

Change to third party prescription
ordering

Castlegate and Derwent Surgery,
Cockermouth

April 2017



your
voice
counts

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Executive Summary

Healthwatch Cumbria (HWC) received concerns from members of the public regarding the imminent change to the third party prescription ordering service between Castlegate and Derwent Surgery and the three pharmacies in Cockermouth; Allison's, Boots and Castlegate Pharmacy located at Cockermouth Community Hospital.

In response to the public feedback received, including over 45 phone calls, letters and emails to the HWC office, HWC visited the surgery and had a meeting with surgery representatives. It was agreed that a public drop in event would be the best way for members of the public to hear, and better understand, the rationale for the change from surgery staff and also allow the public and surgery staff to share their views together.

Surgery staff listened to concerns in group discussions and then formed a panel to answer questions from everyone who attended. Comments were recorded by HWC staff and together with feedback cards completed by the public formed the basis of this report reflecting the views expressed at the drop in.

Analysis of the feedback HWC has received raised the following key issues:

- The changes affect the most vulnerable. The new system is not person centred and does not take into consideration how accessible the surgery is for people to get to.
- It is challenging for some to access the surgery.
- The surgery poorly communicated why the changes needed to take place particularly when people thought the previous method of ordering prescriptions worked well.
- People prefer accessing the pharmacies in the town centre because they find it easier than going up the hill at Castlegate to get to the surgery and/or the pharmacy located in the community hospital.
- There have been frustrations with accessing the prescription ordering phone line.
- There is reluctance to use the online system.
- The loss of patient choice and lack of consultation about the change has led to a breakdown of trust.

Consequently, as a result of the drop in, representatives of the Castlegate and Derwent surgery responded by:

- Apologising for the lack of communication, agreeing that the change should have been more effectively communicated to the public.
- That the aim of the new process is to aid prescription review and reduce wastage.
- Acknowledging that the capacity of the phone prescription line is causing frustration.
- Stating that this method of prescription ordering is being implemented across Cumbria.
- Stating that the surgery would review and add to the list of vulnerable people to ensure people get the additional assistance they need.
- Informing the public that after the process has been in place for a while it would be reviewed.

Recommendations

- To review the systems and processes in place on how significant changes are communicated to patients.
- When the new system is reviewed to make the findings available to all patients.

Acknowledgements

HWC has welcomed the opportunity to work with Castlegate and Derwent Surgery to help those affected understand the changes to prescription ordering services in Cockermouth. HWC would like to acknowledge the particular support of:

- All surgery representatives who were present at the drop in.
- Our team at HWC.
- Cockermouth Methodist Church for the use of their venue.
- Local media and venues that helped to promote the project.

Above all, HWC are indebted to those people who shared their views and experiences and to those people who attended the drop in.

Introduction

During December 2016 concerns were raised to HWC in person and through the info@healthwatch email by members of the public relating to the forthcoming changes to the third party prescription ordering service between Castlegate and Derwent Surgery and the three pharmacies in Cockermouth; Allison's Pharmacy, Boots Pharmacy both of which are located in the town and Castlegate Pharmacy located at Cockermouth Community Hospital.

Third party prescription ordering can happen by:

- The pharmacy ordering on behalf of the patient following a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) either using the right hand side of the patient's prescription or their own paperwork. *This is also known as Managed Repeats.*
- The patient ordering their own medication using the right hand side of the prescription and using the pharmacy as a third party courier service.

The recent changes to this service means that patients now have to travel to the surgery to address their prescription needs. Patients have raised concerns that it is now more difficult to submit their repeat prescription orders because of the surgery's location; it is not as convenient as the pharmacies in the town centre. Patients were also concerned that older adults may find using the telephone or on-line ordering service unacceptable and stressful.

Before the change Allison's, Boots and Castlegate pharmacies were able to order people's repeat prescriptions, however surgeries are being encouraged to adopt Repeat Dispensing. Repeat Dispensing means that the GP authorises so many months worth of prescriptions, usually 6 or 12 months, which are either held by the pharmacy if using a paper system or they are held electronically. Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is moving towards electronic repeat dispensing and prescribing and is putting in place mechanisms to enable this change by April 2018. Castlegate and Derwent Surgery do not currently use the electronic prescribing service (EPS) or repeat dispensing electronic or paper. The definitions below provide further clarity on the terms managed repeats and repeat dispensing:

Repeat Dispensing

- This system is suitable for patients on regular long term medication.
- Repeat dispensing is promoted by the NHS as it saves the surgery time and enables the patient to receive their regular medication in a system controlled by the GP.

Managed Repeat prescriptions

- The pharmacy orders the patients medication on their behalf. *See above definition of Managed Repeats.*
- It can result in wastage of medication.
- This is a non NHS repeat medication service.

The third party prescription ordering service ended on the 1st January 2017 which was extended from the original cessation date of 1st December 2016.

HWC first became aware of the concerns in December 2016 and received over 45 phone calls, letters and emails from members of the public who would become affected by the change.

As a result, HWC wrote a letter to Castlegate and Derwent Surgery outlining the public's concerns on the potential detrimental impact the change may have, particularly on patients less able to access the surgery, and therefore the ability of the surgery to deliver an equitable service for all of its patients. HWC asked the surgery to outline how it proposed to support patients and patient groups disadvantaged by the change around how they would be able to order their prescription medication.

In response to the HWC letter the surgery outlined that the change was happening because it was safer and would reduce medicine wastage. The surgery stated that they had asked to be notified where patients felt they required additional support and for local pharmacies to provide assistance; the surgery felt they had made contact with those patients and identified their needs. The surgery also told HWC that prescription clerks would contact patients who required support to ensure medication was ordered appropriately.

Representatives of HWC met with surgery staff on Thursday 26th February 2017 where it was agreed that it would be helpful to hold a meeting so that the public would be able to hear and better understand the rationale for the change from surgery staff, and the public and surgery staff could share their views together.

Prior to the drop in, a meeting was held by the CCG on Thursday 16th March 2017. This meeting amongst other things discussed forward planning. A part of the discussion on forward planning was around the changes to prescription ordering.

A drop in, facilitated by HWC, was scheduled for Monday 20th March from 7.30-9.30pm.

This report is a summary of what happened and the views that were expressed at the drop in.

About the drop in event

HWC arranged and facilitated a drop in event so members of the public and pharmacies affected by the change to the third party prescription ordering service could meet with surgery representatives to better understand the changes and share their views. The drop in took place at Cockermouth Methodist Church on Monday 20th March between 7.30 and 9.00pm. It was decided to hold the event at the Methodist Church because of its central location, accessibility and car parking availability.

The drop in was advertised via:

- Posters distributed around Cockermouth.
- HWC Twitter and Facebook pages and on the HWC website.
- Times and Star newspaper.
- Allison's Pharmacy Facebook page.

The format of the drop in involved round the table discussions between members of the public and surgery representatives. Representatives from HWC recorded the key issues raised from the discussions that took place. The latter part of the drop in involved a panel of surgery staff answering questions raised by those in attendance. There were also feedback cards available for members of the public to leave their comments upon.

There were over 40 members of the public who attended with five doctors and the practice manager present as representatives from the surgery and six representatives from HWC.

During the meeting, it was mentioned that a meeting had taken place where the issue of the managed repeats methodology was discussed. HWC agreed to contact Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group and NHS England for more guidance on the process. HWC received the following information:

The CCG has decided to cease the practice of managed repeats by April 2018 in line with recommendations from the North East group of CCGs. It is anticipated that where possible this process will be replaced with the national system of repeat dispensing. This is where patients can access their medication, which have been preauthorised by the GP, directly from the pharmacy without having to place their prescription with the surgery every month. Leading up to April 2018 the medicine optimisation team will be supporting general practice surgeries to ensure they have in place robust repeat prescribing systems and processes in place.

At the end of the meeting the key issues raised were summarised by HWC and one of the doctors apologised to those present, saying that, on reflection, they could have managed the change better.

Analysis of the findings

The feedback recorded by HWC from members of the public at the drop in was analysed so the key issues could be identified. The key issues raised at this event reflected the main issues that were first brought to HWC attention. The following are the key issues raised by people on the change to the third party prescription ordering service:

Loss of patient choice

People feel the changes take away their choice to go to a pharmacy of their choosing to have their prescription needs fulfilled rather than having to go through the surgery. People prefer to go to the pharmacies in the town centre rather than travel up to the surgery which is not as accessible or convenient.

"People have said they trust their pharmacist and this has been taken away from them"

"I much prefer to order my medication from my pharmacy (Allison's) as the only 2 times I have ordered from the hospital mistakes have been made"

"I don't think this is working well you have took the patient's choice away from them. It wasn't broken and you certainly haven't fixed it"

Changes affect the most vulnerable

People were concerned that the most vulnerable will be particularly affected by the changes. Practically, getting to the surgery is challenging for some because the surgery is located at the top of a steep hill which has raised access issues.

"I can't get to the surgery and need Alison's"

"Issue of whether the vulnerable patients can contact GPs for repeat prescriptions"

No patient consultation

People feel that the changes have been poorly communicated by the surgery and that it has been imposed without consideration of public feeling or without first seeking public feedback. This has led to a breakdown of trust between patients and the surgery.

"Really disappointed and annoyed to find the decision has already been made and the points of view of the people have only been asked for afterward."

"I still cannot see why these changes have had to happen"

"they will do what they want not what we want"

Access to surgery services is difficult

There have been frustrations accessing the phone ordering prescription system around correct pronunciation of medicines and the increased numbers of people telephoning putting pressure on the phone system.

People have also voiced that it is difficult to access the on-line prescription ordering service and that not everyone is able to or is comfortable using online systems.

“Telephone system is not able to meet demand”

“I can order online but many cannot and have to spend ages on the phone or travel up to the hospital”

Conclusion

HWC had received over 45 contacts from the public about the changes in the way the Castlegate and Derwent Surgery would manage some prescription orders.

As a result HWC facilitated a drop in event where members of the public could share their views and learn more from surgery representatives about the rationale behind the change.

The drop in demonstrated how deeply those affected felt about the issues and gave them an opportunity to share their views and questions with the surgery staff in attendance.

All comments brought to HWC attention at the drop in have been analysed and form the basis of this report.

The main concerns people have shared with HWC are about the difficulties there are accessing the surgery and using the phone or on-line systems, the lack of communication on the changes and the loss of patient choice.

Recommendations

- To review the systems and processes in place which determine how significant changes are communicated to patients
- To make the findings of the planned review of the new system available to all patients

Sue Stevenson

Chief Operating Officer

Healthwatch Cumbria

26th April 2017