

# GP website health check

An overview of GP practice websites in Sheffield

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# Introduction

In December 2022, a group of our staff and volunteers completed an analysis of 74 GP websites from across Sheffield.

In response to feedback we have received from the public over the last year, we wanted to explore whether GP practices in the city are making good use of online services. Based on the stories we've heard from local people, we believe that improving online access will increase accessibility to a wider range of patients, as well as reducing pressures on GP phone lines. We wanted to understand what the current online picture is, and where these improvements could be made.

This report is an overview of our findings. We have also written to each GP practice to share more detailed individual summaries, which we hope will help make their websites and online services more accessible to new and existing patients.

In September 2022 [new guidance](#)<sup>1</sup> was issued by NHS England, to guide GPs in creating usable and accessible websites for patients. This guidance is a source of support which we would point GPs to when considering the findings in this report.

Our team reviewed each site thoroughly and the information in this report is correct to the best of our knowledge, for the dates we accessed the websites. Where we were unable to find information, we believe patients would struggle too.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/creating-a-highly-usable-and-accessible-gp-website-for-patients/>

# Summary of key findings

- Most websites contain a great deal of information which should be useful for prospective and existing patients. While some make it easy to find this information, many are challenging to navigate. Information is not clearly organised, up to date, or located where patients would expect to find it.
- Most practices set out the process of registering as a patient and making an appointment quite clearly. However, patients would benefit from greater choice in the ways they can do this, including more online options. Online services beyond registering and making an appointment are not widespread.
- Many practices do not seem to have considered the whole online 'journey' when setting out their online offer, with patients still having to call or visit the surgery at some point while registering as a patient or to access online services.
- 62% of practices ask for proof of ID and/or proof of address in order to register (with 22% making clear this is absolutely required). Requiring ID is not in alignment with NHS policy, and disproportionately impacts some communities such as refugees and homeless people.
- All practices offer at least two ways to order prescriptions, meaning patients have a good level of choice – though this is sometimes presented in a confusing or overwhelming way.
- The least consistent pages across websites were those that offered supplementary information and advice – including pages about Patient Participation Groups (PPGs), support for carers, and wider health and wellbeing/self-help support for patients. Though many practices had clearly done a great deal of work on these pages at some point, they were the most likely to be out of date, have broken web links, or be incomplete.
- Information about making a complaint or leaving other feedback was rarely detailed, meaning patients will not always know what their rights are or what they should expect.
- Accessibility features are not widespread – just over half of websites had a translation tool embedded, but there were very few which had other features, such as Easy Read information, or the option to change various elements of the display (font, colours etc).

# 1. Contacting the surgery & making an appointment

## Contacting the practice

A GP website/online listing is the first place many people will go to find details of the practice, including how to contact them. 72 of the 74 practices had their contact details clearly visible on the home page of their website.



Two websites had no visible contact details

All of these practices provided a phone number. For 19 this was their only contact method; the others provided an email address or an online webform too.

Though this seems like online contact options are widespread, it should be noted that many websites say these webforms/email addresses should only be used for general comments and suggestions. Some allowed non-urgent medical queries but none were a complete alternative to using the telephone. We also didn't see any websites providing the option to text. This is a significant barrier for some people, for instance many Deaf people for whom texting is the preferred option.

Only being able to contact a GP practice by telephone or by visiting in person can make primary care more difficult to access for many people with sensory impairments, autism, or a disability. Providing a more thorough online contact option could help many of these individuals to get in touch and book an appointment in a way that's comfortable for them.

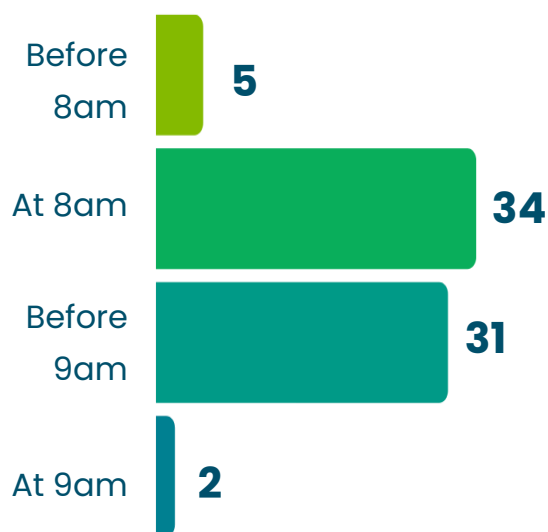
We are aware that some GP practices do have other systems – for instance the Ask My GP service which is a complete alternative to the telephone. However, our team did not see these options when they went online to find contact details, suggesting that they are not displayed where people might expect on the website, or aren't clearly explained.

## Opening times

We have heard from the public that it can be difficult to phone and make a doctor's appointment because practices are not open much outside of standard working hours.

2 websites did not advertise their opening times online. Of the rest, very few websites made a distinction between phone line opening times, and the times that appointments were available, so we (and patients) have to assume that their given opening times apply to both. We know that in practice, this is often not the case.

When does the practice open?



When does the practice close?



We can see that options for people who work 9am–5pm, and may have a commute either side of this, are indeed limited in terms of accessing their own surgery. If it is not possible to extend opening hours, these people may benefit from improved online ways to contact their practice, which can be completed when they have free time and responded to by practice staff in working hours.

## Making an appointment online

73 websites offered ways to make an appointment online.

Can you make an appointment online?	What platforms were used?
Nearly all (53) explicitly say you would need to contact the practice by phone or in person to register for online services before you can use them. Some required a physical visit, collecting a form from reception and showing ID.	Most of these websites say they use the SystemOnline software, with some also using Patient Access.
10 websites did not make it clear how to register for online booking services, meaning patients would have to contact the practice for more information.	Most of these websites say they use the SystemOnline software, with some also using Patient Access.
Only 10 websites appeared to be advertising a way to book an appointment online without having to contact the practice by phone or in person at any point.	Most of recommended that patients use the NHS App, though some were using Ask My GP or DoctorLink.



## Good practice – Valley Medical Centre

Valley Medical Centre explains thoroughly how to use their online services. They have put a registration form for it online so patients know what information will be required when requesting online access, and have included several NHS fact/guidance sheets to help people understand what they'll be getting access to (appointment booking, medical records etc). These guidance sheets also offer other support – learning to use the internet, and learning in more detail how to use online GP services.

There is still some room for improvement here – to make the patient journey truly straightforward, the form could be submitted online so the patient doesn't have to phone or visit the practice at all. The appointment and prescription pages could also link through to this guidance to ensure patients can see it.

## Additional online services offered by practices

Can you do any of the following online?	
Manage and cancel appointments	Nearly all – 73
Have a video consultation	13 websites made reference to video consultations (you'd have to register for online services first)
Ask for advice	15 websites allowed you to contact the practice online for non-urgent advice
Request a referral	Only 6 websites explained how to request a referral online, without making a GP appointment
Access your medical records	39 websites explained how to do this. An additional 3 said you could do it but provided broken links
Change your personal details	33 websites allowed you to change your details eg phone number or address online
Give feedback	52 practices allow you to do this online (via a webform or by email)

It should be noted that where these services were available, this may require access to online services, which is subject to the limitations described earlier in this section.

## 2. Registration information

### How to register as a new patient

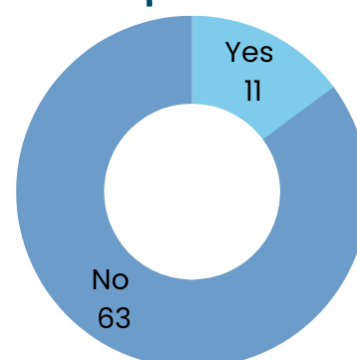
It is important for prospective patients to understand how to register with a GP. Putting this information online makes it more widely accessible as well as improving transparency. 70 of the websites we looked at had easy to find information about how to register as a patient. 3 websites had information that was difficult to find, and we couldn't find this information at all on one site.

### Registering online

When looking at the entire registration process, there were only 11 websites where patients could do the whole process online. Most would need a physical visit to the practice at some point.

This is broken down in more detail below.

### Can you complete the whole registration process online?



### Completing a registration form



**28 websites** had a registration form that could be completed online via a webform, or could be downloaded and filled in before submitting it via email.



**1 website** said they had a form online but the link was broken.



**16 websites** had a registration form available online, but it couldn't be filled in online. New patients would have to print this out (an additional barrier for many), fill it in by hand, and either scan/email it, post it, or hand it in to reception. In most cases this is because the form provided is a PDF document which couldn't be edited.



**29 websites** didn't have a registration form online at all and said you must collect one from the practice.

### New patient questionnaires

49 practices said that people would be asked to fill in a new patient questionnaire while registering, to give the practice a better understanding of their health needs. However, just **27 websites** allowed the form to be completed and submitted online.



There was a disconnect between these forms – some sites that allowed patients to complete registration forms online didn't allow patients to complete new patient health questionnaires, and vice versa. This is a gap in the online patient journey, which means most people will still need to visit the practice.

### Support to fill in the registration form

We only found one website offering support to fill in the registration form.

### New patient health checks

31 websites stated that new patients would be offered a new patient health check. This was not always outlined as part of the registration process where one would expect to find it – our team reported that in several cases this information was tucked away elsewhere on the site.

## Barriers to registration

We know that some people are denied registration because they cannot provide proof of address, identity or immigration status. According to NHS policy this should not be happening. Over the last year we have been supporting the national [GP access campaign](#)<sup>2</sup>. We worked with statutory and voluntary sector organisations to distribute over 1000 GP Access Registration cards to people who may not have particular forms of ID, such as homeless people and refugees. We wanted to see what registration information was being shared by GP practices online, and whether this might be presenting an additional obstacle.

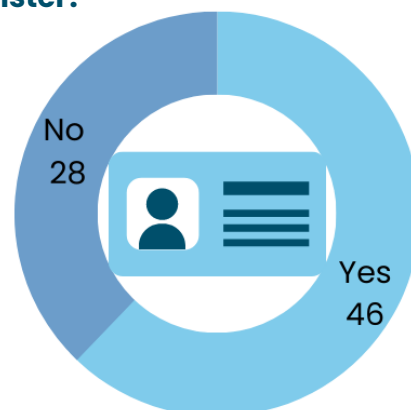
### Requiring ID or proof of address

46 practices mentioned bringing ID and/or proof of address in relation to registering. Many gave examples such as passport, driving licence, utility bill, or tenancy agreement.

16 of these specified that this evidence **must** be provided in order to register with the practice. Others said it would be 'helpful' to bring ID to speed up the registration process, or didn't give further detail beyond asking for the documents.

Through our enquiry line, we know this can cause confusion and distress for people. Experiences we've heard include lengthy delays getting registered because of the back-and-forth required (to either find

### Are new patients asked to bring proof of ID and/or address to register?



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/gp-access-cards/>

documents or assert that they are not needed), as well as people being denied care because they cannot provide the documentation that the practice asks for.

### **Proof of immigration status**

3 websites also mentioned providing proof of immigration status, asking about new patients' right to residency. This can create another barrier to care.

### **Registration for specific groups, e.g. refugees or homeless people**

Some websites mentioned specific groups in relation to registering. 39 websites mentioned refugees, asylum seekers and new arrivals who might need information in other languages. Most of these websites linked to the same information resources – PDFs about the NHS and people's right to primary care, which are provided in 21 languages. However, as one volunteer commented, "I don't know how I'd get [to these pages] if I didn't speak English!"

40 websites described people's right to register as a temporary patient, while 4 mentioned overseas visitors, and 1 mentioned homeless people.



### **Good practice – Sloan Medical Centre**

Sloan Medical Centre's website makes it clear what your rights are as a prospective patient when it comes to registering. They are explicit that you do not need to provide ID or proof of address in order to register, and state they are committed to providing care for homeless patients too.

They also provide information about seeking emergency treatment, treatment as a temporary patient as well as for overseas visitors. They were the only site we found to have information leaflets tailored to homeless people, as well as to Traveller and Roma communities.

### **Capturing new patients' communication needs**

30 of the websites we could check – that is, 30 of the 44 which had their registration form available to view online – did ask about communication needs. Most of these (19) were only capturing language needs and no other adjustments that might be required.

From our enquiry line, we know that other adjustments people sometimes need from their GP practice include large print letters, text reminders, Easy Read information and different font/colour combinations for printed information.

## Practice boundary areas

Most of the websites gave information about the practice boundary to varying degrees. Some practices described serving certain post code areas or certain wards, while others had maps available online. For patients wishing to register from outside the boundary, it wasn't always clear if this was possible:

- 24 were clear that registering from outside the practice area isn't allowed
- 9 websites had a less clear policy. They said that in some cases they could accept patients from outside the practice boundary, though didn't give the eligibility requirements
- The remaining 41 practices made no mention of patients from outside their area, so we (and prospective patients) would not know whether we can register based on their online information.

## 3. Prescriptions

Ordering prescriptions is a topic we hear about regularly from members of the public. Based on the feedback we hear, there is wide variation across the city – both in terms of how you order a prescription, and people's experience of the process.

### How to order prescriptions

All the websites we looked at had information about ordering prescriptions. The range of options given to patients was generally seen as positive, with our team describing "quite a lot of access options" – they all listed **at least two ways for patients to order repeat prescriptions**.

The image below shows the range we found – the larger the word, the more often it was listed as an option.



Requesting prescriptions in person was the most common method suggested, but this was never the only choice for any given practice. This is important for those who find it difficult to travel to their GP.

Most also offered an online option, often via their online access system (SystemOnline, Patient Access etc). 12 websites also allowed patients to email their prescription request, and a few others had an online webform that didn't require a login. We didn't see any options to text the practice about prescriptions.

### **Phoning for prescriptions**

Many practices seem keen to reduce pressure on their phone lines by asking patients not to order prescriptions over the phone. At least 37 practice websites explicitly said patients **cannot** phone to order a prescription.

While online options can improve accessibility for many, and can reduce pressure on phone lines, it is still important for there to be offline systems for patients who need them. Some practices said patients couldn't call to order prescriptions generally, but made allowances for patients who need to (most commonly listing housebound patients or patients who cannot access online services).

Some practices have gotten around this phone pressure in other ways, while still allowing people who need to use the phone to do so. For instance, some practices said they allow prescriptions to be ordered by phone only during certain times, or have a different phone number for prescriptions, where patients can call to leave an answerphone message rather than speaking directly to reception staff.

### **Setting information out clearly**

While the range of options is largely good, the way they are presented to patients is often more challenging. Many prescription pages were seen as “confusing”, with options not laid out very clearly or seeming overwhelming.

Many websites did not make good use of text formatting to break up large chunks of information. It also seems that options had been added at different times, meaning that wording ends up inconsistent or contradictory, and outdated information has often not been removed before adding new choices.

“Confusing – online possibilities are not mentioned on the main prescriptions page and there are 2 different links for electronic, which allow the user to do different things”

“No phone [option] anymore [...] though on contact details it still says you can phone for prescriptions, which is no doubt confusing”



### Good practice - Duke Medical Centre

Duke Medical Centre offer a wide range of options to people wishing to order a repeat prescription, so there should be a method to meet most patient's needs. You can phone, email, send via post, go in person, or use an online portal. This is set out in a very clear way considering the amount of information provided – making good use of bullet points and bold text. They also provide useful information about current prescription fees, and advice for people who may be able to save money through prescription prepayment certificates, or fee exemptions.

## 4. Complaints & feedback

It is important that patients know they have the right to make a complaint or give other feedback, and understand the steps they have to take and what the process will look like. Queries about how to make a complaint (or if a patient 'should' make a complaint) are a common theme in our enquiries. Many people tell us they don't see the point in making a complaint or giving feedback, as they don't feel like it will make a difference. It is important that services make patients feel that feedback is important to them, and that their views will make a difference both for them and other patients.

### Finding out about the complaints process

Most websites we looked at did have a complaints section, though this wasn't always easy to find.

69 of the 74 websites did tell patients who to contact to make a complaint, though this wasn't always detailed – many simply told patients to contact the Practice Manager without providing their name or contact details. On 5 websites we couldn't find any information at all about who to contact.

Most of the websites (51 out of 74) had some sort of information about what patients should expect from the complaints process. However volunteers did not feel that many of these could be considered an actual complaints policy, saying they were more like a "short information leaflet".

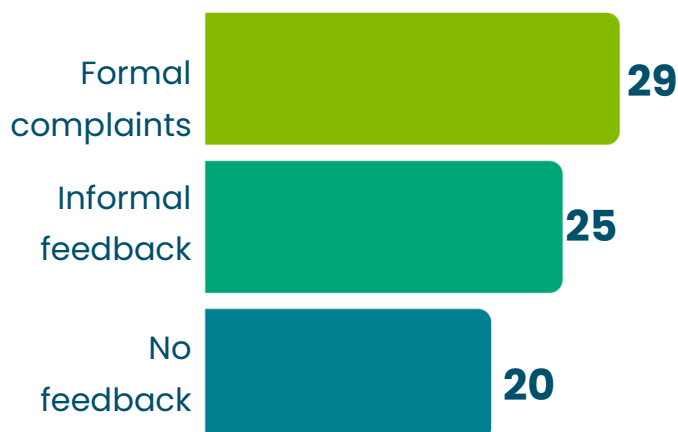


23 websites had no information or guidance about the complaints process at all.

## Making a complaint/giving feedback online

Just 29 websites allowed patients to make a formal complaint to the practice online, via webform or email.

An additional 25 had provision for informal feedback/comments only. Some of these links didn't go directly to the practice, instead sending patients to the NHS website to leave a public review.



20 websites didn't appear to have any online feedback function at all.

## Finding additional support to help with a complaint

52 websites linked to external guidance and/or advocacy support, such as the NHS England Complaints Team, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, and Sheffield Advocacy Hub. The level of information provided on the sites varied, and at least 5 provided links to advocacy services which don't provide support to people living in Sheffield.

22 websites made no mention of external guidance or support at all.



### Good Practice – Woodhouse Health Centre

Woodhouse Health Centre's website has several options for patients to give feedback, all collated under a prominent 'feedback' heading.

They have a Friends & Family test for quick feedback (and allow patients to view previous results), along with links to leave a review on the NHS website and Google.

They also provide a thorough complaints policy, so patients can get a good idea of what should happen when they make a complaint. This includes timescales, the steps that patients can expect to be taken, links to local advocacy support for help making a complaint, and details of escalating the complaint to the Ombudsman if they're not happy with the outcome. Patients can make a complaint online easily via email.

# 5. Patient Participation Groups (PPGs)

60 websites made some reference to a PPG or other patient group. The depth of explanation on these sites varied significantly, with some providing a general definition of a PPG, and others giving detail about the work of their specific group.

## Getting involved in the PPG

All 60 of the websites that discussed PPGs gave some information about how to get involved. For many, this was just signing up to a mailing list - we got the impression that many practices do not have a group that meets in person or virtually to do work together, but rather people who complete surveys as individuals. It's unclear whether this is a change due to the pandemic, or if it has always been the case.

Many of the PPGs seemed to be inactive, with meeting minutes on the website being quite old. Our team commented that this part of most websites doesn't seem to be updated very often.

“Next meeting is apparently planned for Sept 2019...”



### Good practice - Falkland House Surgery

Falkland House Surgery's website has a page dedicated to their Patient Participation Group. They explain the role of the group, and offer different levels of involvement opportunity (becoming a full member or a virtual member) depending on patients' availability.

They provide contact details of the PPG Chair and Deputy Chair so people who are interested can speak directly with them, or go via the GP reception team. The page also has recent meeting notes and reports, so patients can see what the PPG are working on. This seems to be updated regularly.

## 6. Carers

### Registering as a carer

50 of the practice websites asked patients to let them know if they were carers, and provided different ways to do this. Most offered an email address or online form, though some didn't suggest any specific contact method. Some practices also captured this information as part of the registration process for new patients.

### Advice and support for carers

54 websites provided some level of information and advice for carers to access, however volunteers reported that this was difficult to find on many websites, and they had to specifically search for it. The quantity and quality of information also varied widely, with many practices just providing a link to an external organisation like Carers UK, without defining what a carer is or how the practice would like to support them.

How to register as a carer, as well as information for carers, was one of the areas our team were most likely to report broken links, suggesting these sections are not being updated regularly.

"There is a definition given for 'carer'. There's more info than most sites about carers, benefits, support"

"I couldn't find anything at all that mentions carers"

"Could only find carers information using the search bar and the 'tell us if you're a carer' form was broken"



#### Good Practice – Handsworth Medical Centre

Handsworth Medical Centre's website has two pages for carers – one offers NHS links to information and support resources as well as information about finance and law. The other gives a comprehensive definition of a carer and links to local charities. Both of these pages invite patients to register as a carer with the practice.

The key positive detail we found on this site, though, was a detailed explanation of the specific support that Handsworth Medical Centre might be able to offer carers. This included annual health checks, flexible prescription ordering, winter flu jabs and a named contact at the practice for further support.



## 7. Self care

Our team explored the websites to see if there was information which might help people to manage their own health and wellbeing, such as NHS information, support groups, or voluntary organisations.

This topic revealed the greatest amount of variation between websites so far. Whilst most websites had an area about 'self care', 'health', or 'wellness', the content of these was not consistent.

Some websites focused on linking to pages on the NHS website for various health conditions or issues (asthma, diabetes, back pain etc). Others provided links to local or national voluntary sector organisations who could support you to manage various elements of your health. A few provided information about wider determinants of health – debt advice, for instance.

Volunteers commented on the extent – or otherwise – of these pages:

“Lots! There's a 'Health Advice' section with sub-sections on drugs & alcohol, carers, depression etc, each of these has links to groups and resources.”

“There is a section titled 'Self-help' which says there are many such organisations that can help, but doesn't list any”

We found that lots of these sections were outdated – broken links were common:

“Looks really comprehensive if it worked (A to Z of conditions, common health questions and live well). All produced errors when you try to click through”

The overall impression we were left with was; many GP practices created a self care section at some point, but these have not been well maintained and would benefit from being refreshed on a more regular basis. Some consistency across different practices would also be beneficial – and could ease the burden of each GP practice having to complete the same work.

# 8. Website accessibility

## General accessibility

We asked our team to comment on the general accessibility of websites – including whether it was easy to find information, and what the layout was like – and found mixed results.

Many websites had some positive comments:

“The information is reasonably well organised. Visually the website is based on a good template, the headings are clear and there’s good use of icons and pictures to avoid overwhelming the user with text”

However, it was common to find that the home page was clear and well-organised (possibly because it was based on a template) but other pages were less clear:

“Landing screen is well organised and simple. Screens behind this look to have been set up at a different time and are less well organised”

Another issue for some sites was outdated information or broken links, undermining otherwise easy-to-use sites:

“Generally easy to use but a lot of broken links”

The issue raised most often was **information not being where people would expect to find it**. Our team frequently had to use search bars to find information – meaning patients would have to be looking for something specific, rather than just browsing the site in order to find information that might help them.



“Big problem is that a lot of information is not well signposted and is tucked away”

“Quite important info is contained under links at the foot of the homepage where it isn’t immediately obvious”

“I’d find things then not be able to find them again”

## Specific accessibility features

We also asked our team to look for features that would make the websites accessible for a wider range of people – such as information translated into community languages, Easy Read, or British Sign Language, and options to change the display settings:

- 19 websites were reported to have no accessibility features.
- 10 websites were reported to have “only the “standard” fact-sheets in 21 languages for non-English speakers” – these are PDF fact sheets aimed at helping new arrivals to understand the NHS and how to register with a GP. However as raised earlier, these would be very difficult to find for people who did not speak English.
- 39 websites had an option to translate the page – most powered by Google Translate – and these were mostly easy to spot from the homepages. However, for 8 of these websites the translate option didn’t work when people clicked on it.

Some websites also had an accessibility toolbar or widget, which allowed users to change settings like text spacing and font. There were also a small number of GP practices which had additional features that our volunteers spotted. We have copied these comments below:

“There are click-on functions of ‘immersive reader’ and ‘BSL’ function’, however neither worked when I pressed them”

“A customise font feature (which includes ‘opendyslexic’)

“Has a sign language interpreter pop up on each page”

“Easy Read leaflets (but it would take quite a lot of effort to get there”)



### Good practice - Gleadless Medical Centre

Gleadless Medical Centre have a working translate function so patients can view the site in different languages, and an ‘immersive reader’ which reads website pages aloud. There is an accessibility toolbar too, which allows people to change a wide variety of settings on the site – including font, contrasting colours, text size, line and letter spacing and more. Their current accessibility features are among the most wide-ranging we saw.

## 9. Up to date information

We asked our team to explore whether information on the websites was up to date. They found this difficult as nearly all of the sites they reviewed did not put a date on any of their home page items, or only put a date on some of them.

Where these dates were present, people found this useful:

*“Date info on home page is useful. Other pages don’t have dates but this information is presumably more longstanding”*

Where information was only dated sometimes, this could lead to confusion:

*“There is some dating info but it’s sometimes unclear if some advice is still applicable, or no longer applies”*

Where dates were not used at all, it made it impossible to understand what information on the site would mean for patients:

*“There’s an item about building renovation ‘potentially’ affecting appointments at the site ‘over the next few weeks’, but it’s unclear if this is ongoing, yet to start, or completed”*

For some sites, there was information which was clearly outdated and incorrect – where changes had been made to policies or contact options, old information had not been taken off the website to make it clearer for patients:

*“Pretty clear from conflicting info that some pages are out of date”*

*“Telephone times for practice listed have been superseded by a notice about changes to these times, but still remain there to see and refer to”*

If patients aren’t sure whether online information is up to date, it means they are less able to use the practice website instead of phoning or visiting in person. Putting a date on new content and ensuring that out-of-date information is removed would improve people’s experiences of using GP websites, meaning they can find the information they need more easily.

## 10. Social media

We recognise that some practices have found social media to be a useful additional channel to reach out to their patients. Many have a Facebook page where updates are posted – some practices use these pages more frequently than others.

We didn't include social media within the remit of this project, but we have identified some examples where social media seems to be a helpful addition to a practice's online presence. Other GP practices may wish to explore this approach.



### Good practice – Birley Health Centre

Birley Health Centre use their Facebook page to share time-sensitive updates with their patients – for instance bank holiday closures or upcoming Patient Participation Group meetings. They also share opportunities for their patients to get involved in surveys and activities in the local area.

We found their Facebook page particularly notable because they regularly ask for feedback or input, rather than just sharing information. Many posts ask patients if a particular initiative or change would be helpful, or ask what they could do to improve. This is another way that patients can feed back to the practice in an informal manner.

Birley Health Centre could ensure that there's a link to their Facebook page from their website, so patients are aware of this additional resource that might be more accessible to them.

# 11. Additional comments

We left a free space at the end of this exercise, so our team could note anything significant that didn't fit into any of the categories, or leave their overall feelings about a website. Many of the comments were along similar themes:

## Information was not clearly organised or easy to find

The amount of information the websites included was often praised, but our team commented that it was often difficult to find things, and information was not in the place they would expect. This means that even when a practice has worked to provide certain information, patients may not get the benefit of this unless they know specifically what they are looking for and persist in finding it.

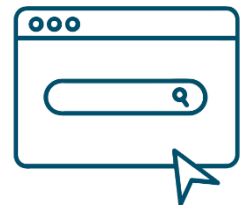


“There's a lot of info on the website which is good, but it's not clearly organised which is bad”

“Generally visually pleasing but things are fairly hard to find”

## Search functions were mentioned a lot

When sites didn't have a search function, this was deemed a noteworthy absence. Adding a search function could help many of the sites to make their information more accessible – though this still relies on patients knowing what they are looking for.



“Search works most of the time but have to be very specific with wording”

## There are gaps in the online patient 'journey'

The third main issue to arise from these comments was about online access to services. We had asked our team to consider the patient's whole journey – for instance not just whether there was information about registering as a patient, but everything they would need to do next. This exercise revealed that many practices have gaps in this online journey, where patients will not be able to do everything they need online, and this was often “frustrating”:



“Need online services properly integrating”

“Limited access options, reliant on people going into the practice”

“Major issue is that none of the forms can be completed online (or even offline but still on the PC – you'd need to print them out). Not making the most of online systems”

“Major gap with the registration system having to go in person and also present ID”

# Recommendations

## For individual GP practices

Please refer to the letter we have sent to you for an individual summary of your website, where we have identified areas of good practice and suggested improvements. Many of these relate to:

- Considering the online patient 'journey' – where can you remove barriers so people do not have to phone or visit the practice to register, access online booking systems etc?
- Ensuring that in this work, non-digital options are also available for those who need or prefer to use them
- Ensuring your policy about new patients needing ID/proof of address lines up with national policy – and making this clear to new patients
- Fixing broken links
- Making sure the information that you provide online is clear, and is where patients would expect to find it
- Replacing out of date information on a regular basis, and adding dates to home page/news updates so patients know what is relevant for them
- Offering more opportunities for patients to feed back – making complaints information clearer, and developing information about the PPG
- To improve consistency and useability, Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and individual practices should use the NHS England guidance, including accessing the support offered alongside it

## For the Integrated Care Board

Consider where you can offer support to GP practices in developing their websites, and where standardised information or a range of template information resources, may be more effective and efficient than GPs producing their own information. This could be especially useful for information about:

- **Carers** – a definition of what a carer is, why people should tell their GP they are a carer, and links to local and national support services
- **Self-help/health & wellbeing support** – linking to NHS resources about common illnesses and ailments, as well as local and national voluntary, community, or peer support groups
- **Complaints information** – standardised guidance about making a complaint and links to external support
- Supporting GP practice staff to understand policies about **ID/proof of address requirements**



**healthwatch**  
Sheffield

Healthwatch Sheffield  
The Circle, 33 Rockingham Lane  
Sheffield, S1 4FW

[www.healthwatchsheffield.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchsheffield.co.uk)

t: 0114 253 6688

e: [info@healthwatchsheffield.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchsheffield.co.uk)

 [@HWSheffield](https://twitter.com/HWSheffield)

 [Facebook.com/HealthwatchSheffield](https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchSheffield)