

Telephones

One of the big talking points in connection with the surgery at the moment is obviously the difficulty patients are experiencing getting through on the phone. We appreciate how frustrating it is to wait in a queue or worse continually get the engaged signal. Contrary to what some have said we do not have a new telephone system. The problem is the sheer number of patients trying to get through. We are seeing an unprecedented demand for services which is reflected nationally as people have delayed contacting their doctor during the pandemic. We already have 10 incoming lines and dedicated outgoing lines as obviously the doctors are doing a high level of telephone triage at the moment. We cannot increase the number of lines without recruiting additional staff to answer them and we are already experiencing difficulty in recruiting receptionists to replace those who have left. We are obviously looking to increase staff and at other options to address this problem. We have increased staffing in our admin team to deal with the volume of emails we are receiving.

Dispensary

In line with the increase in workload our Dispensary team are also receiving a lot of enquiries and patients are reporting difficulty getting through to them. We have decided to increase the opening hours of Dispensary and the hours between which they will answer the telephone to 8am – 6.30pm. Unfortunately we cannot do this until we have recruited additional staff. We will let you know when we have been able to institute this change.

Online appointment booking

We do not offer online appointment booking at the moment. We have never offered nurse appointments online. The reason for this is that the length of nurse appointments differs depending on the type of treatment and not all nurses do all treatment options. We stopped offering doctor appointments online at the start of the pandemic as did all surgeries as we were advised by NHS England to triage by video call or telephone. We have kept this system as we believe it offers the safest option for our patients and staff. We are a large and busy surgery. We already have patients coming in for nurse appointments, blood tests, midwife appointments, ENT appointments. It would be impossible to observe social distancing within the surgery and the waiting rooms if we opened up all the doctor appointments as they were before the pandemic. We will review this following the Government's decision on whether the restrictions will end on 19th July. Notwithstanding that our doctors still ask patients to come in to see them following triage if they feel it is necessary. Yesterday 40 patients were invited in for a face to face consultation with a doctor.

Telephone appointments

When you call and speak to a receptionist they will ask you briefly what the problem is. They don't do this because they think they are clinically trained or because they are nosy or all the other jibes directed at them. They do it because the doctors tell them to do it. This is so that the doctors can have an idea of the urgency of the call and can plan their workload accordingly. It also gives an idea of whether the patient needs an urgent call from the duty doctor that day or can wait until their usual doctor is next available. Speaking to your own doctor obviously provides better continuity of care.

Our doctors are currently dealing with an unsustainable demand for their services. It is common now for, particularly our duty doctors, to work 13 hour days. Our staff, have been amazing throughout the pandemic but are exhausted and still trying to give their best sometimes, sadly, in the face of hostility and abuse. Everyone has already gone above and beyond to assist our successful vaccination programme with thousands of patients vaccinated.

We hope the above explains some of the difficulties we are facing and addresses some of the myths. Once again we apologise for the difficulty you are facing in getting through to the surgery and for any inconvenience caused by the way it is necessary for us to work at the moment. We have been proud of the fact that we have always been highly regarded by the vast majority of our patients and we look forward to your support and understanding at this difficult time.

We regret that we cannot respond to comments on our Facebook posts.