

Over the last year the surgery has had to rapidly change systems and adapt normal working patterns to cope with the demands of COVID. We have tried our very best to ensure decisions have put the safety of all our patients and staff first. We have read with concern some of the social media posts which have been hurtful and would like to respond. We are always open to constructive criticism and will always try to respond appropriately to justifiable concerns raised. Our Patient Participation Group is still functioning and we would ask you to liaise with them via email at nnccg.c84077@nhs.net or contact our Practice Manager on 01623 550254 to provide any feedback that you feel would be useful. Channelling your feedback through these routes helps us to amend our systems where patterns emerge. Often individual complaints that are not fed to us through these channels are hard to investigate and misrepresent events.

Despite the immense challenges of the pandemic we have increased patients' options to seek help. For example, we have maintained face-to-face appointments where appropriate, telephone calls, video calls, email contact and submission of photographs throughout the last year. We have had to limit the number of staff and patients in the building in line with national guidelines to keep vulnerable patients safe. This has meant that we could not have a waiting room full of patients or a queue of patients at the front door, as we would have done in the past. Since many issues can be sorted over the telephone we have needed to speak to every caller to determine whether there was a clinical need to attend the practice and, put them and us at risk or we could safely deal with them at home. If it was felt that patients needed to be seen this has happened and this will continue to happen. The timescales were decided based on clinical need. We have not enjoyed the sudden changes to our healthcare service but are happy that NHS England has now suggested we may offer more clinically appropriate face-to-face appointments as this is something we have already been doing over the last few weeks. So there is actually very little that we need to change in light of the recent guidance, however we need to continue to prioritise keeping everyone safe so please DO NOT attend the surgery if you have symptoms of COVID, such as breathlessness, fever and cough or are unsure of any significant recent contact. In this instance a telephone assessment will be undertaken and then if you need to be seen face-to-face you will be brought down in a safe manner. We will continue to spread face-to-face appointments throughout the day so that we can ensure minimal patients are sitting in the waiting room at any one time. All of these changes mean we continue to offer more assessments than ever before and with the activity spread throughout the day this enables us to keep numbers to a minimum throughout the day and maintain everybody's safety.

Our receptionists will continue to ask you for a quick outline of what your clinical problem is. This is only to ensure you are booked into the correct type of appointment and does not mean that they are replacing a doctor assessing you as has been alleged in the press over the weekend. Our receptionists are doing a difficult job on the frontline and the questions they ask are to assist you and we ask that you show your respect and be open with them.

In order to ensure the correct patients get the best possible care we can manage, we have already been automatically offering face-to-face appointments in certain situations. For example, over the last few weeks we have introduced automatic face-to-face appointments for the following groups:-

- All children <1yr
- Any breast lumps

- Any testicular lumps
- Any unexplained vaginal bleeding or discharge
- Any other problem in an intimate area that needs examining

We will now plan to extend that to include:-

- All children
- Anyone who has had several telephone appointments for the same problem and an examination is needed
- Anyone with significant abdominal pain

If you are unsure if you need to be seen face-to-face you can opt for a telephone appointment and the doctor can always decide whether they need to see you in which case they will arrange this for you. If you request a face-to-face appointment and it is unclear if this is really needed it may be that you are contacted by the doctor first on the telephone so that a joint decision can be made on how to progress

It is important to remember how much can safely be done for you without seeing you and sometimes it is worth having blood tests done before being seen face-to-face. For example, simple skin complaints can still often be dealt with by sending photographs in. It is also so important that we all continue to take responsibility for our own health and self-care whenever possible. Please see below for further information on self-care.

www.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk/change4life

You can also download the app from the app store or Google Play

<https://patient.info/health>

We currently have more doctors working at the surgery and more appointments than ever before but demand at this time is incredibly high across the NHS as we try to recover from the pandemic and restore all services. It is therefore extremely important that we work together to ensure that everyone can be seen when needed. Please remember any musculoskeletal problem can be booked to see a physiotherapist at the surgery face to face, self-care can often be tried before contacting the surgery and all your blood results can be directly viewed if you sign up to the NHS app or SystemOnline. You can access the NHS App services from the browser on your desktop or laptop computer; to find out more go to www.nhs.uk/app

You can download on the App Store or get it on Google Play.

If you wish to use SystemOnline please speak to one of the receptionists or email the surgery at nccg.c84077@nhs.net to request access.