



Our appointment system is changing.....

Why are we changing?

As you will no doubt be aware from the media and your own experience, primary care is undergoing a period of tremendous pressure and significant change. Demand for GP services currently far outweigh the capacity and due to this GP practices are being challenged to discover new ways to address these issues. One solution we feel is to change to our current appointment system.

Primarily we want to move away from the feeling that, in order to get an appointment, patients need to either phone the practice first thing in the morning or to queue outside the door before the practice opens. We also want to ensure that those patients who need a face to face appointment get one; as many of our GP appointments are taken up with issues which either could have been dealt with by a different healthcare professional or by means of a telephone conversation.

We have found that the process of receiving telephone advice can be very effective and that GPs can deal with 2 or 3 times the number of cases via the phone than they can in person. Although we know problems can't always be solved without a face to face assessment, our experience shows us that many queries can be dealt with safely in this way. We also know that many patients appreciate the benefit of not having to come down to the surgery in person.

How will the new system operate?

If you have an issue you think should be addressed then you will be added to the daily assessment list. Our same day appointments will ALL be allocated after an assessment of each clinical issue on the list by a doctor on that morning. To access this service, we ask patients to contact us between 08:30 and 10:00 on the day. Your name, number and brief description of the problem will be asked for.

Your problem will then be assessed by a GP and may result in one of the following:

- A same day appointment with a clinician (not necessarily a GP)
- A future appointment with a clinician (not necessarily a GP)
- Telephone advice from a doctor

In some cases patients may be directed to a Pharmacist, an Optometrist, or occasionally A&E, as these services may be more appropriate for your particular issue. Indeed, we particularly encourage patients to consider whether their problem may be solved by a pharmacist before contacting us.

If patients contact us after 10am then we won't be able to deal with your problem that day and you will be asked to contact us back the next morning between 08:30 and 10:00. (The only exception for this will in the case of a genuine medical emergency).

There will continue to be an allocation of pre-bookable appointments for each doctor (including My Health on line appointments). Although some of these appointments will be allocated by the doctors themselves when the need for a follow up appointment is identified.

What else can be done to reduce pressure on your practice?

1. www.foureImSmedicalcentres.co.uk

Our new website is highly interactive and allows patients to deal with many issues, questions and common conditions themselves without having to phone us or visit the surgery. A large amount of issues that patients want appointments for can be, safely, dealt with by using our website.

This should be the first point of contact for the majority of our patients and we hope it will reduce the number of phone calls patients have to make, sometimes unnecessarily. In turn this should result in shorter wait times for those patients who do need to speak to a receptionist.

2. **Keep it or cancel it**

The NHS campaign against patients missing appointment is more important now than ever. It is vital you cancel your appointment if you can't make it – without enough notice for us to give that appointment to someone else. Patients who ring 5 or 10 minutes before to tell us they can't make it still create problems for us and this will have to be marked as a 'Did not attend'. We track the number of missed appointments and those who repeatedly miss appointments are asked to leave us.

3. **Flexibility**

We understand that ideally you may want an appointment on a specific date and time with a specific doctor and sometimes in a specific place (given the fact we are a two-site practice). We will try to accommodate this as much as we can, but in reality, the pressure on our service means we can't always achieve this. Although this may be frustrating at times, we do ask patients to continue to show understanding about the pressure our service is under.

4. **Other Health Care Professionals**

Pharmacists are these days helping GPs more than ever with treatments for many simple ailments. All medication queries should be made to a pharmacist before contacting us, but they can help with so much more. See the 'Wellbeing Centre' section of our website for further details.

NHS Direct is a freephone number 24 hours a day which can provide you with clinical advice about any problem. This service was put in place to make it easier for patients to receive medical advice and to reduce pressure on GP practises. Please consider calling them on 0845 46 47.

5. **Get involved**

If you have any comments or questions regarding our new system please feel free to speak to any member of the reception team who will gladly answer your questions. You can also go to our new website at www.foureImSmedicalcentres.co.uk which has a wealth of information regarding all of the above.