



Support for cancer patients during the Covid-19 crisis

## Introduction

Healthwatch Southend undertook an exercise to examine the websites of all the GP practices in Southend. This was as part of work across the East of England to inform the East of England Cancer Alliance about what information was available to people with cancer or their carers, given the need to suspend virtually all non-emergency care for this and other groups.

As digital technology forms an increasing component of healthcare services, it is essential that this vulnerable group of patients can access information and advice to support them as services return to some sort of normality.

## Methodology

A small group of staff and volunteers used the following questions as a framework to undertake a “mystery shopper” approach:

- Is the website up to date?
- Is there current Covid-19 advice?
- Is there a link to the NHS Covid-19 advice site?
- Is there advice for cancer patients?
- Is there a link to the Macmillan Covid-19 web page?
- Are there any links to cancer support groups?
- Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?

## Results

There are 26 practices in the Southend area. We noted that the CCG website has a list of all member practices which dates back to 2014.

### Up to date website

Four of the practices in this CCG do not have any form of website. Of those practices which do, we did not observe any serious inaccuracies.

### Current Covid-19 advice

All the practices with a website had current Covid-19 advice, with information particular to that practice in terms of telephone triage etc.

### NHS Covid-19 advice site

All the practices' websites apart from 2 displayed national advice in the form of a pop-up.

### Advice for cancer patients

This was the area with the greatest variety of pages. Five practices had no advice available for patients with cancer. Most practices included information in their pages on long term conditions, with others supplementing this with women's or men's health pages. Some searches return a link to the NHS Choices website. We also found a handful of websites where links were broken so that patients could not access information.

### Macmillan Covid-19 advice

Specific advice for patients and clinicians is available from MacMillan Cancer Support <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/coronavirus>. Eleven practice websites displayed this link (two within long term conditions etc). No link to the MacMillan Cancer Support webpage was found in eleven websites. Two practices referred to NHS Choices. A broken link was found in one website.

### Cancer support groups

Fifteen practices made no reference to cancer support groups, either local or national. Ten practices did have links for support groups such as MacMillan or Cancer Research UK. However six of these practices also included a broken link to Healthtalkonline.

### Local Healthwatch

Most practices did not include information about or a link to Healthwatch Southend, despite our role in signposting patients or carers to advice or support groups. One had an up-to-date link to Healthwatch Southend, and also mentioned Healthwatch Essex. One referred to Healthwatch Essex alone. Two practices had links to Healthwatch Southend, but these needed updating.

### Conclusion

We recognise that maintaining websites can be time-consuming, but their value decreases if they are not kept up to date with relevant, timely and accessible information. We hope that this review will lead to improvements in this information source.

### Recommendations

As a result of this work, we recommend that

1. The CCG validates and updates its own website as a matter of urgency
2. Those practices without websites are encouraged to develop one to provide their patients with up to date information about the practice and local organisations
3. All websites contain up to date information for patients with cancer and their carers, drawing on local and national resources and organisations
4. All websites are checked to see that links are accessible (without too much searching across a website) and that all links work
5. Practice websites include up to date contact details for Healthwatch Southend