



# Enter & View

Boots Bodmin Pharmacy

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Details of visit

Service provider: Boots Bodmin Pharmacy

Service Address: 34 Fore Street Bodmin PL31 2HL

Date and time: 30th September 10am–12:30pm

Authorised representative: Nigel Oakes

## 1.2 Purpose of visit

This visit was conducted as part of a rolling programme of service visits across clinical service providers. Our goal was to observe the service in action, hear directly from patients, and make recommendations for improvement.

## 1.3 Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Cornwall would like to thank patients and staff for providing a warm welcome and their positive contribution to this Enter and View visit and the subsequent report.

## 1.4 Disclaimer

This report relates to findings observed on the specific date above and is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all patients and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time of the visit.

## 1.5 About Healthwatch Cornwall

Healthwatch Cornwall is an independent organisation committed to amplifying the voices of Cornwall's residents in the planning and delivery of health and social care services. Through public engagement, we gather their views and experiences with these services. We ensure these perspectives are represented in decision-making processes both locally and nationally, driven by the belief that community feedback is vital to improving standards of care.

## 1.6 What is Enter and View?

As a local Healthwatch we are authorised to "Enter and View" health and social care services through the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and Local Authorities Regulations 2013 (part 4). These services can include hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists, and pharmacies.

Enter and View visits are an opportunity to see services in action, listen to and understand the experiences of individuals who use them, and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement. The visits are organised based on feedback received about individual services or in response to themes identified in our research.

# 2 Visit Summary

## **Conversations with staff**

Healthwatch Cornwall spoke with the pharmacy/store manager, pharmacy technicians and dispensers

## **Conversations with patients**

Patients attending the pharmacy were asked about their experiences of the service

## **Observation of facilities**

Observations were made throughout the visit, focussing on the condition of the facilities, administrative procedures and patient experience.

# 3 Service Overview

The pharmacy is located within the Boots retail store, which is situated in Bodmin town centre. It is one of two pharmacies in the town and primarily dispenses medication prescribed by two large medical practices located nearby. The service dispenses approximately 4000 prescription items a week, along with many non-prescription medications. An on-site pharmacy first service is available to complete episodes of care for 7 common conditions following defined clinical pathways. The service does not currently have a substantive pharmacist in post, cover instead being provided by locums supplied via the Boots central pharmacy relief team.

# 4 Observations

The Boots store is in the town centre, close to several car parks, with additional limited on-street parking nearby. There were several signs attached to the front door displaying information about the services available in-store, where additional medical services could be accessed (for example the NHS 111 service) and safeguarding advice. The signage was informative and easy to read, though some signs were worn or displayed at inconsistent angles.

The pharmacy area was clean, tidy and appeared accessible, it is located towards the back of the store and patients must queue amongst the retail stands whilst waiting to be served.

Throughout the store there were signs inviting feedback via a QR code link, which was found to be working. Mobile phone reception was however extremely poor and there was no free wi-fi connection available. There were also several signs offering healthcare services such as health MOT and weight loss management.

Although there was seating available, this was not in the area where queues were formed, instead being arranged in a separate area. Patients were directed to these seats once they had been served and were awaiting items to be dispensed. The pharmacy remained busy throughout the visit, with queues regularly reaching over 15 patients. Queue times were up to 20 minutes, with some patients having to wait significantly longer for medication once they had been served.

All the staff on duty were busy and those that were dealing with patients were polite and respectful. Several patients expressed frustration about waiting times, and the staff responded in a calm tone and provided explanations regarding delays. Staff members provided advice on non-prescription medication and gave clear explanations.

Several patients were seen to be waiting for quite long periods after making a query. One patient reported waiting 30 minutes after being advised the pharmacist would check something. Another patient who had been in the queue for some while had to leave as they needed the toilet. On their return they had to rejoin the queue, which had by that point lengthened.

## 5 Patient Feedback

14 patients were asked about their experience of the service they had received:

### **Attitude of staff**

11 out of 14 patients commented positively about the staff. All said that the staff were friendly and 7 said that they were helpful. One patient had seen the duty pharmacist for an NHS first consultation and described them as 'amazing'. Another told us 'The staff here all seem well trained, they were lacking in people skills in the past, but things are much better now and you can tell they have had some good training in dealing with patients'

4 out of the 14 patients we spoke to told us that whilst there had been a problem during their visit, they didn't blame the staff, one patient commenting about the length of wait to be served said 'It's been a nightmare today, but the staff can't help it'. An elderly patient said 'The staff they have are wonderful'.

3 patients were less complimentary about the staff. One patient reported feeling unhappy with the interaction, stating 'It's shocking the way I have been treated today; they couldn't give my child what he needed and didn't explain what had gone wrong, I'm not at all happy'

Another patient said 'It's never good in here, I shouldn't be around people, and they have kept me waiting for ages now, I don't even know what the hold-up is and the person I spoke to was no help'

We were also told by one patient that they were 'fed up' with seeing staff completing what they regarded as 'non-essential' jobs and letting the queue build up.

### **Availability of medication**

5 out of 14 patients had experienced a problem with their prescribed medication. One told us that they had medication delivered for their husband, but a key item was missing, although there was a 'owing' note, which explained that it wasn't in stock. She had attended the pharmacy in person to try and source an alternative. At the point she spoke with us she had been advised the pharmacist was looking into it, but they had been waiting over half an hour.

Another patient reported that they hadn't got the correct strength of his medication, and he had been advised to try a different chemist. A third told us 'They didn't have my blood pressure tablets in stock, but they are hoping to get them soon, I'm running out of it tomorrow so I will have to take some of my husband's tablets, but I probably shouldn't'

A patient who enquired why their medication hadn't been delivered as it usually was, had been told that the store had 'No delivery drivers', they commented 'It would have been nice if I'd had a phone call telling me that and then I could have come in sooner'

### **Length of wait**

12 out of 14 patients were unhappy about the wait time and/or the length of the queue. Seven patients specifically commented that wait times had increased when two local pharmacies had recently closed, one telling us 'It's terrible since Asda (pharmacy) closed, all the people that went there now come here and the queues have doubled' Another commented 'When Bell lane (pharmacy) went, it was a real pain, there was closer parking and you never had to wait as long as you do now'.

A patient with mobility issues told us 'This queueing is so frustrating, I can't stand for too long, but you have to get used to it, what else can you do?' Another patient described the wait times as 'ridiculous' and added 'I had to queue for over 20 minutes, just to be told my prescription wasn't ready and that I should come back tomorrow'

One patient was unhappy about the queuing system, describing it as 'a free for all' specifically they told us 'There is no organised queue, it just snakes through the store and then some people try and join it in the wrong place, also you can't sit down as the chairs are all over the other way and you'd lose your place'

# 6 Staff Feedback

Three staff members were asked about their experience of working in the pharmacy.

A longstanding staff member described the working environment as 'lovely' they told us 'There is a real feeling of teamwork here, we all pull together and do our best for the patients' Another, who had more recently joined the team said 'It's very friendly here and the manager is so supportive' she added 'Although it's really busy, I love it and they give me time to study for a dispensing qualification'

One staff member described a 'lack of resource' on occasion which they said was frustrating as they could see how it affected the patients when they had to queue for long periods.

All three staff members commented on the adverse effect the closure of two local pharmacies had on wait times and stock availability.

# 7 Manager Feedback

The store manager was open and honest about the challenges that the pharmacy faced. They told us that they knew that patients regularly faced long waits, that the pharmacy sometimes struggled with providing pharmacy first services and that they had not had a pharmacist on site on some occasions. They were aware that complaints had been made regarding waiting times and stock availability but offered assurance that all complaints were addressed and responded to.

They told us that the pharmacy had recently had some staffing difficulties due to unplanned absences and sickness, which resulted in a delay to availability of medication. They were now however back to full staffing and had caught up with the dispensing and typically had medication ready within 4 days of the prescription being received.

They advised that the recent closure of two local pharmacies had led to them being a lot busier, the manager believed opening an additional pharmacy in the area could help reduce demand on existing services.

The manager reported that they had a strong working relationship with the two large GP surgeries in the town and had regular meetings with their practice management teams. That

recently had discussions with the local practices about the referral pathway both to and from the pharmacy and on the best use of pharmacy first services.

Although they did not currently have a permanent pharmacist, they did have a system to ensure they should always have locum cover, provided by the Boots pharmacist relief team and administered by the Boots pharmacist planner service.

They were concerned to hear that a staff member had told a patient that the store had no delivery drivers, as this was not the case.

## 8 Recommendations

Healthwatch Cornwall have offered some recommendations based on observations and feedback from patients and staff to improve experiences with the service.

- 1) Patients with mobility issues reported difficulty standing for long periods. Considering adjustments to seating arrangement and queue layout may help improve accessibility and reduce confusion during busy periods.
- 2) Many patients reported long waiting times. Exploring alternative dispensing methods, such as automation, may help reduce delays.
- 3) Some patients experienced delays due to medication not being in stock. Reviewing stock processes may help reduce repeat visits and support timely dispensing.
- 4) Several patients and staff reported challenges when a pharmacist was not available. Considering how to maintain consistent pharmacist cover may support continuity of services.
- 5) Staff reported occasional inconsistencies in information given to patients. Reviewing internal communication processes may help ensure key messages are delivered consistently.

## 9 Provider Response

Boots Bodmin Pharmacy welcomes the feedback provided by Healthwatch Cornwall and values the opportunity to review the observations and recommendations. We recognise the challenges highlighted, particularly around waiting times, stock

availability, and patient comfort, and we are committed to making improvements. The recent closure of two local pharmacies has significantly increased demand on our services, and while we have worked hard to maintain standards, we acknowledge that this has impacted patient experience. We are actively reviewing our processes to reduce delays. We will also look at how seating and queue arrangements can be adjusted to better support patients with mobility issues. Our team is dedicated to providing clear communication and a positive experience for all patients, and we appreciate the constructive input from Healthwatch Cornwall as we continue to enhance the service for our community.

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