



Dear Patients,

The number of patients 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. General practice is busier than we have ever known it and our patients contact us mostly via the telephone, which means that there are often longer waits at peak times. I think it is important that we are honest about what to expect from us in the current climate. I 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 are you waiting so long on the phone to speak to someone?**

- 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 with the easing of restrictions especially now that a lot of them have been vaccinated.
- An increase in patients presenting with poor mental health. Symptoms of depression and anxiety have increased as people have felt isolated, with less access to activities and support networks.
- COVID-19 queries, especially about symptoms and the vaccination/booster rollout. GP practices are not the primary host of these vaccines, patients can book their booster or 3<sup>rd</sup> vaccination (immunosuppressed patients) online or by calling 119, otherwise we will contact you when you are eligible and if we have a clinic.
- Flu vaccination queries: we will contact you if you are eligible.
- 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 try to 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 and how quickly we can answer the phones.
- We don't have all the phone lines nor the Call Handlers available to answer every call immediately although we are currently recruiting more Call Handlers to answer patient calls.

## How can patients help us?

- Together we can stay healthy by choosing well  
<https://www.leedscg.nhs.uk/health/healthy-living/winter-health/>  
Minor illness often gets better with self-help and does not require treatment. Consider using the NHS website or your local pharmacy (Pharmacy First) for advice if you have mild symptoms. Visit 111.nhs.uk or call 111 if you need medical help quickly (24/7). For mental health call 0800 183 0558 for free, confidential help, support, information and guidance or visit [www.Mindwell-Leeds.org.uk](http://www.Mindwell-Leeds.org.uk)  
Visit A&E for life-threatening emergencies such as heart attacks and strokes.
- The job of a GP is far more than the part that patients see which is speaking to and seeing patients. Throughout the day GPs support other health professionals and trainees, process referrals, review hospital letters, liaise with hospital colleagues, GP training, respond to complaints 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, ranging from Nurses/Advanced Practitioners/ Paramedics/ Physiotherapists/Occupational Therapists/Dieticians/Community Wellbeing Advisors/Pharmacists. 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 a 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 an Advanced Clinical Practitioner. This helps to ensure that our GP appointments are available for those patients that do need to see a GP.
- 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 we can offer it to someone else.
- Visit our practice website for details on how to access appointments and try online booking if you feel comfortable using it.
- Try eConsult for all non-urgent admin and clinical queries. This can help free up the phone lines for those who do not have internet access.
- Call volume is exceptionally high from 08:00 to 10:00 and 12:30 to 14:00 every day. For non-urgent queries or to book nurses appointments; call us outside of these times and on our quieter days: Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.
- If you have been asked to get in touch about some results, try not to worry. If there was an urgency to any abnormal results, the clinician processing them would have highlighted this. It is OK to wait a few weeks to discuss mildly abnormal test results.
- Be patient with us. We are trying to do 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 weekend to help support the COVID-19 vaccination/booster and flu programme and burn out is a threat. We need to

protect and support our staff. We work for a GP practice, but we are also patients. It is difficult at times to navigate the system and most of us have sought the advice and care of the NHS during the Pandemic, so we understand 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 and thank you for your patience and understanding during this challenging time.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Neil Bastow  
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