



Catherines Well, Milton Abbas, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 0AT

Dear Patients,

General practice is busier than we have ever known it, so we think it is important that we are honest with you about what to expect from us in the current climate. The number of people requesting an appointment has been rising month on month and we do not have the capacity to see everyone as quickly as they would like. We have increased the number of both doctors and nurses in the last few years, but demand continues to rise.

We would like patients to read this and understand that we are doing our best and understand the ways in which patients can help us.

### **Why are we seeing higher demand for our service and why may it take a little longer to see a GP for a routine appointment?**

- Some patients avoided coming to see us during the peak months of the pandemic, due to fear of catching Covid-19 and supporting the advice to protect the NHS and stay at home. A lot of patients now feel more comfortable about coming into the surgery especially now that a lot of them have been vaccinated.
- An increase in patients who are struggling with poor mental health. Symptoms of depression and anxiety have increased as people have felt isolated, with less access to activities and support networks.
- During the peaks of Covid-19 some routine procedures were paused, which has created a delay for some hospital services and an NHS backlog. We feel the effect of this, for example a patient is awaiting a procedure which has been postponed, their pain increases, their mood dips and who is there to support them while they wait? We are.
- Unplanned staffing absences. Our team is also affected by self-isolation, awaiting a PCR result for themselves or looking after a child who has a positive result. While we manage this by having some staff work remotely at home, this is not always feasible and will have an impact on the number of appointments we can offer.

### **How can patients help us?**

- Together we can stay healthy by making small changes, see [www.nhs.uk/better-health](http://www.nhs.uk/better-health) for more help and ideas. Minor illness often gets better with self-help and does not require treatment. Consider using the NHS website or your local pharmacy in Blandford or Dorchester for advice if you have mild symptoms.
- The job of a GP is far more than the part that patients see which is speaking to and seeing patients. Throughout the day our GPs support other health professionals and our registrar, manage blood test and other results, process referrals, review hospital letters, liaise with hospital colleagues, GP training... the list continues... and it is difficult to fit it all in. We have a multi-disciplinary team of health care professionals to complement our team of GPs – Nurses, Nurse Practitioner and Physiotherapist. It may be more appropriate that you speak to one of these types of health professionals rather than a GP. For example, if you have knee pain our reception team may book you directly in with the Physio because there may be no need to see the GP first, or if you have a chest infection you may see our Nurse Practitioner. This helps to ensure that our GP appointments are available for those patients that do need to see a GP.

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- Our clinicians have been and continue to see patients face to face when needed. Not all patients need to be seen face to face and not all patients want to be seen face to face.
- Cancel your appointment if you no longer need it which means that we can offer it to someone else.
- Our telephone call volume is exceptionally high from 08.30 to 09.30 and 14.00 to 15.00 everyday, so for non-urgent queries or to order your repeat prescriptions we suggest that you call outside of these times.
- If you have been asked to have a non-urgent appointment with a clinician to discuss your blood test results, try not to worry. If there was an urgency to any abnormal results, the clinician processing them would have highlighted this. It is okay to wait a few weeks to discuss mildly abnormal results.
- Be patient with us. We are trying our best.
- If a member of staff has done a brilliant job, let them know or even send an email/letter of thanks. We share these with our whole team, and it can be extremely uplifting to know you are making a difference.

A lot of our staff have worked on their days off and at the weekends to help support the Covid-19 vaccination/booster and flu programme. We need to also protect and support our staff. We work for a GP practice, but we are also patients. We understand ourselves the frustration of having to wait to speak to a clinician, but we also understand why there might be a wait.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Thank you also for your patience and understanding during this challenging time.

*Dr Longley, Dr Rees, Dr Shutt and Dr Woodcock*

*February 2022*