

Enter and View report
Cirencester Health Group
The Avenue/St Peter's Road

31 October 2023

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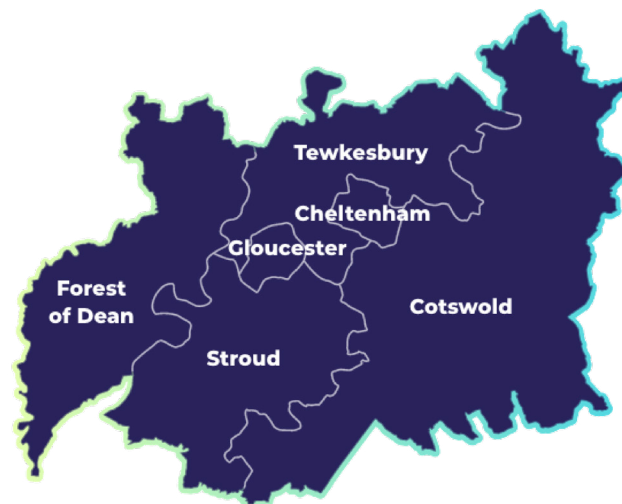
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About Healthwatch Gloucestershire

Healthwatch Gloucestershire is the county's health and social care champion. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care.

We're here to listen to your experiences of using local health and care services and to hear about the issues that really matter to you. We are entirely independent and impartial, and anything you share with us is confidential. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice to help you to get the care and support you need.

Healthwatch Gloucestershire is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We cover the geographical area of Gloucestershire County Council, which includes the districts and boroughs of Cheltenham, Cotswold, Forest of Dean, Gloucester, Stroud, and Tewkesbury.



What is Enter and View?

One of the ways we can meet our statutory responsibilities is by using our legal powers to Enter and View health and social care services to see them in action.

During these visits we collect evidence of what works well and what could be improved to make people's experiences better. We do this by observing the quality of service, and by talking to people using the service, including patients, residents, carers and relatives.

Enter and View visits are carried out by our authorised representatives who have received training and been DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checked. These visits are not part of a formal inspection process or audit.

This report is an example of how we share people's views, and how we evaluate the evidence we gather and make recommendations to inform positive change, for individual services as well as across the health and care system. We share our reports with those providing the service, regulators, the local authority, NHS commissioners, the public, Healthwatch England and any other relevant partners based on what we find during the visit.

Details of the visit

Service visited: Cirencester Health Group

Visit date: 31 October 2023

About the service

Cirencester Health Group is located in Cirencester. The practice is on two sites; The Avenue and St Peter's Road. Both sites are over two floors; The Avenue has clinic rooms on the ground and first floor and St Peter's Road only has clinic rooms on the ground floor. There is some patient parking available at The Avenue but none available at St Peter's Road.

The practice has circa 13,000 registered patients and is part of the South Cotswolds Primary Care Network.

Purpose of the visit

This visit was part of our ongoing partnership working with NHS Gloucestershire and the Care Quality Commission to support improving the patient experiences in GP practices across the county. It is also supporting a wider project being undertaken by Healthwatch Gloucestershire in relation to accessing GP services.

How the visit was conducted

Cirencester Health Group was told about the visit in advance. During the visit information was collected from observations of the communal areas used by patients, including the accessibility of the premises, and by talking to patients. Ahead of the visit there was also a conversation with the Practice Managers to help inform the visit.

Healthwatch Gloucestershire Authorised Representatives

- Helen Esfandiarinia (Staff member and Lead Authorised Representative)
- Martin Leach (Volunteer)
- Amanda Naylor (Volunteer)
- David Pugh (Volunteer)
- Lucy Simms (Volunteer)

Disclaimer

This report relates to this specific visit to the practice, at a particular point in time, and is not representative of all patients registered with the practice. We recognise the following limitations of our visit:

- We only spoke to patients who attended the practice during our visit, or those who had phoned Healthwatch Gloucestershire ahead of the visit.
- Observations are based only on those parts of the practice that are communal, for example, reception, waiting rooms, patient toilets, car park etc.
- We did not ask patients to share any information about the medical/health reason for their visit.

This report is written by the Lead Enter and View Authorised Representative who carried out the visit on behalf of Healthwatch Gloucestershire.

Visit overview

Cirencester Health Group was advised that the visit would take place and the date for this. They were therefore expecting us.

Ahead of the visit the Lead Authorised Representative spoke, and met with the two Practice Managers. The information gained from this discussion helped to inform the visit.

The visit was carried out over three sessions on the same day; two sessions at The Avenue and one session at St Peter's Road. Five Authorised Representatives were involved. Across the three sessions, and via phone calls to Healthwatch Gloucestershire, we spoke to 46 patients; they ranged from being registered recently to being registered for many years.

Ahead of the visit the practice had shared details of the visit on their website and in their newsletter. Posters detailing the visit, and Healthwatch Gloucestershire information leaflets, were also evident across both sites of the Practice.

During the visit information was collected from observations of the communal areas of the Practice, including the reception area, and via conversations with patients.

At the end of each session there was a team discussion to review and collate findings and recommendations were agreed. Initial feedback was provided to the Practice Managers in the week following the visit.

Key findings

The following are the key findings from the visits and should be considered alongside the further information provided later in the report. Unless otherwise mentioned these relate to both sites of the Practice.

- The visiting team was warmly welcomed into the practice.
- The visiting team received mostly positive feedback from the patients.
- There were two key areas of concerns raised by patients:
 - The length of time it can take for the phone to be answered and that sometimes patients are cut off from the call while waiting in the queue.
 - While most patients reported being able to speak to, or get an appointment, with a GP if the issue is urgent, the majority of patients advised that they struggled to get appointments with GPs for more routine issues.
- Accessibility:
 - There are no designated disabled parking bays or drop off points at either site.
 - The patient toilet facilities are accessible.
 - There are clinic rooms on the first floor of The Avenue and while there is no lift in the building, there is a stair lift that patients can use.
- On the whole patients were complimentary about the staff at the practice. Key points are:
 - The majority of patients with ongoing issues described having follow up appointments arranged easily (either during previous appointment or via a phone call from the practice) and that these appointments are often with the same GP/nurse.
 - Some concerns were raised about the manner of some reception staff and being questioned when phoning for an appointment.
 - Some patients felt that their notes/medical history had not been accessed prior to their appointment.
- The majority of patients described being kept up-to-date with practice news, for example, appointment details, the upcoming introduction of a new telephone system. There were couple of issues raised:
 - Texts reminding patients of appointments do not always include the location; as the practice operates over two sites this can cause confusion for patients.
 - Some patients advised that they did not receive text updates despite the practice having their mobile number.

- Some patients reported using the practice website for a number of reasons. Not all patients were aware of that they could do via the website.
- There was a significant amount of information available to patients in the waiting rooms/ reception areas. Most of this appeared to be up-to-date but some of this could have been in a more appropriate place and leaflets arranged in a more logical way (St Peter's Road). Examples of information location are in relation to patients being able to ask for some privacy when speaking to reception staff or requesting a chaperone could be in the reception area rather than in the waiting room (St Peter's Road).
- During the visit some appointments were running late; patients in the waiting room at The Avenue were advised by reception of delays with specific GPs.
- There was a board with staff names and photos in both sites but no information about who was working on the day of the visit.
- There were TV screens in both waiting rooms but neither of these were turned on for the duration of the visit.
- Patients who had provided feedback reported not knowing what had happened as a result of this.
- There were no clocks in either waiting room.

Recommendations

We would like the practice to consider the following recommendations to help improve the patient experience of accessing the practice and services provided. These are based on our findings from the visit.

1. Ensure that patients are kept up-to-date with the planned changes to the phone system and what this will mean for them. When this is introduced carry out regular reviews to understand how this is improving the patient experience.
2. Review availability of appointments for patients. To support this consider how you can inform patients of possible other options, for example, seeing other professionals, or using other means, such as eConsult.
3. Recognising the restrictions of the space available at each site, consider how you can introduce designated disabled parking bays and drop off points.
4. When the new telephone system is introduced ensure that all text messages that contain appointment information also include the location for that appointment.
5. Review the information that is available in the waiting rooms/reception areas to ensure that it is in the right place for the patient, for example chaperoning information and letting patients know how they can have a private conversation.
6. Consider how you can consistently keep patients up-to-date re appointments running times. This is particularly important for those patients who have had to pay for parking, are parked in time limited spaces or are limited for time, for example, due to work commitments.
7. Recognising that patient feedback is usually given anonymously, consider how you can keep patients informed in relation to any changes/improvements made as a result of feedback received, or, if feedback has been received but there are reasons why changes cannot be made as a result of this.
8. Consider using the TV screens more regularly and including information about who is working that day.
9. Consider introducing a clock into each waiting room.

Observations and findings

These are based on what was observed on the day of the visit, the conversations that took place with the practice ahead of the visit and conversations with patients either during the visit or via phone conversations. These findings relate to both The Avenue and St Peter's Road unless otherwise stated.

Premises and accessibility

Both sites are located on residential streets and are well signposted from the outside.

Parking

There is limited patient parking available at The Avenue and none at St Peter's Road. There are no designated disabled bays or drop off points at either site. The space at both sites is limited to extend these facilities.

We heard from a number of patients about the difficulty of parking for appointments and that this can cause an added frustration. We heard that patients who access the services at St Peter's Road often have to pay for parking, or use designated resident parking; they described feeling anxious about this due to the possibility of getting a parking ticket/fine.

Accessibility

The Avenue

To access this building there are some external steps and a ramp. The reception area and waiting room are on the ground floor of the building. There are clinic rooms on the ground and first floor. There is no lift in the building however there is a stair lift for patients to use. We heard from the practice that if they are unable to use this a room will be found on the ground floor.

We did hear from one patient that they are unable to use the stair lift and that when they have attended an appointment at the practice they are not asked about their ability to get to the first floor and finding a room downstairs can be challenging.

St Peter's Road

Clinic rooms are only on the ground floor and therefore accessible to all patients. None of the patients we spoke to raised any concerns in relation to being able to access any of the facilities within the building.

The patient toilets at both of the sites are accessible to all.

Reception areas

Both sites have a reception area that is separate to the waiting rooms. There is a self-check in system for patients to use. We heard that to maintain a calm environment at the reception desks and to support patients attending the practice in person, phone calls to the practice go through to the admin office at The Avenue.

As the reception areas are separate from the waiting room, the visiting team did not spend a lot of time observing the activities in reception. However, the following points are noted from the brief observations undertaken:

- Interactions between staff and patients were calm and friendly; staff were observed to be sat at, or within sight of, the reception desks throughout our visit.
- Patients were using the self-check in system but some chose to check in via the reception desk.
- There was plenty of information available in the reception area of The Avenue, including posters, leaflets and a suggestions box. The same information was available at St Peter's Road but located in the waiting room due to the space available; it was noted that some of this information may be better placed in the reception area, for example, advising patients of how they can ask for privacy for conversations, ask for chaperoning etc.

Waiting rooms

Both waiting rooms offer seating to patients. It was noted that, with the exception of one chair in St Peter's Road, there are no different types of seating (other than some chairs having arms). This was not raised as an issue by any of the patients spoken to however may present physical challenges to some patients.

There are TV screens in both waiting rooms however they were not in use during our visit. Some patients advised that they are turned on sometimes and that when they are they display relevant information about the practice and wider NHS services. One patient was pleased the screen was off as they find the noise too intrusive.

There was plenty of information available in both waiting rooms in the form of leaflets and posters; more in St Peter's Road as there is less space available in the reception area. Examples of this included information about wider NHS services, practice news and processes (for example, chaperoning, how to request privacy for conversations, raising a complaint), different support groups, community information etc.

There were some toys in the waiting room at The Avenue and we observed children playing with these during the visit.

General feedback from patients included:

- Issues with parking as there is none, or limited, on site and most of the surrounding roads are permit only parking.
- A patient who is unable to access the first floor at The Avenue advised that a room downstairs was provided for their appointment.
- Patients generally felt the premises were clean but some felt they were 'tired' and that the waiting rooms could be improved. "Not as smart as used to be", with one patient describing the waiting room at The Avenue as 'soulless'.
- One patient felt that the front door at The Avenue is very heavy and can be difficult to open.

Appointments

The practice advised us that there are a number of options available to patients in relation to the types of appointments available and how they can make these. They advised that patients do have a choice in relation to the type of appointment and who they want to see. We had mixed feedback from patients in relation to the type of appointment they could access and some expressed that phone appointments will be offered and encouraged initially.

The practice will also accommodate home visits for patients when there is a clinical need. These visits are managed by a range of professionals depending on the reason.

Phone calls

The practice advised us that they are in the process of introducing a new phone system. It is hoped that this will reduce the early morning rush and provide patients with the option of arranging a call back rather than waiting in a queue. As part of this, patients who want to see a GP will be signposted to complete a form, either online or with the support of reception, which will be triaged by a GP. The new system will also link to the patients' clinical notes.

While some patients reported that they did not have any issues, phoning the practice was one of the areas that we heard the most dissatisfaction from patients. The key points are:

- Some patients opt to come into the practice to make appointments rather than phoning (to avoid challenges with getting through on the phone).
- Waiting in the phone queue can take a long time, up to an hour in some circumstances, and there were occasions reported where calls have been cut off during this process.
- The phone system is a challenge particularly if patients are restricted with time, for example, having a school run, work commitments.
- It can be difficult to get through to get results.
- There are less challenges getting through on the phone if early morning is avoided.

Type and availability of appointments

Some of the patients we spoke to said that they were able to choose the type of appointment, for example, face-to-face or over the phone, but some felt that they were encouraged to have phone appointments and had to push to get a face-to-face appointment.

The majority felt they were able to get appointments for urgent matters and that they could choose which GP they wanted to see. Patients told us that if they wanted to see a specific GP the practice would let them know if this was likely to cause a delay.

We heard from a lot of patients that there were difficulties in getting appointments with GPs for more routine matters, for example, blood tests, asthma reviews. This was the second area that caused the most dissatisfaction with patients with some patients describing that they have had to wait for up to a month for an appointment. A couple of patients told us that as a result of not being able to get an appointment they have contacted other services, for example, 111 or the local Minor Injury Unit.

General

While there were some exceptions, most patients felt that:

- The appointments are long enough and that they would feel able to ask for a longer appointment if necessary.
- For ongoing issues follow up appointments are arranged easily (either during the previous appointment or via a phone call from the practice) and that they are able to see the same GP.
- They felt listened to, understood what was discussed during the appointment and what the next steps would be.

Some patients raised issues in relation to:

- Seeing the same GP (unless it is an ongoing issue).
- Getting their appointment of choice, for example, face-to-face rather than a phone call.
- The professional not being aware of their medical history when they attend the appointment.
- Availability of follow up appointments and support following hospital treatment, for example, removal of stitches.
- Delays in referral to other NHS services, resulting in health issues becoming more complex to manage.

On the day of the visit some appointments were running late, particularly for those waiting to see a GP at The Avenue. The practice advised that there is an expectation that patients will be kept updated if appointments are not running to time, either when checking in or while they are waiting.

It was observed on a few occasions that staff in The Avenue let patients in the waiting room know about appointments running late. A number of patients reported that they were not usually informed of this. One patient expressed that they thought this was only happening because we were undertaking a visit on that day and another patient expressed frustration at their appointment running late as they needed to get back to work for a commitment.

Staff

Interactions observed during the visit

All of the limited interactions observed during the visit between staff and patients were managed in a calm and professional way.

Some specific observations were:

- Some patients using the self-check in option or choosing to check in via the reception desk. Patients told us that they are not made to feel that they should be using the self-check in option.
- A patient being helped with messages to their pharmacy.

- A patient being given a drink of water upon request.
- Staff were smiley and friendly when calling patients in for their appointments.

Feedback from patients

On the whole patients were complimentary about the staff at the practice. Some themes of their comments are:

- No problems with the staff.
- Staff were described as kind and friendly.
- Some patients expressed frustration with questions being asked by reception staff when phoning up for appointments, for example, asking for too much personal information.
- Generally satisfied but: "it can sometimes show when staff are feeling overworked."

General

Keeping patients up-to-date

Most of the patients we spoke to felt that they are kept up-to-date by the practice. The practice keeps patients up-to-date via text messages (including sending appointment reminders), the practice website and they also produce a paper version of their newsletter (copies are available in the reception areas).

A couple of patients raised the following points:

- The appointment reminders via text do not always include the location of the appointment. This can cause frustrations due to the practice being over two sites. The practice advised us that they are aware of this issue and that it is an issue with the current system; they are hopeful that this will be resolved with the introduction of the new phone system.
- They do not receive updates via text despite the practice having, and using, their mobile number.

Seeking feedback from patients

The practice advised us that they use the Family and Friends Test to seek feedback and that they receive approximately 150 responses a month. They don't routinely let patients know if there have been any changes made as a direct result of this feedback but will if significant. They advised that their Patient Participation Group will provide feedback and they will undertake periodic patient satisfaction surveys.

Patients told us:

- They use the comments box.
- They have provided feedback but not heard anything as a result.

Raising concerns or complaints

The practice advised us that all complaints are overseen by the Practice Manager. If a complaint is received in writing it will be responded to in the same way and will include what the patient can do if they are not satisfied with the outcome. Leaflets relating to how to raise a complaint were available either in the reception area or waiting rooms of both sites.

Patients told us:

- If they had a concern they would first speak to reception and if not resolved, the Practice Manager.
- They would look on the website to see how they should do this.
- They would phone the practice or speak to a GP.
- They would feel able to raise a concern or complaint.

Accessing the practice website

Not all patients access the website or were fully aware of what they could do via the website.

Patients told us that:

- Some elements are not up-to-date.
- Use website to order medications, log an eConsult, sick notes, appointments (some patients reported that there were no appointments available), 'Ask a doctor' option.
- Some patients reported not using the website as they 'don't do tech' or because they feel they don't need to access it.

What people told us

Below are some of the quotes from patients under a couple of broader headings.

Describe your experience of this practice?

The positive feedback included:

- "Fine; with the practice all of my life. Aware some people have difficulties making appointments."
- One patient told us that they had been with the practice since 1953 and although they are now living 11 miles away, that prefer to stay with this practice.
- "Very good." Attends The Avenue with no problems making telephone appointments.
- "Confident to call the practice and straightforward to get today's appointment."
- "15 years in London so this is a dream compared."
- "When I've been able to get an appointment I've been pleased."
- "Sometimes have to wait for an appointment, but in an emergency you'd get one straightaway."

The frustrations included:

- "Good but getting an appointment takes longer than in the past."
- "Great, really good although trying to get appointments can be difficult." They also added that the practice has been exceptional in caring for/treating their child.
- "Generally good; fine once in, getting in is a pain."
- "Not great trying to get appointments and for those to be face-to-face."

If there was one thing you would like to change [at the practice]?

A sample of responses received to this question are:

- "Easier access to make appointments plus the opportunity to have them face-to-face."
- "Improved parking."
- "[Not] having to attend both practices in order to see different people."
- "Parking is a nightmare." They went on to say, that was at risk of getting a parking fine on the day.
- "Same gripe as everyone... waiting times."
- "Would like it to be easier to get an appointment."
- "The building and accessibility [parking and access to disabled bays]."
- "To be able to choose the doctor."
- "[There are] no disabled spaces."
- "Not all online, I prefer using the phone."

A number of patients said that there wasn't anything they would change:

- "Nothing."
- "Would not change a thing."
- "No change, highly efficient, actively listen.... seen improvement over the last year."

Acknowledgements

The Healthwatch Gloucestershire Enter and View team would like to thank Cirencester Health Group for working with us and enabling us to be able to speak to patients to seek their feedback.

Provider response

“Cirencester Health Group would like to thank Healthwatch Gloucestershire for their visit and our patients that took the time to respond.

“The visit was conducted with consideration and respect, we appreciate the feedback we received so we may reflect on how to improve our service to patients.”

Recommendation	Cirencester Health Group response
<p>Ensure that patients are kept up-to-date with the planned changes to the phone system and what this will mean for them. When this is introduced carry out regular reviews to understand how this is improving the patient experience.</p>	<p>The practice has plans to update the current phone system during 2024 in line with NHSE guidelines. This will provide additional functions for patients including call queue management. All system changes are added to our practice website as news information items, we also send batch text messages and display posters to inform patients of changes that may affect their contact with the practice.</p>
<p>Review availability of appointments for patients. To support this consider how you can inform patients of possible other options, for example, seeing other professionals, or using other means, such as eConsult.</p>	<p>On 27 November 2023, the practice launched a new appointment system. The practice was already offering eConsult and now all patient requests are triaged by a doctor and signposted to the appropriate health care service that patients need, this ensures more appointments are available for patients who need to be seen.</p>
<p>Recognising the restrictions of the space available at each site, consider how you can introduce designated disabled parking bays and drop off points.</p>	<p>We are aware that parking is restricted at our practice sites due to the nature of our buildings.</p>
<p>When the new telephone system is introduced ensure that all text messages that contain appointment information also include the location for that appointment.</p>	<p>We acknowledge the difficulty this was causing our patients and on launching our new appointment system on 27 November 2023, our clinical system has been updated to offer this facility.</p>
<p>Review the information that is available in the waiting rooms/ reception areas to ensure that it is in the right place for the patient. For example chaperoning information and letting patients know how they can have a private conversation.</p>	<p>The practice has chaperoning and private discussion posters available in the waiting rooms and all consulting rooms, this information will now also be provided by the reception areas.</p>

<p>Consider how you can consistently keep patients up-to-date re appointments running times. This is particularly important for those patients who have had to pay for parking, parked in time limited spaces or are limited for time, for example, due to work commitments.</p>	<p>All our reception staff are trained to ensure they can use the appointment diary.</p> <p>The appointment diary system will highlight when appointments are running late and receptionists are expected to inform patients in the waiting rooms.</p> <p>The waiting rooms are situated next to the reception areas which allows this dialogue to flow with ease.</p>
<p>Recognising that patient feedback is usually given anonymously, consider how you can keep patients informed in relation to any changes/improvements made as a result of feedback received, or, if feedback has been received but there are reasons why changes cannot be made as a result of this.</p>	<p>Patient feedback is always discussed within practice meetings.</p> <p>Any patterns for improvement and change are identified.</p> <p>When this results in a system change patients are informed by newsletter, posters, texts and information on the practice website.</p>
<p>Consider using the TV screens more regularly and including information about who is working that day.</p>	<p>There are TV screens in both waiting rooms, however they do not provide information about who is working each day.</p> <p>We have a photo board of all staff in the waiting rooms so patients can see who they may meet while at the practice.</p>
<p>Consider introducing a clock into each waiting room.</p>	<p>We did not have a clock in the waiting rooms as the time is displayed periodically on the TV screen, we do however acknowledge that as this screen is not always turned on a clock would be a useful additional and will rectify this.</p>

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