

May 2022

Dear Patients,

The past 2 years have been like no other, with so many of us affected directly by COVID, either through having to self-isolate, catching COVID itself, or sadly losing members of our family or close friends to this global pandemic. As a General Practice, we have been at the forefront of helping our patients, as well as helping in a very successful roll-out of the COVID vaccines with our Primary Care Network (and we are very grateful for your cooperation in this).

Unfortunately, the extra workload created by COVID could not have come at a worse time for anyone involved in healthcare – and General Practice is no exception.

Although often an overused word, General Practice is in ‘crisis.’

Rest assured that we remain committed to the health and welfare of our patients, who continue to be at the core of everything we do. We hope to briefly outline some of the challenges we are all facing through this letter, as well as offering practical things our patients can do to help the service for everyone.

General practice has been open for business throughout the pandemic and we want to reassure you that we are still here, although you may be seen in different ways such as by telephone, face to face, video and online consultations. Even during the pandemic face to face appointments continued to be conducted.

These changes in how we consult have been necessary to protect patients and staff from the further spread of COVID

During the past 18 months General Practice has seen a significant increase in workload. In March 2021 over 28.5 million appointments were provided in England, 2.3 million more than in pre-pandemic March 2019 and significantly 5 million more than in February 2021. This is at a time of ongoing significant decrease in the numbers of GPs and practices, The number of GP partners in

England has fallen by 22% since 2015 and 98 practices closed in England last year.

As we mentioned above, while trying to cope with this increase in demand and limited resources, general practice has been the core of the highly successful COVID Vaccination Programme – delivering the majority of doses of which we are incredibly proud. Since September 2020, our GPs, Nurses and other clinical staff have been vaccinating patients at the Birkenhead Medical Building, in nursing & care homes and in patients' own homes, often working in the evenings and at weekends.

And just like you, many of us have been affected by COVID. We have lost family and friends and have had children isolating at home while we were trying to work.

However, our commitment to serving our patients has never changed.

This increase in workload has meant that you may for example wait longer in the queue on the phone or for a response from your GP, as well as taking its toll on our tired workforce.

We are just as frustrated as many of you are about this seeming change in service – this is not where we want to be – but we simply do not have the resources or funding to match the levels of expectation that some of our patients have. Regrettably, this has led to a rise in negative, and sadly abusive, behaviour toward our staff. Not only is this distressing to all our staff, but it also means that more often than not we have to divert resources to dealing with this rather than focussing on healthcare. We know most of you do not need reminding that we have a zero-tolerance policy on abuse towards our staff. Please remember that we are all human and rely on the respect and understanding of all of our patients.

Thank you for your continued support and we understand that at times it can be frustrating, but please bear with us as we are doing all that we can to work through this. Your health is of the highest importance to us and we are working to ensure you are seen as quickly as possible.

So, what are we asking you, our patients, to do?

Be Reassured

We are here. We are working in different ways than before the pandemic and with a wider workforce of healthcare professionals, which includes, pharmacies, social prescribers, minor injuries centres. If you have symptoms you are worried about, please do contact us.

Be Respectful and Kind

Please respect that GPs, nurses and practice staff are working harder than ever to provide healthcare. We have a zero-tolerance policy to abuse from patients.

Be Self-Sufficient

If you or your children have a minor rash, signs of a cold, or other minor symptoms try home remedies, look for advice from www.nhs.uk or ask for help from a pharmacist. Only seek an appointment if you have serious symptoms or are advised to do so by a pharmacist.

Be Prepared

Keep simple remedies including paracetamol or ibuprofen at home. Order your repeat medications well in advance. Think about signing up to the NHS App or other Apps provided through your practice.

Be Thoughtful

Practices are receiving a massive increase in complaints. Each complaint takes staff away from patient care. Before complaining, think whether it is appropriate – is it due to an error or mistake which practices should know about to change or improve their services? Or is it relating to the significant reduction in the current capacity to provide services by practices or hospitals and therefore no change is possible?

Be Covid Aware

If you develop COVID like symptoms, please do not attend the GP surgery in person. Please arrange a COVID test and if you are unwell and need to speak to a GP then have a telephone consultation initially. Be aware of current guidance. Look at www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19. And please always wear a mask in any NHS setting.

Be Patient

All health services have been significantly affected by the pandemic and unfortunately your GP cannot influence this. Only if there has been a significant change in your condition can we get an appointment or investigation brought forward. Our telephone lines remain extremely busy and your call will be held in a queue. However we have at least 4 – 6 receptionists answering calls throughout the day so please be patient and we will answer you.

Be Cancer Aware

We are concerned that the number of patients presenting with symptoms of possible cancer or other significant illnesses has reduced during the pandemic. If you or someone you know have worrying symptoms, then please do not delay but make an appointment as soon as possible. For more information, see www.nhs.uk/conditions/cancer/symptoms.

Be Assured

We are still here for you when you are ill and need us. Late presentation of severe illness, including mental health, is harder to treat so do contact us if your condition is not resolving or you need to discuss worsening of a pre-existing health problem – general practice is open and here to help.

We send our sincere sympathies to everyone who has been directly and indirectly affected by the pandemic. We understand and feel the impact too.

We hope that this letter has helped to explain some of the pressures that general practice is under. Please continue to work with us to protect services and patient care.

From all the GPs and Staff at Church Road Medical Practice.