

**Black Country Integrated Care Board
Primary Care Access – Update on Primary Care Access and GP Telephone
Systems**

1. Aim

NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board (BCICB) is committed to improving access into primary care services. BCICB is working with GP practices, NHS England and local stakeholders to put in place a series of improvements which will improve access into GP Practices. This report details the areas of improvements that have been identified and the actions that BCICB plan to put in place.

2. Report detail

2.1 Appointment Data

2.1.1 In August 2022, Walsall patients accessed 148,917 appointments within general practice and 69% of these were face-to-face.

2.1.2 In June 2023, Walsall patients accessed 173,419 appointments within general practice and 76% of these were face-to-face. There has been a 16/% increase in the number of appointments.

2.2 GP Contractual Updates

2.2.1 On 30 March 2023 NHS England released the updated contractual documentation for GP Practices and Primary Care Networks (PCNs).

2.2.2 All practices either hold a General Medical Services (GMS), Personal Medical Services (PMS) or Alternative Provider Medical Services (APMS) contract. In the update on 30 March 2023, there was an additional clause added into all GP contracts which states that when a patient contacts their practice, the practice can no longer ask patients to call back at a different time or on a different day. The practice must either offer the patient an appointment on the same day, schedule an appointment within two weeks or signpost the patient to self-care or other local services.

2.2.3 All Walsall practices are aligned to one of seven PCNs. BCICB commission the PCNs to provide Direct Enhanced Services which are provided in addition to the core GMS, APMS and PMS contracts. The latest Direct

Enhanced Service contract includes a capacity and access improvement payment. The payment is for PCNs to focus on making improvements to help manage demand, to support the accurate recording of general practice activity and improve patient experience of access enabling patients to access care more equitably and safely prioritised on clinical need.

2.2.4 Each PCN developed their own capacity and access improvement plan and they were submitted to BCICB. The plans were reviewed by a panel and they were approved. All seven Walsall PCNs have a plan in place which meets the minimum requirements. The plans briefly consist of; engaging with patients on their current experience, acting on patient feedback and supporting practices who are outliers within the PCN. Each practice will increase the uptake of Friends and Family Test surveys and report the results to NHS England. Each practice will increase their online consultation utilisation and increase the accuracy of their General Practice Appointment Data.

2.2.5 The PCNs will work on their improvement plans throughout 2023/24 with regular monitoring by BCICB to ensure that progress is being made.

2.3 Delivery Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care

2.3.1 On 9 May 2023, NHS England announced the Delivery Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care. The plan focuses on four key priorities; empowering patients, implementing Modern General Practice Access, building capacity and cutting bureaucracy. BCICB are working through the plan with our partners to ensure that the demands of the plan are met.

Empowering Patients

2.3.2 There is a commitment to improve NHS App functionality by improving uptake of its four existing functions:

- (i) to view prospective clinical records – in July 2023 clinical records were viewed 37,386 times by people registered with a Walsall GP.
- (ii) to order repeat prescriptions – in July 2023 Walsall patients ordered 10,273 repeat prescriptions via the NHS App.
- (iii) to see messages from their practices as an alternative to text messaging.
- (iv) manage routine appointments – in July 2023 742 GP appointments with Walsall GP Practices were booked or cancelled using the NHS App.

In Walsall 44% of patients aged 13+ are registered with the NHS App, each time a patient completes a task via the app this a potential phone call to the practice that has not been made, freeing up the phone line for patients who are not using the app. BCICB are working with practices to increase the utilisation of the NHS App and with local partners to ensure that patients without access to technology are not digitally excluded.

2.3.3 NHS England have a commitment to expand self-directed care from September 2023 for selected services including; community musculoskeletal services, audiology for older people including hearing aid provision, weight management services, community podiatry and wheelchair and equipment

services. BCICB are working with partners to scope out how this will be achieved in Walsall.

2.3.4 NHS England has a commitment to expand community pharmacy services. Many low complexity illnesses can be dealt with in pharmacies without the need for a GP appointment. Pharmacy First will launch before the end of 2023 which will enable pharmacies to supply prescription only medicines to treat seven common health conditions. The blood pressure checks within pharmacy will continue. Pharmacies started to manage oral contraception for women in April 2023. There will be improvement in the interoperable digital solutions to streamline referrals and allow pharmacies to view clinical records.

Modern General Practice Access

2.3.5 All analogue phone systems across the country are due to be switched off by December 2025 therefore all practices that are currently using an analogue phone system are required to move to cloud-based telephony. NHS England and the ICB are supporting the move by supporting procurement, contract negotiation and buy-out of current contracts and financial support for new equipment, transition costs and training.

2.3.6 All Walsall GP Practice websites are being updated to meet the new digital and online service requirements. 19 practice websites have been completed as of 22 August 2023.

2.3.7 To enable practices to respond to phone calls on the same day, as is the new contractual standard, practices will need to implement effective care navigation. Nationwide, 15% of current GP appointments could be navigated through self-care, community pharmacy or other local services and effective care navigation could direct these patients without the need for an appointment. National care navigation training began in July 2023 and has been attended by 21 Walsall practices. Advanced care navigation training has recently been announced.

2.3.8 To establish where practices feel they are with implementing modern general practice BCICB have compiled a survey which has been sent out to practices to self-assess their progress. Once the survey window closes BCICB will offer targeted support to practices based upon their responses.

Building Capacity

2.3.9 The practice teams have expanded through the introduction of additional roles within general practice such as paramedics, pharmacists, advanced nurse practitioners and physiotherapists known as ARRS (Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme). In Walsall there are 97.32 whole time equivalent people employed into direct patient care roles that are not GPs, nurses or healthcare assistants.

2.3.10 There is a plan to significantly expand GP training and make changes to visa sponsorship for newly qualified GPs.

2.3.11 There will be pension reforms encouraging GPs to stay in general practice longer.

2.3.12 Government will update guidance to encourage local planning authorities to engage with the ICB when large housing sites are being developed to ensure there is sufficient primary care capacity.

Cutting Bureaucracy

2.3.13 There is an ambition to improve the primary care and secondary care interface by:

- (i) secondary care carrying out onward referrals for an immediate or related need rather than referring back to general practice.
- (ii) secondary care to ensure that patients have fit notes on discharge rather than requesting they attend their GP practice.
- (iii) secondary care having effective call and recall systems in place.
- (iv) primary care having clear points of contact within secondary care.

The ICB is working with Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust to put these recommendations in place.

2.3.14 Reducing unnecessary bureaucracy on general practice.

2.4 Additional Primary Care Access Focussed Work

2.4.1 BCICB is hosting a Protected Learning Time event for Walsall practices in September with a focus on improving access. The planned agenda includes presentations on implementing modern general practice access, realising the benefit of cloud-based telephony, effective clinical triage and effective care navigation.

2.4.2 NHS England are supporting practices through the GP Improvement Programme. The programme has three tiers of support based upon the level of support the practice feels they need; 26-week support with sessions provided by an on-site facilitator, 13-week support with sessions provided by an on-site facilitator or a series of webinars.

2.4.3 BCICB have commissioned the Digital Journey Planner which an online self-assessment tool to enable practices to assess their implementation of online patient communication, GP online services, digital inclusion and online consultations. The programme will develop an action plan for the practices to follow to improve their digital patient offer.

2.4.4 BCICB continue to commission enhanced access hubs, which provide primary care appointments to patients between 6.30pm-8.00pm Monday to Friday and 9.00am-5.00pm on Saturday.

3. Conclusion

There is a national focus on primary care access which has resulted in changes to the GP contracts and new guidance, training programmes and additional funding. BCICB are working through the Delivery Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care with GP Practices and local stakeholders to ensure that the commitments made in the plan are met.

Author

Ruth Smith
Primary Care Commissioning Manager – Walsall
Black Country Integrated Care Board