



Grey Gable Surgery
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Autumn 2021

Dear Patient

We are writing to update you regarding the situation with appointments. Thank you for your patience at this difficult time for the NHS - we are anticipating another very busy winter period across the NHS for primary care, secondary care and the ambulance service.

We have noticed that there have been a small number of patients who have been disappointed that they cannot directly book a face to face appointment with a doctor. The reasons for this are as follows:

1. We need to manage our appointments appropriately ensuring that patients who require a face to face appointment are offered one in an appropriate timescale for their needs.
2. The only way to determine this is for a clinician to speak to the patient first to establish the reason for the contact - it is not possible for our receptionists to be able to judge this as they are not medically trained. If we enabled a small number of appointments to be directly bookable by patients these would quickly be filled and the wait for these may not be clinically safe.
3. We need to ensure the safety of our waiting room as there are many vulnerable patients attending the surgery and we need to avoid large numbers of people in a small space.
4. We have done extremely well to have minimal staff sickness throughout the pandemic. If there was an outbreak of Covid 19 within our staff, the service would be put at risk. For example, if members of the dispensary could not work then there would be an issue with supplying your medication. If reception members are off sick then there will be no-one to answer the phones.
5. How we are running our service is consistent with local and national guidelines. Within our Primary Care Network of seven practices in the local area the same system is being operated.

What we are doing:

1. Continually reviewing our policies and procedures
2. In June of this year the GPs saw 433 patients face to face and made 1695 phone calls while our nursing team saw 1011 patients. The number of contacts keeps rising every week.
3. Monday 9/9/2021 we answered approximately 400 calls - this is a higher volume than we have ever experienced and put our reception and administration team under huge pressure.
4. Throughout the pandemic we have always seen patients face to face where clinically necessary. We have been guided by local and national standard operating procedures

5. We as GPs will listen to you and if together with yourself we feel that a face to face appointment is going to be needed then we will arrange it.

What you can do to help yourself, your family, other patients and the surgery is :

1. Please appreciate that the receptionists are unable to book you directly for a face to face appointment. You will need to speak to the GP first. The next available slot will be offered to you. If there is an exceptional circumstance (eg hearing impairment) then the receptionists will send a message to the GP to confirm how they should proceed.
2. Please use open access appropriately. This is for urgent on the day issues which cannot wait for a routine appointment. Please call before 10am each day to ensure a call back that day. Again if the clinician feels you need to be seen then they will arrange this.
3. A very small number of patients have been verbally aggressive on the phone to our reception staff. This is not acceptable and upsetting for our staff who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to keep the service running. They have all had their own personal challenges in coping with working throughout the pandemic and for that we are extremely grateful.
4. If the GP advises you to book a follow up within a certain time frame please leave this amount of time before booking in again as a number of problems will get better with time.
5. Issues with regards to the hospital and outpatient clinics are out of our control. We are as frustrated as you but our staff are not able to chase up appointments. Hence we ask you to call the appointments line at the hospital 01562 512312 for an update or you could speak to your consultant's secretary. If there are any issues with delays we suggest you speak to the PALS (patient advisory liason service) via the hospital switchboard 01905 763333.

Thank you for your continued help and support at what is an unsettling time for all of us working in the health service.

Dr Rahul Unnikrishnan



Dr Donna Montford

