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## **GP Surgeries' websites are useless if you need help in a hurry - thanks to NHS England!**

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Here's a question for those of us who still think of our GP's surgery as the front door to the NHS: How useful would you find your GP's website if, outside the Surgery's opening hours, you yourself needed medical help in a hurry, or if a family member or someone staying with you is clearly unwell and in distress?

You'll want to know two things: where is the nearest place that you can take someone who seems to need help urgently; and what can you tell from their symptoms about how urgent their need is.

Each of the four GP Surgeries in Penzance, where I live, has its own website, but they have much in common. On the home page of all of them you will find a text box that looks relevant: "Find urgent treatment centres".

Click on this text box and you will be taken to a page that belongs to NHS England. It is headlined: "Find urgent and emergency care services".

Look closely at this page, and others that it links to, and you will see that the words 'urgent treatment centres' do not appear in any of them!

What you do see below the headline on this page is the message: 'Where you can go for urgent and emergency care depends on how severe your injury or condition is.'

Carry on down this page and you come to a section headed: "For severe and life-threatening emergencies" which states: "Accident and emergency (A&E) is for serious injuries and life-threatening emergencies. These are things like heavy bleeding, choking and seizures."

"Things like" indeed! Can you imagine a 'thing' like heavy bleeding, or a 'thing' like choking, or a 'thing' like a seizure? This is casual, careless talk, not the precise clinical language that doctors use. And conspicuously missing from this list of 'things' are breathlessness and chest pain, which can indicate potentially fatal conditions, and, of course, the various symptoms of stroke.

Who, I want to know, is designing websites and writing for patients in this scandalously off-hand way? The managerial high-ups in NHS England and NHS Digital who commissioned the design and foisted the websites on the surgeries, must take some responsibility, as should the manufacturers of the website, Agilio Software, who should be keeping an eye on how their product is used. And what about the partners in the surgeries, doctors who paid Agilio good money to create the website but carelessly failed to test it thoroughly before putting their names to it?

As you can see, searching for an urgent treatment centre can take you fruitlessly through quite a few web pages. Only if you're a patient of one of the surgeries – Sunnyside Surgery – will you come across a notice telling you that there is actually an Urgent Treatment Centre in Penzance, at West Cornwall Hospital, less than ten minutes walk away from all four surgeries. But it also tells you that the UTC is open until midnight: sadly the doors are closed much earlier than that nowadays!

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