

Verulam Medical Group

Quality Report

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Date of inspection visit: 05 October 2016

Date of publication: 24/11/2016

This report describes our judgement of the quality of care at this service. It is based on a combination of what we found when we inspected, information from our ongoing monitoring of data about services and information given to us from the provider, patients, the public and other organisations.

Ratings

Overall rating for this service

Good 

Are services safe?

Good 

Are services effective?

Good 

Are services caring?

Good 

Are services responsive to people's needs?

Good 

Are services well-led?

Good 

Summary of findings

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Overall summary

Letter from the Chief Inspector of General Practice

We carried out an announced comprehensive inspection at Verulam Medical Group on 5 October 2016. Overall the practice is rated as good.

Our key findings across all the areas we inspected were as follows:

- There was an open and transparent approach to safety and an effective system in place for reporting and recording significant events.
- Risks to patients were assessed and well managed.
- Staff assessed patients' needs and delivered care in line with current evidence based guidance. Staff had been trained to provide them with the skills, knowledge and experience to deliver effective care and treatment.
- Patients said they were treated with compassion, dignity and respect and they were involved in their care and decisions about their treatment.
- Data from the national GP patient survey showed the practice was performing broadly in line with the local

and national averages. However the scores in some areas related to patient experience during consultation with a GP were lower than local and national averages.

- Information about services and how to complain was available and easy to understand. Improvements were made to the quality of care as a result of complaints and concerns.
- The practice had good facilities and was well equipped to treat patients and meet their needs.
- There was a leadership structure and staff felt supported by management. The practice proactively sought feedback from staff and patients, which it acted on.
- The provider was aware of and complied with the requirements of the duty of candour.

The areas where the provider should make improvement are:

- Continue to monitor and ensure improvement to national patient survey results.
- Continue to seek and support patients who are also carers.

Summary of findings

Professor Steve Field (CBE FRCP FFPH FRCGP)

Chief Inspector of General Practice

Summary of findings

The five questions we ask and what we found

We always ask the following five questions of services.

Are services safe?

The practice is rated as good for providing safe services.

- There was an effective system in place for reporting and recording significant events.
- Lessons were shared to make sure action was taken to improve safety in the practice.
- When things went wrong patients received support, information, and an apology. They were told about any actions to improve processes to prevent the same thing happening again.
- The practice had clearly defined and embedded systems, processes and practices in place to keep patients safe and safeguarded from abuse.
- Risks to patients were assessed and well managed.

Good



Are services effective?

The practice is rated as good for providing effective services.

- Data from the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) showed patient outcomes were comparable to the national average.
- Staff assessed needs and delivered care in line with current evidence based guidance.
- Clinical audits demonstrated quality improvement.
- Staff had the skills, knowledge and experience to deliver effective care and treatment.
- There was evidence of appraisals and personal development plans for all staff.
- Staff worked with other health care professionals to understand and meet the range and complexity of patients' needs.

Good



Are services caring?

The practice is rated as good for providing caring services.

- Data from the national GP patient survey showed the practice was performing broadly in line with the local and national averages. However the scores in some areas related to patient experience during consultation with a GP were lower than local and national averages.
- Patients said they were treated with compassion, dignity and respect and they were involved in decisions about their care and treatment.
- Information for patients about the services available was easy to understand and accessible.

Good



Summary of findings

- We saw staff treated patients with kindness and respect, and maintained patient and information confidentiality.

Are services responsive to people's needs?

The practice is rated as good for providing responsive services.

- Practice staff reviewed the needs of its local population and engaged with the NHS England Area Team and NHS Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to secure improvements to services where these were identified. For example the practice hosted the Community Gynaecology and Ultrasound Service which benefitted patients from GP practices from across the CCG.
- Patients said they found it easy to make an appointment with a GP and there was continuity of care, with urgent appointments available the same day.
- The practice had good facilities and was well equipped to treat patients and meet their needs.
- Information about how to complain was available and easy to understand and evidence showed the practice responded quickly to issues raised. Learning from complaints was shared with staff and other stakeholders.

Good



Are services well-led?

The practice is rated as good for being well-led.

- The practice had a vision and strategy to deliver high quality care and promote good outcomes for patients. Staff were clear about the vision and their responsibilities in relation to it.
- There was a leadership structure and staff felt supported by management. The practice had a number of policies and procedures to govern activity and held regular governance meetings.
- There was a governance framework which supported the delivery of the strategy and good quality care. This included arrangements to monitor and improve quality and identify risk.
- The provider was aware of and complied with the requirements of the duty of candour. The partners encouraged a culture of openness and honesty. The practice had systems in place for notifiable safety incidents and ensured this information was shared with staff to ensure appropriate action was taken.
- The practice proactively sought feedback from staff and patients, which it acted on. The patient participation group was active.
- There was a strong focus on continuous learning and improvement at all levels.

Good



Summary of findings

The six population groups and what we found

We always inspect the quality of care for these six population groups.

Older people

The practice is rated as good for the care of older people.

Good



- The practice offered proactive, personalised care to meet the needs of the older people in its population.
- Patients over 75 had a named accountable GP.
- All these patients were offered an over 75 health check.
- The practice was responsive to the needs of older people, and offered home visits and urgent appointments for those with enhanced needs.
- The practice worked closely with Community Nursing Team and coordinated care at home.
- The practice had identified older patients at high risk of admissions to hospital (patients with multiple complex needs, and involving multiple agencies) and worked community services in planning support.
- The practice provided an at home vaccination service for the housebound.
- Housebound patients had access to a domiciliary phlebotomy service provided by the local community trust.
- The practice had enrolled in the Electronic Prescribing Service (EPS). This service enabled GPs to send prescriptions electronically to a pharmacy of the patient's choice.
- The practice worked with local pharmacies and arranged the delivery of medicines to the housebound.
- The Practice promoted external domiciliary services for housebound patients. For example the visiting optician service.

People with long term conditions

The practice is rated as good for the care of people with long-term conditions.

Good



- Nursing staff supported by the GP had lead roles in chronic disease management and patients at risk of hospital admission were identified as a priority.
- The practice assessed needs and delivered care in line with relevant and current evidence based guidance and standards. For example we saw that the practice used the NICE pathway for the management of hypertension which was referenced in the patient's records.
- Performance for diabetes related indicators was comparable to the CCG and national average. For example, the percentage of

Summary of findings

patients with diabetes, on the register, in whom the last blood glucose reading showed good control in the in the preceding 12 months (01/04/2014 to 31/03/2015), was 72%, compared to the CCG and national average of 78%.

- Longer appointments and home visits were available when needed.
- All these patients had a named GP and a structured annual review to check their health and medicines needs were being met.
- For those patients with the most complex needs, the named GP worked with relevant health and care professionals to deliver a multidisciplinary package of care.
- The Practice offered on-site phlebotomy services.
- The Practice offered influenza, pneumococcal, and shingles vaccinations to eligible patients through a call and recall system.
- Where possible, locally commissioned 'closer to home' community clinics were used to refer patients with long term conditions for specialist care. For example the community diabetic service and the community respiratory service which enabled the patient to receive care nearer to their home.

Families, children and young people

The practice is rated as good for the care of families, children and young people.

- There were systems in place to identify and follow up children living in disadvantaged circumstances and who were at risk, for example, children and young people who had a high number of A&E attendances. Immunisation rates were relatively high for all standard childhood immunisations.
- Patients told us that children and young people were treated in an age-appropriate way and were recognised as individuals, and we saw evidence to confirm this.
- The practice's uptake for the cervical screening programme was 78%, which was comparable to the CCG average of 83% and the national average of 82%. Appointments were available outside of school hours and the premises were suitable for children and babies.
- We saw positive examples of joint working with midwives and health visitors.
- The practice provided a variety of health promotion information leaflets and resources for this population group for example the discreet provision of chlamydia testing kits and sign posting to Sexual Health Hertfordshire.

Good



Summary of findings

- Young patients were signposted to 'YouthTalk', which offered a safe place where young people could attend for counselling and support.

Working age people (including those recently retired and students)

The practice is rated as good for the care of working-age people (including those recently retired and students).

- The needs of the working age population, those recently retired and students had been identified and the practice had adjusted the services it offered to ensure these were accessible, flexible and offered continuity of care.
- The practice was proactive in offering online services as well as a full range of health promotion and screening that reflects the needs for this age group.
- The practice offered late evening appointments on Thursday till 8.30pm for working patients and those who could not attend during normal opening hours.
- The practice provided telephone consultations at the patient's request where appropriate.
- The practice offered pre bookable appointments up to six weeks in advance which could be booked in person by telephone or online.
- The practice offered NHS Health checks smoking cessation advice and travel immunisations.
- The practice had enrolled in the Electronic Prescribing Service (EPS). This service enabled GPs to send prescriptions electronically to a pharmacy of the patient's choice.

Good



People whose circumstances may make them vulnerable

The practice is rated as good for the care of people whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

- The practice held a register of patients living in vulnerable circumstances including those with a learning disability.
- The practice offered longer appointments for patients with a learning disability.
- The practice regularly worked with other health care professionals in the case management of vulnerable patients.
- The practice informed vulnerable patients about how to access support groups and voluntary organisations.
- The practice held regular health visitor liaison and multi-disciplinary team meetings to discuss the care needs of specific patients.

Good



Summary of findings

- The practice held regular review meetings involving district nurses, GP's and the local palliative care nurses for people that require end of life care and those on the palliative care register.
- Staff knew how to recognise signs of abuse in vulnerable adults and children. Staff were aware of their responsibilities regarding information sharing, documentation of safeguarding concerns and how to contact relevant agencies in normal working hours and out of hours.
- The practice identified patients who were also carers and signposted them to appropriate support.

People experiencing poor mental health (including people with dementia)

The practice is rated as good for the care of people experiencing poor mental health (including people with dementia).

- 100% of patients diagnosed with dementia had their care reviewed in a face to face meeting in the last 12 months, which was above the national average.
- The practice offered annual reviews to all patients on the mental health register which included physical checks.
- The practice regularly worked with multi-disciplinary teams in the case management of patients experiencing poor mental health, including those with dementia.
- The practice carried out advance care planning for patients with dementia.
- The practice had told patients experiencing poor mental health about how to access various support groups and voluntary organisations including to the local Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services and to the counselling services available through the Wellbeing Team provided by the local mental health trust.
- The practice had a system in place to follow up patients who had attended A&E where they may have been experiencing poor mental health.
- Staff had a good understanding of how to support patients with mental health needs and dementia.

Good



Summary of findings

What people who use the service say

The national GP patient survey results were published in July 2016. The results showed the practice was performing broadly in line with the local and national averages. The scores in some areas related to patient experience during consultation with a GP were lower than local and national averages. There were 286 survey forms distributed and 109 had been returned. This represented 38% return rate (3% of the practice's patient list).

- 77% of patients found it easy to get through to this practice by phone compared to the CCG average of 78% and the national average of 73%.
- 72% of patients were able to get an appointment to see or speak to someone the last time they tried compared to the CCG average of 79% and the national average of 76%.
- 79% of patients described the overall experience of this GP practice as good compared to the CCG average of 89% and the national average of 85%.

- 66% of patients said they would recommend this GP practice to someone who has just moved to the local area compared to the CCG average of 85% and the national average of 80%.

As part of our inspection we also asked for CQC comment cards to be completed by patients prior to our inspection. All of the 22 patient comment cards we received were positive about the care experienced. Three commented on the delay they sometimes experienced when waiting to see a GP because the previous patient had overrun their appointment. Patients felt the practice offered a helpful discreet service and staff were approachable knowledgeable and caring and had treated them with dignity and respect. A number of comments noted on how well they were satisfied with the reception staff who they described as calming and helpful.

We spoke with four patients during the inspection. All patients said they were satisfied with the care they received and thought staff were approachable, committed and caring.

Areas for improvement

Action the service **SHOULD** take to improve

- Continue to monitor and ensure improvement to national patient survey results.

- Continue to seek and support patients who are also carers.

Verulam Medical Group

Detailed findings

Our inspection team

Our inspection team was led by:

Our inspection team was led by a CQC Lead Inspector. The team also included a GP specialist advisor.

Background to Verulam Medical Group

Verulam Medical Group (also known as Colney Medical Centre) situated in London Colney, St. Albans, Hertfordshire is a GP practice which provides primary medical care for approximately 4,200 patients. A branch of this practice the Bricket Wood Medical Centre is located at St Lukes Church, The Crescent, Bricket Wood. The practice maintains one patient list and patients can access either practice. We did not inspect the Bricket Wood Medical Centre branch at this time. Together they provide primary medical care to the residents of London Colney and Bricket Wood and surrounding areas.

Verulam Medical Group provides primary care services to local communities under a General Medical Services (GMS) contract, which is a nationally agreed contract between general practices and NHS England. The practice population is predominantly white British along with a significant ethnic population of Bangladeshi, Italian, and Portuguese origin.

The practice has three GP partners (two male and one female). There is a practice nurse. Practice management is shared between the three GP partners who are supported by a team of administrative and reception staff. The local NHS trust provides health visiting and community nursing services to patients at this practice.

Patient consultations take place at ground and first floor levels and there is a lift available. There is onsite parking available including for those patients with mobility issues.

The practice is open Monday Friday from 8am to 6.30pm except on Thursday when the practice is open until 8.30pm. The practice offers a variety of access routes including telephone appointments, on the day appointments and advance pre bookable appointments.

When the practice is closed services are provided by Herts Urgent Care via the 111 service.

Why we carried out this inspection

We carried out a comprehensive inspection of this service under Section 60 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 as part of our regulatory functions. The inspection was planned to check whether the provider is meeting the legal requirements and regulations associated with the Health and Social Care Act 2008, to look at the overall quality of the service, and to provide a rating for the service under the Care Act 2014.

How we carried out this inspection

Before inspecting, we reviewed a range of information we hold about the practice and asked other organisations to share what they knew. We carried out an announced inspection on 5 October 2016.

During our inspection we:

- Spoke with a range of staff including the GPs, nursing staff, administration and reception staff and spoke with patients who used the service.

Detailed findings

- Observed how patients were being assisted.
- Reviewed comment cards where patients and members of the public shared their views and experiences of the service.

To get to the heart of patients' experiences of care and treatment, we always ask the following five questions:

- Is it safe?
- Is it effective?
- Is it caring?
- Is it responsive to people's needs?
- Is it well-led?

We also looked at how well services were provided for specific groups of people and what good care looked like for them. The population groups are:

- Older people
- People with long-term conditions
- Families, children and young people
- Working age people (including those recently retired and students)
- People whose circumstances may make them vulnerable
- People experiencing poor mental health (including people with dementia)

Please note that when referring to information throughout this report, for example any reference to the Quality and Outcomes Framework data, this relates to the most recent information available to the CQC at that time.

Are services safe?

Our findings

Safe track record and learning

There was an effective system in place for reporting and recording significant events.

- The staff we spoke knew the reporting process used at the practice and there was a recording form available on the practice's computer system. Staff would inform a GP of any incidents. The incident form supported the recording of notifiable incidents under the duty of candour. (The duty of candour is a set of specific legal requirements that providers of services must follow when things go wrong with care and treatment).
- We saw evidence that when things went wrong with care and treatment, patients were informed of the incident, received support, information, a written apology and were told about any actions to improve processes to prevent the same thing happening again.
- The practice carried out a thorough analysis of the significant events. There was a consistent approach to investigations.

We reviewed safety records, incident reports, national patient safety alerts and minutes of meetings where these were discussed. For example following a specimen bagging error the practice had strengthened the process for checking specimens were correctly labelled and bagged.

The practice had a process in place to act on alerts that may affect patient safety, for example from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). For example, we saw that the practice had acted on an alert related to making anticoagulant therapy safer.

Overview of safety systems and processes

The practice had clearly defined and embedded systems, processes and practices in place to keep patients safe and safeguarded from abuse, which included:

- Arrangements were in place to safeguard children and vulnerable adults from abuse. These arrangements reflected relevant legislation and local requirements. Policies were accessible to all staff. The policies clearly outlined who to contact for further guidance if staff had concerns about a patient's welfare. A GP was the lead for safeguarding. The GPs attended safeguarding meetings when possible and provided reports where necessary for other agencies. There were regular meetings with the

Health Visitor to discuss patients who were on the child protection register. Staff demonstrated they understood their responsibilities. For example we saw that the practice had referred a concern about a patient with suspected financial abuse to the local authority. All staff had received training on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults relevant to their role. GPs were trained to the appropriate level to manage child (level 3) and adult safeguarding.

- A notice in the waiting and in clinical rooms advised patients that chaperones were available if required. All staff who acted as chaperones were trained for the role and had received a risk assessment for the need for a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. (DBS checks identify whether a person has a criminal record or is on an official list of people barred from working in roles where they may have contact with children or adults who may be vulnerable).
- The practice maintained appropriate standards of cleanliness and hygiene. We observed the premises to be clean and tidy. Hand wash facilities, including soap dispensers were available throughout the practice. There were appropriate processes in place for the management of sharps (needles) and clinical waste. A GP was the infection control clinical lead who liaised with the local infection prevention team to keep up to date with best practice. There was an infection control protocol in place and staff had received up to date training. Annual and monthly infection control audits were undertaken and we saw evidence that action was taken to address any improvements identified as a result.
- The arrangements for managing medicines, including emergency medicines and vaccines, in the practice kept patients safe (including obtaining, prescribing, recording, handling, storing, security and disposal). Processes were in place for handling repeat prescriptions which included the review of high risk medicines. The practice carried out regular medicines audits, with the support of the NHS Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) medicines management team, to ensure prescribing was in line with best practice guidelines for safe prescribing. For example the practice had reviewed restricted anti-bacterial drug prescribing to ensure such prescriptions were in accordance with CCG guidelines. Blank prescription

Are services safe?

forms and pads were securely stored and there were systems in place to monitor their use. Patient Group Directions had been adopted by the practice to allow the nurse to administer medicines in line with legislation.

- We reviewed three personnel files and found appropriate recruitment checks had been undertaken prior to employment. For example, proof of identification, references, qualifications, registration with the appropriate professional body and the appropriate checks through the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Monitoring risks to patients

Risks to patients were assessed and well managed.

- There were procedures in place for monitoring and managing risks to patient and staff safety. There was a health and safety policy available. The practice had up to date fire risk assessments and carried out regular fire drills. All electrical equipment was checked to ensure the equipment was safe to use and clinical equipment was checked to ensure it was working properly. The practice had a variety of other risk assessments in place to monitor safety of the premises such as control of substances hazardous to health and infection control and legionella. (Legionella is a term for a particular bacterium which can contaminate water systems in buildings).
- Arrangements were in place for planning and monitoring the number of staff and mix of staff needed

to meet patients' needs. There was a rota system in place for the different staffing groups to ensure enough staff were on duty. Practice staff covered for each other during times of annual leave. The practice occasionally employed a locum GP to cover planned absences and leave.

Arrangements to deal with emergencies and major incidents

The practice had adequate arrangements in place to respond to emergencies and major incidents.

- There was an instant messaging system on the computers in all the consultation and treatment rooms which alerted staff to any emergency.
- All staff received annual basic life support training and there were emergency medicines available in the treatment room.
- The practice had a defibrillator available on the premises and oxygen with adult and children's masks.
- Emergency medicines were easily accessible to staff in a secure area of the practice and all staff knew of their location. All the medicines we checked were in date and stored securely.

The practice had a comprehensive business continuity plan in place for major incidents such as power failure or building damage. The plan included emergency contact numbers for staff. The GPs kept a copy off site for easy access in the event of an emergency.

Are services effective?

(for example, treatment is effective)

Our findings

Effective needs assessment

The practice assessed needs and delivered care in line with relevant and current evidence based guidance and standards, including National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) best practice guidelines.

- The practice had systems in place to keep all clinical staff up to date. Staff had access to guidelines from NICE and used this information to deliver care and treatment that met patients' needs.
- The practice monitored that these guidelines were followed through risk assessments, audits and random sample checks of patient records. For example we saw that the practice used the NICE pathway for the management of hypertension which was referenced in individual patient records.

Management, monitoring and improving outcomes for people

The practice used the information collected for the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) and performance against national screening programmes to monitor outcomes for patients. (QOF is a system intended to improve the quality of general practice and reward good practice). The most recent published results were 92% of the total number of points available.

This practice was not an outlier for any QOF (or other national) clinical targets. Data from 2014/15 showed:

- Performance for diabetes related indicators were comparable to the national average. For example, the percentage of patients with diabetes, on the register, in whom the last blood glucose reading showed good control in the preceding 12 months (01/04/2014 to 31/03/2015), was 72%, compared to the CCG and national average of 78%. Exception reporting for this indicator was 1% compared to the CCG and national average of 12%. (Exception reporting is the removal of patients from QOF calculations where, for example, the patients are unable to attend a review meeting or certain medicines cannot be prescribed because of side effects).
- Performance for mental health related indicators was comparable to the national average. For example, the percentage of patients with diagnosed psychoses who

had a comprehensive, agreed care plan documented in the record, in the preceding 12 months (01/04/2014 to 31/03/2015) was 90% where the CCG average was 92% and the national average was 88%. Exception reporting for this indicator was 0% compared to a CCG average of 10% and national average of 13%.

The practice told us that they did not use exception reporting methodology as it was practice policy to contact patients personally to ask them to attend for the respective monitoring reviews.

There was evidence of quality improvement including clinical audit.

- There had been seven clinical audits completed in the last two years, two of these were completed audits where the improvements made were implemented and monitored.
- The practice participated in local audits, national benchmarking, accreditation, peer review and research.
- Findings were used by the practice to improve services. For example, a recent audit of infection rates following the insertion of intrauterine device (IUD or coil) at the practice had confirmed no infection was present after a three week period and that the procedures had been undertaken in accordance with guidelines from the faculty of sexual and reproductive health care of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

Effective staffing

Staff had the skills, knowledge and experience to deliver effective care and treatment.

- The practice had an induction programme for all newly appointed staff. This covered such topics as safeguarding, infection prevention and control, fire safety, moving and handling, health and safety and confidentiality.
- The practice could demonstrate how they ensured role-specific training and updating for relevant staff. For example, for those reviewing patients with long-term conditions such as diabetes asthma smoking cessation and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).
- Staff administering vaccines and taking samples for the cervical screening programme had received specific training which had included an assessment of competence. Staff who administered vaccines could

Are services effective?

(for example, treatment is effective)

demonstrate how they stayed up to date with changes to the immunisation programmes, for example by access to on line resources and discussion at practice meetings.

- The learning needs of staff were identified through a system of appraisals and reviews of practice development needs. Staff had access to appropriate training to meet their learning needs and to cover the scope of their work. This included ongoing support, and support for revalidating GPs. All staff had received an annual appraisal and staff we spoke with confirmed this was a positive productive experience. We saw evidence of learning outcomes which had been identified and addressed.
- Staff received training included safeguarding, fire safety awareness, basic life support and information governance. Staff had access to and made use of e-learning training modules and in-house training as well as protected learning afternoons which occurred monthly.

Coordinating patient care and information sharing

The information needed to plan and deliver care and treatment was available to relevant staff in a timely and accessible way through the practice's patient record system and their intranet system.

- This included care and risk assessments, care plans, medical records and investigation and test results.
- The practice shared relevant information with other services in a timely way, for example when referring patients to other services. The practice used an electronic system communicate with the district nurse and health visitor. The pathology service were able to share patient clinical information and results electronically. There was a system to review patients that had accessed the NHS 111 service overnight and those that had attended the A&E department for emergency care.
- There was an information sharing system to review patients attending Herts Urgent Care.

Staff worked together and with other health and social care professionals to understand and meet the range and complexity of patients' needs and to assess and plan ongoing care and treatment. This included when patients moved between services, including when they were

referred, or after they were discharged from hospital. Meetings took place with other primary health care professionals on a regular basis when care plans were routinely reviewed and updated for patients with complex needs and those that needed end of life care.

Consent to care and treatment

Staff sought patients' consent to care and treatment in line with legislation and guidance.

- Staff understood the relevant consent and decision-making requirements of legislation and guidance, including the Mental Capacity Act 2005. When providing care and treatment for children and young people, staff carried out assessments of capacity to consent in line with relevant guidance.
- Where a patient's mental capacity to consent to care or treatment was unclear the GP assessed the patient's capacity and, recorded the outcome of the assessment.
- The practice gained written consent for minor surgery which were scanned and maintained in the patient's records.

Supporting patients to live healthier lives

The practice identified patients who may be in need of extra support. For example:

- Patients receiving end of life care, carers and those at risk of developing a long-term condition, those patients with mental health problems and patients with learning difficulties. Patients were offered regular health reviews and signposted to relevant support services.
- We saw a variety of health promotion information leaflets and resources, for example, on smoking cessation sexual health and immunisations.
- The practice provided a variety of health promotion information leaflets and resources for children and young people for example the discreet provision of chlamydia testing.
- The practice's uptake for the cervical screening programme was 78%, which was comparable to the CCG average of 83% and the national average of 82%. There was a policy to offer telephone reminders for patients who did not attend for their cervical screening test.
- The practice also encouraged its patients to attend national screening programmes for bowel and breast cancer screening.

Are services effective?

(for example, treatment is effective)

Results showed:

- 61% of patients attended for bowel screening within six months of invitation compared to national average of 58%.
- 70% attended for breast screening within six months of invitation which was similar to the national average of 73%.
- Childhood immunisation rates for the vaccinations given were comparable to CCG/national averages. For example, childhood immunisation rates for the vaccinations given to under two year olds was 98% to 100% and five year olds from 93% to 98%.

- For patients with long term conditions the practice offered influenza, pneumococcal, and shingles vaccinations to eligible patients through a call and recall system.

Patients had access to appropriate health assessments and checks. These included health checks for new patients and NHS health checks for patients aged 40–74. Of the eligible patients 487 had received this check with 65 completed in the past 12 months. Appropriate follow-ups for the outcomes of health assessments and checks were made, where abnormalities or risk factors were identified.

Are services caring?

Our findings

Kindness, dignity, respect and compassion

We observed members of staff were courteous and very helpful to patients and treated them with dignity and respect.

- Curtains were provided in consulting rooms to maintain patients' privacy and dignity during examinations, investigations and treatments.
- We noted that consultation and treatment room doors were closed during consultations; conversations taking place in these rooms could not be overheard.
- Reception staff knew when patients wanted to discuss sensitive issues or appeared distressed they could offer them a private room to discuss their needs.

All of the 22 patient Care Quality Commission comment cards we received were positive about the care experienced. Three commented on the delay they sometimes experienced when waiting to see a GP because the previous patient had overrun their appointment. Patients felt the practice offered a helpful discreet service and staff were approachable knowledgeable and caring and had treated them with dignity and respect. A number of comments noted on how well they were satisfied with the reception staff who they described as calming and helpful.

We spoke with four members of the patient participation group (PPG). They also told us they were satisfied with the care provided which was sensitive and professionally delivered and said their dignity and privacy was respected. Comment cards highlighted that staff responded compassionately when they needed help and provided support when required.

Results from the national GP patient survey showed the practice was performing broadly in line with the local and national averages in relation to treating patients with compassion, dignity and respect. However the scores in some areas related to patient experience during consultation with a GP were lower.

For example:

- 79% of patients said the GP was good at listening to them compared to the clinical commissioning group (CCG) average of 91% and the national average of 89%.

- 79% of patients said the GP gave them enough time compared to the CCG average of 88% and the national average of 87%.
- 91% of patients said they had confidence and trust in the last GP they saw compared to the CCG average of 97% and the national average of 95%.
- 79% of patients said the last GP they spoke to was good at treating them with care and concern compared to the CCG average of 88% and the national average of 85%.
- 92% of patients said the last nurse they spoke to was good at treating them with care and concern compared to the CCG average of 92% and the national average of 91%.
- 90% of patients said they found the receptionists at the practice helpful compared to the CCG average of 88% and the national average of 87%

The GPs told us that they had taken on board the national GP patient survey results which reported a number of areas where the patient experience during consultation with a GP could be improved. All GPs have now been refreshed through 'Five checkpoints in the consultation' which was learning model for the teaching and learning of consultation skills. A subsequent internal satisfaction survey had shown that the satisfaction levels during consultation were much improved.

Care planning and involvement in decisions about care and treatment

Patients told us they felt involved in decision making about the care and treatment they received. They also told us they felt listened to and supported by staff and had sufficient time during consultations to make an informed decision about the choice of treatment available to them. Patient feedback from the comment cards we received was also positive and aligned with these views. We also saw that care plans were personalised.

Results from the national GP patient survey showed patients responded positively to questions about their involvement in planning and making decisions about their care and treatment. Results were in line with local and national averages. For example:

- 81% of patients said the last GP they saw was good at explaining tests and treatments compared to the CCG average of 87% and the national average of 86%.

Are services caring?

- 81% of patients said the last GP they saw was good at involving them in decisions about their care compared to the CCG average of 83% and national average of 82%.
- 89% of patients said the last nurse they saw was good at involving them in decisions about their care compared to the CCG average of 86% and national average of 85%.

The practice provided facilities to help patients be involved in decisions about their care:

- Staff told us that translation services were available for patients who did not have English as a first language.

Patient and carer support to cope emotionally with care and treatment

Patient information leaflets and notices were available in the patient waiting area which told patients how to access a number of support groups and organisations. Information about support groups was also available on the practice website.

The practice's computer system alerted GPs if a patient was also a carer. The practice had identified 30 patients as carers (less than 1% of the practice list). There was a care for carer policy. The practice had identified a carer's champion who provided information as well as to direct carers to the various avenues of support available to them. This included referral to Carers in Hertfordshire which supported people in their caring role. The practice told us that their ethnically diverse patient list meant the cultural and family traditions dictated how they cared for their family members which could explain the low numbers of patients coming forward as carers. However the practice was actively seeking to increase the number of carers.

Staff told us that if families had suffered bereavement, their usual GP contacted them. This call was either followed by a patient consultation at a flexible time and location to meet the family's needs and or by giving them advice on how to find a support service.

Are services responsive to people's needs?

(for example, to feedback?)

Our findings

Responding to and meeting people's needs

The practice reviewed the needs of its local population and engaged with the NHS England Area Team and NHS Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to secure improvements to services where these were identified. For example the practice hosted the Community Gynaecology and Ultrasound Service which benefitted patients from GP practices from across the CCG.

- The practice offered late evening appointments on Thursday till 8.30pm.
- The practice provided telephone consultations at the patient's request where appropriate.
- There were longer appointments available for patients with a learning disability and others with complex needs.
- Home visits were available for older patients and patients who had clinical needs which resulted in difficulty attending the practice.
- Patients over 75 had a named accountable GP and were offered the over 75 health check.
- The practice worked closely with the Community Nursing Team and coordinated care at home.
- Same day appointments were available for children and those patients with medical problems that require same day consultation.
- Patients were able to receive travel vaccinations available on the NHS.
- There were disabled facilities and translation services available. There was a hearing loop available. A lift was available for patients to access the first floor.
- The Practice offered on-site Phlebotomy Services.
- Housebound patients had access to a domiciliary phlebotomy service provided by the local community trust.
- The practice provided an at home vaccination service for the housebound.
- Online services were available for booking appointments and request repeat prescriptions.
- Through the Electronic Prescribing System (EPS) patients could order repeat medications online and collect the medicines from a pharmacy near their workplace.
- The practice worked with local pharmacies and arranged the delivery of medicines to the housebound.
- The Practice promoted external domiciliary services for housebound patients. For example the visiting optician service.
- As far as practical, locally commissioned 'closer to home' community clinics were used to refer patients with long term conditions for specialist care. For example the community diabetic service the community respiratory service which enabled the patient to receive care nearer to their home.
- Young patients were signposted to 'YouthTalk', which offered a safe place where young people could attend for counselling and support.
- The practice provided a variety of health promotion information leaflets and resources for this population group for example the discreet provision of chlamydia testing kits and sign posting to Sexual Health Hertfordshire.
- The practice had told patients experiencing poor mental health about how to access support groups and voluntary organisations including to the local Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services and to the counselling services available through the Wellbeing Team.

Access to the service

The practice is open Monday Friday from 8am to 6.30pm except on Thursday when the practice is open until 8.30pm. In addition to pre-bookable appointments that could be booked up to six weeks in advance, urgent appointments were also available for people that needed them.

Results from the national GP patient survey showed that patient's satisfaction with how they could access care and treatment was comparable to local and national averages.

- 81% of patients were satisfied with the practice's opening hours compared to the CCG average of 81% and the national average of 79%.

Are services responsive to people's needs?

(for example, to feedback?)

- 77% of patients said they could get through easily to the practice by phone compared to the CCG average of 78% and the national average of 73%.

People told us on the day of the inspection that they were able to get appointments when they needed them.

The practice had a system in place to assess:

- whether a home visit was clinically necessary; and
- the urgency of the need for medical attention.

The reception staff were all aware of how to deal with requests for home visits and if they were in any doubt would speak to a GP. Home visit requests were assessed and managed by a GP.

Listening and learning from concerns and complaints

The practice had an effective system in place for handling complaints and concerns.

- Its complaints policy and procedures were in line with recognised guidance and contractual obligations for GPs in England.
- The practice manager was the responsible person who handled all complaints in the practice.
- We saw there was a poster in the waiting area that informed patients of the complaints procedure. There was also information on the practice website.

We looked at 4 complaints received in the last 12 months and found that these had been satisfactorily handled and dealt with in a timely way with openness and transparency. Lessons were learnt from individual concerns and complaints and action was taken as a result to improve the quality of care. For example, raising awareness for clinical staff of the need to be aware that infections in very young children needed to be monitored more closely including the need to seek specialist advice to manage such instances.

Are services well-led?

Good 

(for example, are they well-managed and do senior leaders listen, learn and take appropriate action)

Our findings

Vision and strategy

The practice had a clear vision to deliver high quality care and promote good outcomes for patients.

- The practice had a mission statement which was to provide good quality safe up-to-date timely and effective medical care for its population.
- The practice had a set of values which to give quality care ensuring patient safety and satisfaction.
- The practice had supporting plans which reflected the aims and objectives and were regularly monitored.

Governance arrangements

Being a small team the overarching governance framework was overseen by the three GP partners and supported the delivery of good quality care. This outlined the structures and procedures in place and ensured that:

- There was a staffing structure and that staff were aware of their own roles and responsibilities.
- Practice specific policies were implemented and were available to all staff electronically on their desktops.
- A comprehensive understanding of the performance of the practice was maintained through active staff participation and regular review at meetings.
- A programme of continuous clinical and internal audit was used to monitor quality and to make improvements.
- There were arrangements for identifying, recording and managing risks, issues and implementing mitigating actions.

Leadership and culture

The practice prioritised safe, high quality and compassionate care. Staff told us the GPs were approachable and always took the time to listen to all members of staff.

The provider was aware of and had systems in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the duty of candour. (The duty of candour is a set of specific legal requirements that providers of services must follow when

things go wrong with care and treatment). This included support training for all staff on communicating with patients about notifiable safety incidents. The practice encouraged a culture of openness and honesty.

The practice had systems in place to ensure that when things went wrong with care and treatment:

- The practice gave affected people support, information and a verbal and written apology
- The practice kept written records of correspondence.

There was a leadership structure in place and staff felt supported by the GPs.

- Staff told us the practice held regular meetings we saw minutes of these to confirm this. Staff also told us the practice manager kept them informed of practice matters at all times formal and daily informal discussions or by email.
- An open team culture was evident on account of the small team and staff told us they had the opportunity to raise any issues directly to a GP at any time and during staff meetings and felt confident and supported in doing so.
- Staff said they felt respected, valued and supported, particularly by the GPs. All staff were involved in discussions about how to run and develop the practice, and were encouraged to identify opportunities to improve the service delivered by the practice.
- There were named GPs in lead roles. For example there was a nominated GP lead for safeguarding asthma and COPD.

Seeking and acting on feedback from patients, the public and staff

The practice encouraged and valued feedback from patients, the public and staff. It proactively sought patients' feedback and engaged patients in the delivery of the service.

- The practice had gathered feedback from patients through the patient participation group (PPG) and through surveys and complaints received. We spoke with the chair of the PPG who told us that they had worked with the practice on several initiatives. For example helping with the in-house patient satisfaction survey.
- The practice had gathered feedback from staff through staff meetings, appraisals and discussions. Staff told us

Are services well-led?

Good 

(for example, are they well-managed and do senior leaders listen, learn and take appropriate action)

they would not hesitate to give feedback and discuss any concerns or issues with colleagues and management. They told us they felt involved and engaged to improve how the practice was run.

Continuous improvement

There was a focus on continuous learning and improvement at all levels within the practice. There were several initiatives for example,

- Work in relation developing a model for sharing the practice nurse with another practice in the vicinity bringing benefits to both practices as well as the nurse on account of the current recruitment issues.
- Provision of a Migraine Clinic by a special interest GP.