

Worcestershire and Herefordshire Local Medical Committees Ltd

Our Ref: GF/LJC/6174

18th May 2021

Dear Patients,

There has been further lifting of some Covid-19 restrictions as part of step 3 of the Government's Roadmap. This means that individuals are now able to meet indoors in groups of up to six people or two households and many hospitality and entertainment venues are now able to reopen to the public. It is understandable therefore that you might expect to be able to access your GP practice in the "old way" and you may feel some frustration around delays in appointment times and use of different systems such as online consultations and triage by telephone before the practice decides how best to manage your health concern. Unfortunately, some patients are directing their frustration, and in some cases, anger towards practice teams who are doing their very best to keep on top of patient demand. This is demoralising for staff who are now understandably tired after a year of having to adapt the way in which we deliver care to patients as a direct result of the pandemic.

We are proud to note that all practices across Worcestershire have continued to provide care for patients throughout the pandemic. We were instructed by NHS England to operate in a manner that meant we must talk to all patients first of all by telephone before deciding on the type of appointment that was needed. Our government have also been very keen for GPs to use more online consulting methods even prior to the pandemic and this push was accelerated during the last year and did enable practices to provide care remotely and safely for the benefit of everyone. We are acutely aware though that accessing general practice in this way does not work for some individuals. As such we have always taken this into consideration when deciding how best to assess and treat you.

Sadly, as we emerge from this pandemic, it is clear that we remain in a difficult position. Waiting lists for hospital treatment have increased considerably putting an additional strain on general practice as we try to support and manage those patients in the community. There has been a substantial increase in demand for appointments of all types in recent months and our practices continue to roll out the covid vaccination programme across our county for the benefit of our population. The vaccination programme should take the pressure off our hospitals so that they can begin to tackle the backlog as fewer patients will require admission and treatment for covid related illness. We also want to ensure that those with long term conditions receive monitoring and their usual checks as we recover.

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Simply put, we cannot meet the demands on our services that we are now facing without making use of the different consultation types available to us. One model is not better than another and your GP must be trusted to decide on the most appropriate method of consulting with you. The GP contract states that practices should meet the reasonable needs of their patients in a manner determined by the practice. Even as restrictions ease, Covid is still circulating and new variants remain a concern. Therefore, to continue protecting patients, we will still have to limit how many patients can be in the surgery at any one time. We will continue to offer face to face appointments where this is necessary and appropriate but we will not put patients and staff at risk by returning to crowded waiting rooms at this stage.

Currently, we find ourselves in the unenviable position where we must prioritise care in order that those who most need it can access it promptly. That means that you may need to wait longer if your condition does not require immediate attention. Please consider contacting your local pharmacy, accessing the NHS website for advice on minor conditions and allowing a few days at least for minor self-limiting conditions to settle before contacting your GP. Always seek help if you are worried that symptoms are not settling as expected within a reasonable time scale. Queries around hospital waiting times should be directed to the hospital and not your GP as we are not provided with this information. The way in which we work will continue to adjust as time progresses.

Recent data released by NHS England showed that over 451,000 appointments were delivered by practices across Worcestershire and Herefordshire during March. Over 241,000 of those appointments were carried out face to face, and a further 3,191 patients were visited at home. National appointment data published in May showed that there were 3 million more appointments across England (up 11%) in March this year, than the same time in 2019 prior to the pandemic. General practice is fully open for business.

We ask for your understanding and support as we continue to aim to provide the very best quality of care for patients across our County. Our staff have continued to care for you whilst facing their own personal challenges this year. Without your support, patience and understanding at this time of increased demand on our service, our traditional model of general practice will not survive the fall out of this pandemic. With your support we can recover fully and continue to be here for you when you need us.

Yours sincerely



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