

A message to our patients about appointments

The Gloucestershire Local Medical committee has produced an information sheet for patients regarding the current issues faced by General Practices.

We understand that when you are unwell or worried, you want help as soon as possible. We feel the same – our whole team wants to support you quickly and safely when you need care.

General practice works within a limited budget. This means there is a fixed amount of funding available, and practices must carefully manage it to provide as many appointments as possible for patients. Decisions must be made about using this funding to have the right mix of staff, such as GPs, Advanced Nurse Practitioners, Nurses, pharmacists, first contact physios, Mental health specialists and social prescribers, so patients can be seen by the most appropriate person.

To keep patients safe, practices also need to balance different types of appointments, including:

- urgent, same day appointments for acute problems
- book ahead appointments for non-urgent concerns
- follow-ups and routine reviews for long-term conditions such as asthma or diabetes

When you contact the practice, your concern is clinically assessed so we can decide how best to help you, who is most appropriate to deal with your request and how quickly you need to be seen. This may mean that:

- The practice can deal with your request remotely (for example, issuing a prescription or giving advice)
- You are signposted to another appropriate service, such as a community pharmacy, physiotherapy, minor injuries or A&E
- You are offered an appointment at the surgery

If your concern is assessed as non-urgent, you may be asked to wait for the next available routine appointment, including taking into account continuity of care for patients benefitting from seeing a specific clinician. If it is assessed as more urgent, you will be given a suitable appointment, which may be with a clinician other than a GP.

We understand that being asked to wait can feel frustrating, especially if you are worried. However, clinically prioritising requests helps ensure that patients who need urgent care that day can be seen safely.

Sometimes patients agree their problem is not urgent but still feel unhappy about waiting. When non-urgent problems are seen sooner than clinically needed, it reduces the number of urgent appointments available and can lead to longer waits overall.

Across Gloucestershire in April:

- 44.6% of patients were seen on the same day they contacted their practice
- 71% were seen within two weeks
- For some non-urgent concerns, where it was safe to do so, around 6% of patients had appointments booked four weeks or more ahead

We ask patients to be understanding of the clinical judgement used to decide safe waiting times. When we suggest support from other parts of the NHS – such as pharmacies or local community and voluntary services – this advice is given carefully and often allows you to get help more quickly.

If you would like to support general practice to improve the care it is able to provide to patients, you may wish to contact your local MP. How general practice is funded and organised has a direct impact on how easily patients can get appointments. You could consider highlighting:

- The need for fairer funding for general practice. General practice manages most NHS patient contacts (around 90%) but receives a relatively tiny share of NHS funding (around 7%). Better funding supports more appointments and continuity of care (being able to see the same GP).
- The need for flexibility for practices to organise care locally and to consider smaller and rural practices - so GPs do not have to spend time reviewing routine online requests instead of seeing patients face to face when demand is high.

By working together, we can help make sure that everyone gets the right care, at the right time. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

Patient parking

We acknowledge that parking is often difficult around the surgery. However, there have been a couple of incidents this month where parked cars have been damaged and no-one has reported the incident to reception staff for car insurance details. Please inform reception if you damage another car whilst parking in the surgery road.

Staff updates

Reminder message from Dr Nikki Hodgkins (also shared in the June bulletin):

“I wanted to let patients know that I will be leaving Campden Surgery in mid-July due to family reasons. It has been a real privilege to care for the patients at Campden Surgery and to be part of such a dedicated team. I am very grateful for the kindness and support shown by patients and colleagues over the past five years and I wish everyone all the very best for the future.”

We welcome Dr James Walker, working 3 days per week, and Hayley, our new Medical Receptionist, who both started in June. We also welcome Emma Eccleston, Technology & Digital Inclusion Social Prescribing Link Worker (North Cotswolds). Emma is available for appointments to support patients with using NHS technology systems. Please book with reception.