



CYNGOR IECHYD CYMUNED
COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCIL

HYWEL DDA

**Ash Grove Medical
Centre**

**Llanelli,
Carmarthenshire**

Visit report

November 2019

About Hywel Dda Community Health Council (CHC)

We represent independently and without bias the interests of patients and the public in the way that NHS services are planned and provided across the counties of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire.

Our volunteer members who live in the communities we serve are supported by a small team of staff who work together to:

- Carry out regular visits to health services talking to the people using the service and the people providing the care to influence the changes that can make a big difference;
- Get involved with health service managers when they are planning service developments and larger scale service change to emphasise the patient view right from the start;
- Provide free and confidential support through complaints advocacy if things go wrong and if the health service complaints process isn't working;
- Reach out more widely to patients and their families across communities to provide information, and to gather views and experiences so that we can represent your interests to health service managers and to policy makers.

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Background

Ash Grove Medical Centre is situated centrally within Llanelli in Carmarthenshire. It is a training practice helping qualified doctors, known as registrars, complete the final stages of their General Practitioner (GP) training. The practice is also able to train medical students as part of their undergraduate training.

The clinical team is supported by a Practice Manager and a range of reception and administrative staff.

The practice is available by telephone Monday – Friday from 8.00am to 6.30pm except weekends/Bank Holidays (5.00 pm to 6.30 pm emergency calls only). The reception is open from 8.30am to 6.00pm daily, Monday to Friday, except Bank Holidays. On Friday afternoon from 1.00 pm to 6.30 pm the surgery is closed for routine matters and is only open for emergencies.

Introduction

This report sets out our findings from a visit to Ash Grove on 7 August 2019 and a patient survey that we used at the same time.

In September 2018, it became a “managed practice”, which means that Hywel Dda University Health Board stepped in to take over its management and day-to-day running. This happens when a practice hands back its General Medical Services (GMS) contract, and the Health Board feels that the practice must not close. Leading up to this point, the local community was understandably very concerned given the risk of closure and the uncertain future. One of the main problems the practice has faced is the lack of doctors and the use of a high number of locum (temporary) doctors covering clinics.

It is important to note that we did not visit because we had heard any specific concerns about the practice or the quality of care it offers.

Instead, we were keen to understand what patients had to say nearly a year after the practice had gone through upheaval and change.

CHC involvement at the time of change

With a statutory role in service change, the CHC was closely involved in the process run by Hywel Dda Health Board to engage with local people who were affected by the uncertainty caused by the return of the GMS contract. The CHC ensured that the Health Board undertook face-to-face engagement with local people. It also argued that the practice should remain open to reduce impacts on patients and neighbouring GPs.

What we did

We asked the GP surgery to encourage people to complete a patient survey in the 2 weeks before we visited. We also explained why we were visiting and what could be expected.

We visited the practice on 7 August to hear directly from patients, family members and carers, speaking with people in the waiting area.

On the day of our visit, we heard from 18 people. Most people had an appointment to see a GP, but some had appointments with the nurse. 10 survey forms were returned.

We used some basic questions to structure our conversations. We were keen to understand how easy it was to get an appointment and what it was like to be a patient at the practice given that the surgery had gone through some change. We asked people what they thought was good and what could be better.

What people told us

Change and upheaval

It was clear that a year after the changes, patients seemed to have settled back into a normal pattern. When we spoke to the Practice Manager, she felt that after an initial period of “crisis management” the practice was now looking to deliver on longer term plans. These included (for example) working better with local care homes and potentially putting physiotherapist sessions in place, using an existing clinical room. Acknowledging this, a number of patients felt that with high numbers of locum doctors being used, they didn’t really have the continuity of care that they would like and this could lead to repeating background stories and past history to each new doctor they saw. Some felt it led to inconsistency in their care. This was a particular concern for people with long-term illnesses;

“The doctors are lovely but they don’t know me”

“You never see the same doctor twice. Continuity is an issue”

“So many different doctors in our surgery now that you can’t relate to a doctor who knows you or that you know. It gives you a bit more confidence to be able to see a doctor that you see most of the time and who knows you.”

We accept that the use of locum doctors is essential currently for the effective running of the practice. Whilst patients did not raise concerns related directly to the quality of care they received they were however, concerned about continuity of care. This issue emerged as a clear theme during our visit.

Learning from what people told us

- The Practice should review ways in which it can provide more continuity for patients, particularly those people who need to see a doctor regularly.

The appointment system

Often, when we speak with people about their experiences in accessing the help of their GP, getting an appointment is one of their biggest concerns. We were keen to understand whether this was the case for Ash Grove patients given the limited availability of GPs at times.

We heard mixed views from people on this issue. Generally people tended to find emergency appointments easier to access than routine appointments. Some didn't raise any concerns about access but many people told us that the telephone system could be very busy and sometimes you had to wait a long time to speak with a receptionist. Some stories were more concerning:

"I was calling for over 11 working days and couldn't get an appointment for a medication review and then ran out of medication"

A number of people felt that the lack of available bookable (routine) appointments led to inflexibility, particularly for working parents or carers. Some people said that evening appointments would be helpful. One person said:

"I don't like not being able to pre-book appointments, I have difficulty getting carers to sit with my parent, same day appointments are impossible"

Another said that she was disappointed to be told she could only access a smear test on one day of the week.

Most people told us they were happy or very happy with opening times. We were encouraged to hear that a reasonable proportion of people used "My Health Online" to book appointments and the practice is actively encouraging patients to use this system.

Learning from what people told us

- The practice should keep its appointment arrangements under review with input from patients, to explore more flexibility.
- The practice should consider offering evening appointments

Waiting to be seen

Arriving and waiting for an appointment when you are ill or in pain can be stressful so it is important that arrangements are straightforward and people are put at ease as soon as possible.

On our visit some people said that the limited number of free parking spaces outside the practice and congestion could be frustrating, but this tended to be tolerated by most due to the availability of spaces in a Council-operated car park directly opposite, even though they had to pay.

Generally people were happy with the waiting area and facilities as they waited for their appointment. The turnover of patients was relatively quick as they went to appointments and when we spoke with people during our visit, we had to cut some discussions short because they were called through to be seen.

The waiting area was clean and furniture was in good condition, including the seating which included chairs with arms which help those that needed them to stand.

We were impressed with a carers' notice board which included a named "carers contact". There was a quiet and relaxed atmosphere on the day we visited and it was noticeable that there was no intrusive telephone ringing noise to be heard from the reception area.

A television in the waiting area provided ambient sound and reception couldn't be overheard easily, which is important for patients' privacy and dignity.

Some people were frustrated that the self-service "booking-in" screen in reception rarely seemed to work.

Learning from what people told us

- The practice should review the functioning of its automated check-in screen system.

Patient care

The people we spoke with were generally positive about the caring, helpful and professional approach from staff at the practice. One lady we spoke with said;

"When I wanted to see a female GP and couldn't, the receptionist was very helpful in discussing other options."

Another person who completed our survey said;

"Most doctors are very helpful and pleasant"

Although there were relatively few negative things said about the care or help from staff we did hear some concerns.

A small number of patients told us that they sometimes felt appointments were rushed or that the GP didn't listen to them as well as they would like. Most people praised reception staff but two patients we spoke to said that their manner could sometimes feel obstructive.

We heard concerns about prescriptions from a couple of patients. One said that they had difficulty with the repeat prescription service. Another said that prescriptions didn't always get through to the pharmacy.

Learning from what people told us

The practice should:

- share our report with its staff and thank them for the good things we heard about

- ensure that patients are routinely encouraged to feedback their views on their experiences of care to the practice and that the practice reviews this information regularly, showing how it has acted on the things patients say.

Information and involvement

We found that the practice's website was clear and well maintained. Information was up to date and it was helpful in terms of the services and clinics offered. It provided a range of useful information and was easy to navigate.

We were pleased to see that the website has an area where people can feedback their experiences.

With the CHC keen to see practices working towards Patient Participation Groups and we were very pleased to hear that after our visit, a group was due to meet for the first time in October. The website has a section where those who are interested can apply to become a part of the group.

We were told by the Practice Manager that she regularly went to the waiting room to talk with patients and gain their views feedback. She also said that plans were in place to routinely survey patients on their experience.

Two people who completed our survey said that they had been unsettled by the threat of the surgery's closure when they heard about the problems and wanted reassurance and information about the future.

Learning from what people told us

- We would like to see the practice publicising what the patient group has discussed on its website.
- We feel the practice should communicate with patients to reassure them about the future of the surgery.

Summing up

We'd like to thank everyone who took the time to share their experiences with us.

We are also grateful to the surgery and their staff who made us feel welcome and helped us on the day we visited their busy place of work.

The people who shared their views and experiences with us clearly appreciated the services provided in their GP practice, and valued the staff that care for them.

One quote from a patient who completed our survey said;

"This surgery did go downhill last year. It has now been sorted and seems much better."

It is clear that Ash Grove has gone through a very challenging time. Some patients had concerns and accessing appointments was the most common amongst these.

It was also clear that many felt the practice had seen improvements since the Health Board had taken over and that there was a calmer, happier atmosphere. We were impressed with the Practice Manager's approach and attitude and longer term plans seem to bode well for patient experience and care.

When we visit a surgery to speak with patients or distribute surveys, we hope that our conclusions are representative of all the patients. We also realise that this is only a snapshot and if patients have more to add to our findings we always pleased to hear from them. Our contact details are included at the end of this report.

**Hywel Dda Community Health Council
November 2019**



**GP SURGERY
PATIENT SURVEY**

Hywel Dda Community Health Council is using a survey to find out what it is like to access services at your surgery. We are entirely independent of your surgery and do not need your name or contact details.

How happy are you with the following:	Very happy	Happy	It's ok	Unhappy	Very unhappy
Surgery opening times					
The waiting area					
Reception staff					
Access to the building					
Parking					

1. How long have you been registered with the surgery

- Less than 3 months
 3 - 12 months
 1-2 years
 2-5 years
 5 years +

If you have been registered less than 2 years, where were you registered before and why did you change?

.....

2. When you phone your surgery for any reason, how long do you have to wait before you get through to a person?

- Less than 2 mins 2-5 mins 5-10 mins 10 mins +

3. If you phone for an appointment, do you go through a telephone triage system before getting an appointment? (*Telephone triage is a system where someone asks you for your reason for calling before giving you an appointment or arranges for someone to call you back?*)

- Yes No I'm unsure

4. How easy is it to make a routine appointment?

- Very easy Easy It's ok Difficult Very difficult I don't know

5. How long do you have to wait to see a doctor for a routine appointment?

- Less than 48 hours Under a week 1-2 weeks 2-3 weeks More than 3 weeks

6. When booking a routine appointment have you been offered an appointment with someone instead of a doctor?

- Yes, this often happens Yes this sometimes happens No this has not happened I would like to be given this option when booking

7. When you book a routine appointment how easy is it to get an appointment on a particular day of the week/time of the day e.g. mornings/evenings?

- Very easy Easy It's ok Difficult Very difficult I don't know

8. How easy is it to access an emergency/same day appointment?

- Very easy Easy It's ok Difficult Very difficult I don't know

9. Have you ever failed to get an emergency/same day appointment?

- Yes No

If Yes what did you do instead?

- Tried again the next day Went to the A&E instead Saw a pharmacist Other

10. How easy is it to speak to a health care professional (doctor or nurse) by telephone?

- Very easy Easy It's ok Difficult Very difficult I don't know

11. How easy is it to have a home visit if you needed one?

- Very easy Easy It's ok Difficult Very difficult I don't know

12. How easy is it to order a repeat prescription?

- Very easy Easy It's ok Difficult Very difficult I don't know

13. Do you have any difficulties with getting to the surgery?

Yes

No

14. Do you use My Health Online? (tick all that apply)

Yes, to
make
appointments

Yes, to
order
prescriptions

I don't
know what
this is

I've
heard of it
but don't
use it

I don't
think my
surgery has it

Have you noticed any changes in your GP surgery in the past year and if so how has this affected you? This may involve things which are good or bad from your viewpoint

Please tell us about your experience with any other NHS Service (e.g. Hospitals, Outpatient Clinics, Dentist etc.)



**GP SURGERY
PATIENT INTERVIEWS**

Hywel Dda Community Health Council is talking to patients to find out what it is like to access services at your surgery. We are entirely independent of your surgery and do not need your name or contact details.

How happy are you with the following:	Very happy	Happy	It's ok	Unhappy	Very unhappy
Surgery opening times					
The waiting area					
Reception staff					
Access to the building					
Parking					

If you want to make any comments on any of the above, what are they?

How long have you been registered with the surgery and if you have only recently registered her, in the past 2 years, why did you change?

Tell us what it is like when you phone your surgery for any reason.

Tell us about the appointment system in the surgery

Tell us about the staff in the surgery – this can include doctors, nurses, receptionists or any other staff that you have seen here?

Have you noticed any changes in your GP surgery in the past year and if so how has this affected you? This may involve things which are good or bad from your viewpoint

Have you got any comments that you want to share with us about your local NHS in general eg hospitals, dentists, community care etc?

Contact us

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