

Willington Surgery – Oct 2021



We are acutely aware that patients are currently frustrated with trying to get an appointment with a GP. We thought we would try and explain some of the issues that we are currently facing.

Within this information you can find:

1 – How many face-to-face appointments are being offered?

2 - Why are the telephone lines so busy?

3 – Could we get more staff?

4 - How you can help us?

Currently we have approximately 9500 patients and we offer around 900 appointments per week with a clinician, i.e., a doctor, physio, or clinical pharmacist. We offer a further 400 appointments with a practice nurse/HCA/Phlebotomist. Each day the demands for appointments far exceeds the number of appointments we can offer, so we need to manage these appointments carefully.

We are reviewing the number of face-to-face appointments vs telephone appointments that we offer on a weekly basis. However, patient/practice staff safety, as well as a clinical need, means that patient preference cannot always be offered but this would be our aim. In October we are at 52% face to face appointments for GP's.

1- How many face-to-face appointments are being offered?

There are many reasons why we are currently having lower numbers of face-to-face appointments than before the pandemic:

- ✚ We are trying to reduce risk. Many patients who telephone the surgery have a cough or fever etc. which are possible indicators of Covid-19. Cases of Covid-19 are currently high, and we need to protect vulnerable patients visiting the surgery as well as staff members. We have been following NHS England guidance which enables us to reduce this risk. If, having spoken to a patient, a clinician feels that they are needing to be seen face-to-face, they will book you in accordingly. Many problems can be dealt with effectively over the telephone.
- ✚ We have a finite number of appointments ensuring those with the clinical need can be seen face-to-face if clinically necessary.
- ✚ We have made available face-to-face routine appointments for the reception team to book directly without the need for telephone triage. This is due to some ailments

automatically requiring an examination, so a receptionist with the support of the doctors can advise if they feel this is appropriate.

- ✚ Although isolation guidance has been relaxed for most of society, healthcare workers are still following strict isolation procedures. This means that if a member of staff has someone in their household who tests positive for Covid-19, that member of staff must stay or work from home for up to 10 days. If this is a clinician, this has an impact on the number of patients that can be seen face-to-face.
- ✚ This has a knock-on effect for reception staff who are not only trying to answer incoming calls but are also rearranging pre-booked appointments, often at short notice. To reduce this additional workload, the booking of future routine appointments is restricted to ensure unnecessary rearranging. We are constantly looking at this as things change.
- ✚ GP surgeries are required to ensure strict infection control procedures are followed. Consulting and treatment rooms need to be cleaned and all surfaces wiped down in between each patient as well as a change of PPE. This all takes additional time and resources.
- ✚ We do also have to remember that many patients prefer a telephone call rather than a face-to-face appointment as they are often at work or it fits in with their lifestyle.

2- Why are the telephone lines so busy?



We recognise that the phone lines are extremely busy, which demonstrates how much pressure the receptionists are currently under. Please be patient and kind; they are working tremendously hard, and they are working to the instructions of the GPs. We installed in April 2021 a new cloud-based telephone system which gave us more lines in and out of the building. In October we answered **25378** calls in 21 working days.

Some of the reasons why the phones are busy are:

- ✚ Patient enquiries regarding covid-19 vaccinations and the covid-passport. Each day we receive many calls relating to when patients will receive vaccine appointments or how to access the NHS app or how to book an appointment.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/book-or-manage-a-booster-dose-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccine/>

- ✚ Additional enquiries regarding hospital waiting lists due to delays in operations. These patients are requiring additional GP help, care, and appointments while they wait for the backlog to reduce.
- ✚ Every time the news/papers/social media report any sort of health-related story, patients ring their GP surgeries for advice and guidance. Over the last 18 months there has been a lot of media regarding the pandemic, which subsequently increases telephone traffic. For example:

- Patients needing a covid passport to travel.
- Covid Booster vaccination eligibility
- The relaxing of isolation guidance
- Do I need a PCR test?
- ✚ There has been a national blood bottle shortage. Patients have been contacting the surgery asking if their blood test is urgent or when they can get a blood test appointment. Many appointments have been cancelled as a result; all of this requires receptionist time. This has thankfully now been sorted.
- ✚ Many calls to the surgery are generally taking longer to deal with. There is an unprecedented demand for appointments, and it takes time explaining the reasons why there are no appointments are left that day, or that you will need to ring back at 8am the following day. Prior to booking an appointment, receptionists are also required to ask covid-19 related questions.

The phone lines are under regular review and we have recently increased the number of lines into the practice to help meet demand. We have also moved over to the Medicines Order line (MOL) for repeat prescription requests. This will hopefully reduce the amount of phone calls coming into the practice. We are also constantly reviewing the appointment system to try make it better.

Our reception team would love to give an appointment to everyone who calls, as this would improve their working environment but this is simply not possible.

3- Could we get more staff?

If only it was that easy:

Clinical staff

The setting up of the vaccination hub at the beginning of this year is having a massive impact on our staffing levels. Whilst we had been very fortunate to secure a large number of volunteers, along with other surgeries involved, we have had to supply our share of GPs, Nurses and administration staff to help deliver the vaccination programme.

We have desperately tried to get some locum cover to help ease the pressure, but unfortunately, there is a national shortage of GPs, plus GPs with years of experience retiring. We have managed to secure two locum GP to support the surgery. Although this is still a shortfall of what we require at this moment with the current demands, it goes a little way in bolstering the appointment availability.

Reception Staff

The role of a receptionist is a complex one. It takes approximately 8 weeks of intensive training to become a receptionist, and a further 6 months before they feel confident enough to be able to deal with the medical terminology and majority of queries that come in on any given day, so recruiting temporary staff is not an option.

Over the last year, we have increased the number of receptionists answering the telephone at any one time. We have employed a couple of members of staff to help with ringing patients who do not have a mobile phone (and therefore no text facility) to invite them for the vaccines and other appointments. Currently we have 3 new members of the team under 6 months and are taking on another team member in November.

4- How you can help us!



✚ Can I self-help first? Contact your local pharmacy, look at healthy lifestyles. Many programs are online to help with getting a healthier lifestyle.

- ✚ Symptoms which could be Covid 19 – get a PCR test via www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test (a lateral flow test is not sufficient if you have symptoms)
- ✚ Need a covid passport- ring 119, we cannot supply paper copies or go to: www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-covid-pass
- ✚ If you cannot see your Covid-19 vaccine on your app and you were not vaccinated at the Derby Arena Primary Care Vaccine Hub (booked through the surgery), then you need to contact 119. Adding your details to our system will not show on the NHS app.
- ✚ Covid Booster queries – invitations are sent by NHSE approx. 26 weeks after your 2nd vaccine. Please do not chase unless it is over 28 weeks since your 2nd vaccine, you can chase by calling 119.
- ✚ Covid vaccine queries, please check the NHS website for information first. www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-booster-vaccine/
- ✚ Covid Travel guidance – we are unable to offer advice on travel requirements during covid – www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-abroad-from-england-during-coronavirus-covid-19
- ✚ Need the Contraceptive pill? Go to www.sh24.org.uk – this is suitable for 16+ years
- ✚ Self-referral for anxiety <https://www.derbyshirehealthcareft.nhs.uk/services/talking-mental-health-derbyshire/contact-us-refer-yourself>
- ✚ A query not an appointment request- try ringing in the afternoon when lines are quieter
- ✚ We may have the answer to your query on our website which is regularly updated.

I hope that this goes some way to explaining the challenging circumstances our staff are currently facing. Please show respect to all staff and treat them with kindness. Although it might look like our waiting room has very few patients sitting in it, this is to protect you and your loved ones, and an empty waiting area doesn't mean no face-to-face appointments it just means we are running to time. Whether it is our clinical staff, our receptionists, or our administration team, we are all working extremely hard, and we are all incredibly proud to be working with the NHS.

Thank you for your continued support
From all the team at Willington surgery