

Forest Practice Newsletter Autumn 2020

As we approach the Flu season and Covid 19 cases rise we want to update you on how you can access advice and treatment if you have a health-related concern. We are still very much open and here to help but are having to arrange our services in line with NHS England Standard Operating Procedures. This new way of working is aimed at protecting patients and staff and preventing the total closure of a practice if there is a significant Covid 19 outbreak as has already happened in other areas in recent months.



Requests for appointments

All requests for advice will be dealt with by phone initially. Reception will make a brief note of your concerns and ask the clinician to call you back. Please keep your phone handy to avoid missing our call. The majority of requests can be managed over the phone and we can send prescriptions, medical certificates, letters and some test request forms electronically. Paper items can be collected from the Pyrles Lane surgery.

If the clinician needs more visual information then they can arrange a video call using your mobile phone or can send you a link that will allow you to send back a photograph.

Some problems will need a face to face examination and if so the Clinician will arrange this for you. These appointments are strictly managed to ensure that you will not come into contact with patients who are showing symptoms of Covid 19 and you will also be able to distance from other patients while you are waiting. You will be asked to wear a face covering while you are in the building and we are grateful for your co-operation with this.

Please do not come to the surgery to request an appointment as the reception team will not be able to help you. We have an intercom that is only intended for patients attending pre-booked appointments or who have items to collect.

Our current arrangements were reviewed recently during an Infection Control Audit carried out by Hertfordshire and West Essex Infection control team and were confirmed as being proportionate and appropriate and are continually reviewed in line with NHS England guidance.



Pressure on our phone lines

As a result of these changes to how we organise appointments we are not able to offer any on-line booking and this, coupled with the understandable increase in demand following the easing of the National lockdown has resulted in significant pressure on our phone lines.

To help ease this pressure we have doubled our number of phone lines, redirected office and management capacity to help with Reception duties and are recruiting additional reception staff. We continue to work with our phone supplier as there have been other issues beyond our control leading to some patients being cut off or not progressing in the queue. We are hopeful that recent adjustments made by the supplier have addressed this but will continue to monitor this closely.

Forest Practice Newsletter Autumn 2020

There are ways that you can help us reduce the phone waiting time:

- If your query is not urgent please avoid calling on Monday and Friday as these are the busiest days of the week
- If you need a result and do not have on-line access to view it please call between 10 am – 12.30pm and press 2 for results.
- If you are waiting for the result of a test arranged by your specialist or hospital team please call the team who requested the test as the result will go back to them and they are responsible for advising you. Reception will not be able to chase this result for you. If your specialist writes to us asking us to take any action based on a test result we will contact you.
- **If you are waiting for your Flu jab please DO NOT call the surgery** as we will contact you when the vaccines are available and the clinics have been arranged. We cannot allow you to book directly as the clinics need to be managed very differently this year due to Social distancing requirements and the need to book patients according to clinical priority as vaccine delivery is being staggered.
- Please consider registering for DoctorLink which allows you to submit a description of your symptoms and then directs you to appropriate advice or is sent on to us to arrange a Doctor telephone appointment as appropriate.

Please bear with us while you are waiting on the phone. We do understand how stressful it can be when you have a health worry and need to speak to someone but all our Reception team are answering the phones as quickly as they can. When you do get through please help them to manage your request as efficiently as possible as this will help the overall waiting time. In recent weeks a small number of patients have subjected our reception staff to unacceptable abuse and this cannot be tolerated.



Routine Chronic Disease and Medication reviews

We will continue to carry out reviews on the phone where possible and many patients now have access to equipment at home. We support patients being able to manage their health conditions and would encourage you to consider purchasing equipment relevant to your situation.

- Home Blood pressure machines – it is well proven that home readings are more reliable than readings taken at the surgery or hospital.
- Peak Flow meter – if you have asthma then your peak flow is an important marker of how well your asthma is controlled and can help you adapt your treatment according to your personal Asthma plan.
- Thermometer – the current Covid 19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of being able to measure your temperature at home. While not essential to the diagnosis of Covid 19 it gives valuable information during the course of Covid 19 and illnesses linked to other infections.
- Oxygen saturation monitor – If you have a Chronic Respiratory illness such as Asthma or COPD then having an Oxygen saturation monitor at home will allow you to know your

Forest Practice Newsletter Autumn 2020

baseline levels when you are well and to identify any drop in this level promptly if you become unwell. It is also very useful in identifying more severe illness in Covid 19.

Please respond if you receive a phone message requesting information such as your Blood pressure, weight etc as we need this data to make sure your prescription is safe and appropriate. Monitoring blood tests can be arranged at St Margaret's in Epping (by appointment only to ensure social distancing and special arrangements for patients who were previously shielding) or by first come first served basis at Forest Medical Centre.



Nursing appointments

General nursing appointments can be arranged by speaking to reception. These include:

- Smears – please contact us if your smear is due/over due
- Baby and Childhood immunisations (EXCEPT FLU)
- Contraceptive injections
- Dressings
- Specialist injections arranged through your specialist eg as part of cancer treatment
- B12 injection
- Suture removal

The following services are not currently available:

- Ear Syringing
- Steroid injections
- Minor Surgery
- Contraceptive coils and implants



Other sources of advice and support

We have reviewed and improved the information available on our website including links to services and reputable websites for information and advice.

Updated/new sections include:

- Useful links during lockdown
- Mental Health Resources
- Antenatal and postnatal care

Thank you for taking the time to read this, we hope it has been useful and will provide updated information as and when the situation changes -

The Team at Forest Practice