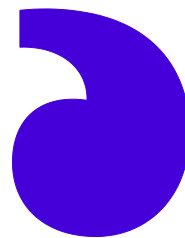




Making sure people with a learning disability are able to make a complaint about GP services



January 2015

*Updated with responses to
recommendations - May 2015*



Making sure people with a learning disability are able to make a complaint about GP services

Healthwatch Worcestershire has a statutory role to make recommendations to publicly funded health and social care services, based on feedback we receive from the public. We are also able to formally request a response from services about our reports and recommendations.

To understand improvement needed, it is vital that GPs listen to feedback and complaints of those who use the service. It can be difficult to raise an issue or make a complaint if you do not know how to do it or do not feel that you will be listened to. This can be even more difficult for people with a learning disability.

We met with 39 adults with a learning disability, all members of SpeakEasy N.O.W. to talk about their understanding of how to make a complaint and if they felt able to do so.

- Only 7 people out of 39 said they thought they knew how to make a complaint about their GP practice.
- Although they told us about many things they had been unhappy about with their GP practices, no one had ever made a complaint.
- Many said that they were worried no one would listen and that nothing would happen as a result.

People also said they worried they would not be taken seriously because of their learning disability, that they didn't want people to be angry with them, they didn't want to offend anyone, they might be fobbed off and that people might think they were just making a nuisance.

People said that they would feel *worried, scared, upset, afraid* and *not confident* about making a complaint.

Some felt that people with a learning disability may not know that they are able to make a complaint. They may feel that this could just be done by a carer or supporter, if this is who the GP staff talk to rather than directly to them.

GP surgeries need to make sure that everyone, including people with a learning disability are given clear information about how to make a complaint. They also need to consider how to make sure people feel able to raise their concerns and reassure them that they will be listened to.

The group told us that there needs to be information in Easy Read about how to complain. The information needs to clearly explain the stages of making a complaint in easy words with pictures.

They said that not everyone will be able to write down their complaint and that there need to be different options, such as arranging a meeting or speaking on the phone. It is also important that information responding to a complaint is given in a way that people can understand and there needs to be support available to make a complaint if people need it.

In 2014 NHS England ran a consultation about their standard: Making Health and Social Care Information Accessible, which is due to come into effect later in 2015. The standard states that health services must provide information in a format that people can understand, such as Easy Read. This will mean that GP surgeries will have a responsibility to provide Easy Read information about their complaints process.

Working with the CCGs, SpeakEasy N.O.W. have developed a template for an Easy Read complaints leaflet for GP surgeries. It enables practices to enter their own details and photos as appropriate. With support from the Learning Disability Primary Care Liaison Nurse this has now been sent to all GPs in Worcestershire. GPs should recognise the importance of making this information available.

The NHS England standard about making information accessible also states that services have a responsibility to provide additional support, if people need it due to a disability, to help them understand information. This could include having support with understanding how to complain and what the outcome of the complaint has been. GPs ought to ensure that patients receive access to and information about advocacy services, who can provide independent support to make a complaint about health services.

The main focus of the feedback the group gave us about their own GPs was about how well they thought their GPs and other practice staff explained things in a way they could understand and spoke directly to them rather than to a carer or supporter. This highlights the importance of effective communication and appropriate understanding of learning disabilities.

Recommendations

1. GP practices in Worcestershire should have an understanding of their responsibilities relating to the NHS England standard: Making Health and Social Care Information Accessible.	NHS England GP Practices
2. GP practices should be using the leaflet template to create their own Easy Read 'How to Complain' leaflet.	GP Practices
3. GP practices should raise awareness of complaints process with their patients with a learning disability, such as giving out Easy Read leaflets at appointments or Annual Health Checks.	GP Practices
4. GP practices should raise awareness of advocacy support available to support people to make a complaint	GP Practices
5. GP practices to send their response to this report and the recommendations to Healthwatch Worcestershire.	GP Practices
6. Healthwatch Worcestershire will create an Easy Read versions of our guides: How to Complain about Health Services in Worcestershire and How to Complain about Social Care Services in Worcestershire.	Healthwatch Worcestershire

Responses to Recommendations

Updated - May 2015

Responses from GP Practices

This report was sent to all GP Practices in Worcestershire with a request to respond to the recommendations made. We received a response from 46 practices. 21 practices did not respond.

All the practices that responded agreed to making available easy to understand information for people with a learning disability about how to complain.

One practice told us - 'We feel that the report has highlighted certain areas where we were adequate, but not necessarily meeting all criteria and has therefore been a useful exercise. Having raised awareness the key is now to maintain it, which will be done in conjunction with the Primary Care Liaison Nurse, the CCG and the practice management team.'

GP practices should be using the leaflet template to create their own Easy Read 'How to Complain' leaflet -

- 5 practices already had Easy Read complaints leaflets
- Many were not previously aware of the leaflet template
- 16 had created the leaflets since receiving our report
- The other 25 practices said that they would be creating an Easy Read leaflet following our recommendations.

GP practices should raise awareness of complaints process with their patients with a learning disability, such as giving out Easy Read leaflets at appointments or Annual Health Checks -

- Most practices said that they would now distribute these leaflets at Annual Health Checks
- 2 practices said they had put the leaflets on their website
- 2 practices are sending the leaflets out to all of their patients with a learning disability.
- 1 practice said they would give out the leaflets at every routine appointment
- 1 practice said they would carry out audits of Annual Health Checks to ensure the leaflets are being given out.

GP practices should raise awareness of advocacy support available to support people to make a complaint -

Most practices told us that this information is available in their reception area and is also included on the Easy Read leaflet.

Response from NHS England

‘NHS England recognises the importance of reasonable adjustments to communication as well as provision of accurate information to patients in a format that is easy to understand and supports their choices. We recognise that your report identified some gaps around the communication of complaints procedures and we value the work you have undertaken to support practices in addressing this. We are keen for the work to be shared across other contractor groups, especially dentists.

As part of quality monitoring visits, the team already queries the complaints process in practices - we will ensure that during future visits, we discuss with practices their process for ensuring that information is provided in the relevant format.

We already commission an interpretation and translation service which supports general practices across the area.

We have written to all GP surgeries and dentists to update them on progress of the work on Standards so they are aware of upcoming responsibilities. We will update them again once the standards have been signed off. We are also discussing the matter with the Local Medical Committees.’

Healthwatch Worcestershire - Additional feedback and recommendations

- We received a number of responses that indicated that many practices were not aware of the Easy Read leaflet template or the work being done as part of the My Worcestershire Health Plan - Big Aim 1: My GP Practice.

Some responses also asked to be sent the template for the leaflet. It may therefore be useful to look at how this template is made available to GP Practices and information about the My Worcestershire Health Plan shared.

- There are still a number of practices who have not responded to the report and recommendations and have therefore not made a commitment to providing their patients with a learning disability with this information.