact, though not all had the contact details. The majority did not give timescales for the next stages, nor a description of the process to be followed.

Is a standard form available to streamline the complaints process? Only 25% of sites had a complaints form template, and it was not always easy to access on the site.

Is "Friend and Family" tab on your home page? Less than half of the practices had a link from the home page, though 60% had a link somewhere on their site. This is a key way for practices to gain feedback from patients in a constructive way and could be much better promoted.

Following this Survey, the team reviewed Care Quality Commission (CQC) and British Medical Association (BMA) Guidance for Complaints and also had discussions with NHS England. It is suggested that the following points be included in GP websites to ensure patients are enabled to understand the process, have the required information to enable the matter to be investigated, and thus produce a result that is beneficial for both patient and the practice.

Friends and Family test link should be available on the Home page. This could also be used to encourage patients to make suggestions and give constructive feedback. Many patients told us they did not wish to make a formal complaint but had no other way to give their input.

- A clear complaints policy should be available giving the alternative methods of giving feedback, when appropriate to use complaints procedure and outlining what is involved and when a response may be indicated.
- A clear complaints procedure should be available easily on the website, covering the process; timescales; contact details; follow-up if not satisfied with the outcome. A simple flow chart might be helpful for this.
- A standard form for making a complaint would be helpful to guide the patient or carer and to ensure they include all information necessary.
 - Sources of support should be listed e.g. PALS and Healthwatch
 - Feedback on changes that practices have made as a result of patient feedback would also be helpful.

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank our team of Healthwatch Barnet volunteers who assisted with this research - Stewart Block, Janice Tausig, Ganesh Dutt, Arati Banerjee, Amlan Ghoshal, Ranil Jayasinghe, Rifka Rhys. www.healthwatchbarnet.co.uk October 2016

