

Enter & View Report



Emmer Green Surgery

4 St Barnabas Rd, Reading, RG4 8RA

Who: 55 people completed a survey during two 'Enter and View' visits by Healthwatch Reading.

When: We visited 9.30-11.30am, Friday 7 February and 2-4pm, Tuesday 11 February 2020. This was before the outbreak of Covid-19.

Why? To check latest patient experience, following recent changes to primary care services in the area.

Summary of survey findings

Appointments

- 60% of people booked that day's appointment by phone
- 13% of people were offered an urgent appointment
- 69% of people said they were seen on time or within 10 minutes of their appointment slot, on their last visit
- 75% of people didn't know they could book routine GP appointments at evenings and weekends (under national changes introduced at all surgeries from October 2018)
- 39% said they would find it a convenient option to get an appointment during extended hours for routine health issues

WAITING ROOM



Clinical care

- 96% of people said the clinical care they got from doctors and nurses was 'good' or 'excellent' (45%, good, 35%, excellent)
- 73% of people 'felt the doctor's surgery was the best place to go' and didn't seek advice from other services, beforehand



Reception



- 87% of people said help from receptionists was 'good' or 'excellent' (47% excellent, 40% good)
- 67% of people said they felt their last call to the surgery was answered in a reasonable amount of time

Online services

- 43% of people said they were using online services to book appointments or order repeat prescriptions
- 9% of people had booked that day's appointment online



Feedback from extra comments in the survey

- Many people described excellent care and helpfulness from doctors and staff
- Getting through on the phone can be lengthy during peak times
- Some people felt the wait to see preferred GPs was too long
- Two people described problems with signing up to online services

Selection of patient comments:

‘I see only two doctors and they have been the best and listen to me. A lot of my mental health issues have been answered due to them listening.’

‘My doctor goes above and beyond to help me.’

‘Very pleased with the care received from the GPs, nurses and reception staff here.’

‘I called 8am sharp, I was 21st in queue. I did try 3 times and finally got through.’

The experience of former patients of Peppard Road Surgery

Four of the 55 patients we spoke with had transferred to Emmer Green Surgery when Peppard Road Surgery in Caversham closed in 2019. They answered extra questions which showed:

- All felt they had been given enough information by the NHS on the changes
- Most (3) felt they had been given enough time by the NHS to decide on their next GP surgery
- All felt the handover had been smooth in relation to any ongoing care
- One person suggested a longer notice period to patients for any future closures

Healthwatch Reading observations

- The reception area was clean and tidy, and staff were friendly to patients
- There was a well-organised selection of leaflets promoting a range of local health, social care and voluntary sector services
- There was a public health information notice up about Coronavirus
- Doctors came out to the waiting room to collect patients for appointments
- The electronic screen in the waiting room invited patients to ask reception if they needed a glass of water
- There was a blood pressure machine in the reception area for patients
- We observed a reception staff member assist a woman using a walking frame through the automatic doors
- The surgery has an active patient participation group (PPG) which meets every two months; details on joining are on the surgery’s websites although no minutes of meetings have been put online.

Discussion and recommendations

Enter and View findings are only a snapshot of experience on the dates we visited. They are not a comprehensive judgement on the overall quality of a surgery.

We do believe, however, that they can help surgeries better understand what patients think of their services.

The findings we collected (set out in full in Appendix 2) suggest:

Patients are very satisfied with the quality of care and attitude of clinicians

Our findings were similar to that of other experience measures. Most people (96%) told us that their care was excellent or good, just as 93% of Emmer Green patients had previously told the national GP Patient Survey, that their clinician was good at listening to them, giving them enough time, and treating them with care and concern. We also received many extra comments volunteered by respondents about the care, professionalism and dedication of staff.

Patients do not always find it easy to get through to the surgery on the phone

Around two-thirds (67%) of people told us their last call to the surgery was answered in a reasonable amount of time, similar to the number (66%) recorded in the national GP Patient Survey. This is just below national average scores. People described to us how they had waited anything from a few minutes to up to 45 minutes or made multiple calls to get through.

More needs to be done to encourage use of online services

Only 9% of people told us they had booked that day’s appointment online, despite 43% also saying they had signed up to use the Patient Access system that allows them to do this. Extra comments we received from people identified some potential barriers - the time or perceived difficulty in signing up (which echoes a separate Healthwatch Reading project which found the Patient Access sign-up to be generally cumbersome for people), needing help from reception staff or wanting the surgery to make more appointments available online to book. More accessible online appointment booking could help overcome frustrations from phone bookings.

People might be missing out on convenient appointment times

There was an overall low awareness (25%) among people we surveyed of the new extended hours scheme introduced from 1 October 2018 at all GP practices that lets people book an appointment up to 8pm on a weeknight and during the weekend. These may be offered at the patient’s own surgery or a neighbouring surgery via joint working between Reading doctors. It is interesting to note that 39% would consider this a convenient option for the future, and one person told us ‘evening and weekends would be great as I struggle to get time off work’.

Most people think reception staff are helpful but there may be room for improvement

In our survey, 87% of people told us reception staff were helpful, the same percentage as recorded in the national GP Patient Survey. This score is just below the national and local averages. We received a mixture of extra comments about staff, including those praising the helpfulness of staff, and some saying it varied. During our visits, we observed positive interactions between reception staff and patients.

Most patients see GPs as the default option for their health needs

In our survey, 73% of people told us they didn't seek help elsewhere before making their appointment. Some people told us this was because their appointment that day was for a follow-up that had previously been recommended by a doctor. The NHS has been generally trying to encourage people to contact a local pharmacist or try calling 111 for advice on minor issues or if they are unsure whether they need to see a doctor.

Patients are generally being seen on time

In our survey, 69% of people said they waited 10 minutes or less to be seen after their appointment time, similar to the 69% of people from Emmer Green who told the national GP Patient Survey they waited 15 minutes or less. This percentage is the same as the local and national averages.

The surgery generally keeps patients involved and informed

The surgery has a PPG that meets regularly and contributes to larger patient forums in Reading. Healthwatch Reading would commend examples of good communication channels that we have seen in other surgeries, such as regular surgery newsletters, 'You said, we did' posters, and making PPG meeting minutes available to all patients on noticeboards or the surgery website. Publishing results and surgery responses to comments in the Friends and Family Test (the NHS-wide survey) can also show patients that their opinion is valued and acted upon.

We sent the following recommendations to the surgery, before the outbreak of Covid-19, urging the recommend the practice tries to increase patient satisfaction, by:

- encouraging more patients to sign up to GP online services
- improving telephone access to patients at peak times
- making more patients (especially working age) aware of extended hours and that these are routine appointments they can book in advance
- making patients more aware of how the surgery is responding to their feedback, such as publishing PPG minutes or Family and Friends Test results.

Healthwatch Reading normally asks NHS organisations to respond within 20 working days to our recommendations. However, our national body Healthwatch England advised us to alter our normal way of working to avoid putting extra pressure on the NHS at a time when it was dealing with the peak of the Covid-19 outbreak. We therefore agreed to postpone the surgery’s response.

In the interim period, GP surgeries drastically changed the way they operated, moving to phone or online-only access system in the first instance for patients, with surgery visits by patients only taking place when doctors judged they were clinically necessary. Health secretary Matt Hancock has indicated he is keen to see this way of working becoming the norm in the long-term.

Emmer Green’s response has been provided in this new context.

Emmer Green Surgery’s response:

‘We would like to thank Healthwatch for coming into the surgery and talking with our patients about their experiences and giving us feedback on what we can improve on and what our patients think of the service they receive from Emmer Green Surgery.’

‘We will certainly undertake to implement your recommendations:

- encouraging more patients to sign up to GP online services
- improving telephone access to patients at peak times
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- making patients more aware of how the surgery is responding to their feedback, such as publishing PPG minutes or Family and Friends Test results.

when, and if, we get back to a normal working life again in the surgery.

‘We will also publish PPG minutes online as suggested along with result of the Friends and Family Test.’

Healthwatch Reading acknowledgements

We thank Emmer Green Surgery staff, and its PPG members, for welcoming us on the visits.

Appendix 1: Background information

About Healthwatch Reading

We are the local patient and public champion for NHS and social care services. We are independent of the NHS and Reading Borough Council. One way we collect feedback is by using our statutory ‘Enter and View’ powers to visit local services to survey people and observe the environment.

Our visits are agreed in advance and carried out by trained Healthwatch staff or volunteers. Our findings are a snapshot of patient experience at that point in time, rather than a comprehensive judgement on the surgery’s quality. Our visits are designed to help NHS organisations understand things patients think they do well or need to improve. Under NHS rules, organisations must provide a written response to Healthwatch findings.

How do patients know if a GP surgery provides good care?

Various elements can help people understand the quality of their GP surgery:

- Patient feedback collected locally, such as surveys by independent local Healthwatch, or the NHS service itself via ‘Friends and Family Test’ surveys
- Patient feedback collected nationally about all surgeries in the yearly GP Patient Survey, published by NHS England
- Facts and figures about the surgery’s performance collected by Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (BWCCG) to see whether the surgery is meeting its contractual obligations; the CCG might also run patient surveys
- Comprehensive inspections on the safety and quality of GP surgeries carried out on a rolling cycle by the Care Quality Commission, a national, independent body with significant legal powers to order services to make improvements.

Healthwatch Reading regularly meets with BWCCG and the CQC to share feedback with them or press for quality improvements at local services.

About Emmer Green Surgery

The surgery is located in a purpose-built facility in Emmer Green, north Reading. Around 12,000 patients are registered there, up from 9,400 three years ago. This increase has been due to taking on some patients when Priory Avenue Surgery in Caversham closed following care failures, in 2017, and also taking most of the patients from Peppard Road Surgery in Caversham, which closed in 2019 when a husband and wife doctor team retired.

The remaining surgery in Caversham, Balmore Park, has recently closed its patient list for the time being while it recruits and trains staff to cope with its growing workload.

Emmer Green is run by a partnership of six GPs partners, who are supported by two salaried GPs, two long-term locums, a nursing team, a pharmacist, practice manager and admin and reception staff. Seven of the GPs are women and three are men. There is also a nursing team, a manager, and administrative and reception staff. A new pharmacist is due to start working at the surgery in March 2020.

Since July 2019, the surgery has been part of the Caversham Primary Care Network, working in partnership with Balmore Park. PCNs get extra government funding to hire new staff to help GPs cope with their workload and to work with other services to deliver better care to patients.

Emmer Green Surgery was most recently inspected by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) on 21 November 2019 and rated overall as ‘Good’. The CQC checks surgeries in five areas: whether they are ‘safe’, ‘effective’, ‘caring’, ‘responsive’, and ‘well-led’. The CQC’s [inspection report](#) states that the surgery ‘had managed the increase of 3,000 patients effectively’.

Latest results for the ‘[Friends and Family Test](#)’, for the month of December 2019, show 96% of the 324 Emmer Green patients who answered the survey, said they would recommend the surgery to friends or family.

In the latest results from the annual [national GP Patient Survey](#), published in July 2019, the surgery scored higher than both the local and national average scores in 11 out of 18 questions, mostly for the quality of its clinical care. This included having the highest score out of all Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire surgeries, for the number of patients who said they had enough support in the last year to manage a long-term condition. Four below-average scores were recorded, mostly related to making and accessing appointments.

Appendix 2: Full Healthwatch Reading patient survey results

1. How did you make this appointment today?

Total respondents: 55

- Phoned the surgery: 60% (33 people)
- Booked it in person: 30.91% (17)
- Booked it online e.g. on a smartphone, tablet or computer: 9.09% (5)
- It was booked for me by the NHS 111 helpline: 0%

2. How far in advance did you have to make this appointment?

Total respondents: 54, 1 skipped

- This appointment was available within two weeks of first trying to book it: 24.07% (13 people)
- The appointment was available within a week of first trying to book it: 16.67% (9)
- I contacted the surgery today and was offered an urgent appointment: 12.96% (7)
- This appointment was available within two days of first trying to book it: 12.96% (7)
- This appointment was available within three weeks of first trying to book it: 9.26% (5)
- I contacted the surgery today and was offered a routine appointment: 5.56% (3)
- Other: 18.52% (10)

Note that most (8) of the ‘other’ comments, indicated that the person’s appointment had been booked by the surgery as a routine follow-up.

3. Before booking this appointment, did you seek health advice from somewhere else?

Total respondents: 55

- No, I felt the doctor’s surgery was the best place to go: 72.73% (40 people)
- Yes, from a pharmacy: 7.27% (4)
- Yes, from the NHS 111 helpline: 0%
- Yes, other: 20% (11)

Note that most (7) of the ‘other’ comments, were from people who said they hadn’t sought advice elsewhere because they were required to come into the surgery as part of a follow-up; and 3 people said they had been beforehand to either the Reading Walk-in Centre or a health care practitioner in another setting.

4. Thinking about your experience of this surgery since the beginning of 2019, how would you describe the quality of care you receive from doctors/clinicians?

Total respondents: 55

- **Excellent: 56.36% (31 people)**
- **Good: 40% (22)**
- **Okay: 3.64% (2)**
- **Poor: 0%**

5. Thinking about your experience of this surgery since the beginning of 2019, how would you describe the helpfulness of receptionists/administration staff?

Total respondents: 55

- **Excellent: 47.27% (26 people)**
- **Good: 40% (22)**
- **Okay: 5.45% (3)**
- **Poor: 1.82% (1)**
- **Other: 5.45% (3)**

The ‘other’ comments are listed below:

‘Not always as helpful as they might be.’

‘It depends who is on at the desk.’

‘Good but there is not enough for the volume of patients.’

6. Thinking about the last time you phoned the surgery, did you feel your call was answered in a reasonable amount of time?

Total respondents: 55

- **Yes: 67.27% (37)**
- **No: 9.09% (5)**
- **Other: 23.64% (13)**

The ‘other’ comments described a mix of waits for calls to be answered:

‘No, it took about 10mins before call was answered.’

‘Always call in afternoon.’

‘I called 8am sharp, I was 21st in queue. I did try 3 times and finally got through.’

‘Today was quick but in the past had to wait up to 10mins.’

‘Late morning 5th in queue and ghastly music while on hold.’

‘Never contacted by phone.’

‘2pm was 9th in queue.’

‘Sometimes better than others.’

‘Yes a few minutes as waiting time.’

‘Called at 9ish started as 8th in queue only took about 10/15 mins to get through.’

‘Got cut off numerous times when 1st in queue.’

‘Not always, long wait during busy periods.’

‘Overall, when I call I have to wait between 3 mins to 45mins.’

7. Thinking about the last time you visited the surgery for an appointment, how long did you wait from your appointment time to be seen by the health care professional?

Total respondents: 51, skipped 4

- I was seen within 10 minutes of my booked time: 50.98% (26)
- I was seen within 30 minutes: 19.61% (10)
- I was seen on time: 17.65% (9)
- I had to wait longer than 30 minutes: 7.84% (4)
- I was seen on time: 13.33% (4)
- Other: 3.92% (2)

The ‘other’ comments did not give any detail on the time waited.

8. Did you know that you can book appointments and repeat prescriptions online?

Total respondents: 53, skipped 2

- Yes, I have already signed up and use these online services: 43.40% (23)
- No, I prefer to deal with the surgery by phone or in person: 28.30% (15)
- Yes, but I haven’t signed up yet: 15.09% (8)
- No, but I am interested in finding out more: 7.55% (4)
- Other: 5.66% (3)

Two of the ‘other’ comments, described issues with the process:

‘I tried to do this and it was not straight forward and the reception staff weren’t very helpful with it.’

‘Tried but found it too difficult and untimely take too long.’

9. Did you know that you can now book routine GP appointments until 8pm weekdays or at weekends (although you might have to be seen at a different doctor’s)?

Total respondents: 51, skipped 4

- No: 74.51% (38)
- Yes: 25.49% (13)

10. In the future, would you book a GP appointment in the evening or weekend? Tick as many as apply.

Total respondents: 51, skipped 4

- Yes, I would find it a convenient option for non-urgent health problems: 39.22% (20)
- Yes, but only for an urgent issue: 35.29% (18)
- Yes, but only if I could be seen at my own surgery: 21.57% (11)
- No, normal day-time hours suit me: 19.61% (10)
- Yes, but only if I could see a doctor I know: 13.73% (7)
- No, I think doctors deserve time off from non-urgent work: 7.84% (4)

11. Any other feedback?

When asked to offer any additional comments, 21 people replied, most of which were positive, some which included suggestions and a small number, negative.

Positive comments:

'I see only two doctors and they have been the best and listen to me. A lot of my health issues have been answered due to them listening and getting tests done. They help with my mental health well.'

'I find this surgery very good.'

'Dr [x], nurse and receptionist have been wonderful.'

'Very pleased with the care received from the GPs, nurses and reception staff here. Glad to have this as my local surgery.'

'Excellent service, everyone very professional and I always felt well looked after.... The emergency appointments works really well and triage always kind and helpful. Thank you for a great service!!!'

'Always helpful and approachable.'

'Since [health issue] I have found the surgery very helpful and always fit me in.'

'I have been a patient for 20yrs and always feel comfortable with the doctors and service.'

'Beyond praise (GP). Extremely helpful (Reception staff). Very satisfied.'

'Haven't been here very long but everyone has been very professional and helpful when I needed them.'

'Very good service once with the GP/nurses.'

‘My doctor goes above and beyond to help me, he has been emailing [relative] for 6 weeks every couple of days and even having phone calls throughout if he has any concerns.’

Suggestions:

‘The only aspect that could be more helpful for patients in booking an appointment with chosen GP that it is not too far ahead (usually when I ask the earliest appointment with GP of choice is 2-3 weeks ahead).’

‘Would be useful to be able to book appointments further ahead. Time consuming to have to keep checking online for appointments to be released.’

‘Evening and weekends would be great as I struggle to get time off work.’

Negative or mixed feedback:

‘It was quite a change transferring from Peppard Road (which closed when Drs retired, had been a patient there for 30yrs) and we could get an appointment on the same day. It was less automated (good and bad!)’

‘Phone queue is long early in the morning.’

‘The wait for routine appointment is too long!’

‘I don’t like that I don’t have an assigned GP as I have complex needs, other than that all is perfect.’

‘...just getting there [to the surgery] is a bit of a task!!’

Demographics of survey respondents

- 93% of respondents (51) said they were the patient; the rest were a relative, parent or carer
- Age breakdown: 25% (13) were aged 65-74; 21% (11) were 55-64; 19% (10) were 35-44; 12% (6) were 25-34; 12% (6) were 75-84; 4% (2) were 17-24; 4% (2) were 85+, 2% (1) was 45-54 and 1 person preferred not to say.
- Asked about gender, 71% (37) said they were women, 29% (15) said they were men and three people did not answer
- Of the 46 people who answered about their ethnicity, 76% (36) said they were White British; 7% (3) said Indian; 2% (1) said Black African; 2% (1) said they preferred not to say’ and 13% (6) said ‘other’, describing themselves as Hindu British citizen, White European, Black, Mixed White Asian, Black British and French
- Of the 9 people who answered about whether they had a disability, 56% (5) said yes, 33% (3) said no and one person said they preferred not to say.