

Using Digital Technology in Primary Care Services Summary of Report published March 2021

Introduction

Healthwatch Sandwell looked at the patients experience of using digital technology in primary care services - this is a summary of the main findings. We wanted to find out whether people had adapted well to the changes in services brought about by Covid-19. We found that many people had been able to cope with the adjustments and were satisfied with the services they were receiving.

However we also found that many people were in “digital poverty” i.e. unable to access digital technology or had issues with data supply. Some people have barriers or challenges to using digital technology. Working in collaboration with a range of community support organisations in Sandwell we conducted Focus Group work to look at the particular issues in using and accessing services through digital tech-

Main Findings

59% were put off contacting GP due to Covid
Phone and video consultations increased
On-line NHS111 & virtual GP usage increased
People mainly happy/satisfied with services
Face-to-face, phone call and letter preferred
60% neutral about video consultations
Virtual/on-line services convenient for many
Sandwell Community and Voluntary sector providing some digital access and support.

44% found digital technology difficult to use:
64% lack of familiarity due to age
22% due to a sensory disability
17% due to English not first language
30% difficult to access equipment/data supply
28% owned a mobile phone without internet
5% did not own any technology
49% used the internet for bookings
44% use technology for health & wellbeing

Focus Groups key findings

People over 65 years old and long term conditions - Digital technology convenient for GP services. Age a barrier to some learning, others need ongoing training and support. Less technology ownership.

People with sensory impairments blind/visually impaired/deaf - Assistive technology is helpful. Training and support needs. Communication should be in accessible formats. Insight detail in full report.

Learning disabilities and autism - Face-to-face services are best for aiding communication (Video can work too). Person centred design of services with preferred options recorded. Health apps used.

English not first language - Higher level of elderly who can not speak/read English. More likely to be digitally excluded. Translation services need to be able to explain medical terminology. Privacy issues.

Key Recommendations

Produce “how to” guide for on-line GP services, staff support offer, awareness training.

People with support needs—person centred approach and preferences/support needs recorded.

Review accessible communication formats and translation services offered.

Healthwatch Sandwell will support primary care services to ensure patients voices are heard.