

Covid Recovery Report –Priory Surgery

May 2021

This report will outline for our patients where our GP Practice is with regards to recovering from the impact of COVID and aims to answer common queries that our patients have regarding this. The Practice Management Team continue to analyse changing situations and make difficult decisions, in general, based on the principles below.

Overriding Principles

1. To provide a safe service to patients attempting to ensure that when demand exceeds capacity, that priority is maintained for those who are immediately vulnerable and those who are exhibiting symptoms that require access to clinician advice within 24 hours or less.
2. To maximise appointments in all forms
3. To actively work to identify patients who may be part of the known groups not presenting with certain conditions and ensure that they are swiftly provided with appropriate onwards services where appropriate.
4. To lead on the vaccination program for our Primary Care network in the knowledge that vaccination currently remains the best path to overall recovery of the system as a whole.
5. To abide by COVID safe working requirements.
6. To take all means necessary to avoid staff burnout with the knowledge that prevention will mean less overall disruption to patient care.
7. To minimise on the day disruption which is known to cause a highly stressful situation in the GP Practice
8. To work with Buckinghamshire NHS IT to replace our telephone infrastructure
9. To work with Buckinghamshire NHS IT to improve mobile working for staff
10. To monitor and react to increasing verbal and physical abuse of our staff

Access to Appointments

Pre Covid we ran a triage telephone system. This will remain. This allows us to maximise appointments for patients and screen those queries that can be accommodated more efficiently by telephone or in some instances text or other action. Ultimately this approach lets us maximise appointments with clinicians.

Getting through on the Telephone

We understand the frustration that patients have at times in getting through to our reception team. This is due to a number of factors. The enormous vaccination programmes (that started last October with the increased flu programme for the over 50's and those on the shielding list, and then the COVID vaccination programme that has run since January,) have created an enormous pressure on our reception staff and the telephone system. These massive programmes are being run by General Practice teams in addition to our normal work. Our reception team have made and taken thousands of extra calls regarding these programmes.

We are also seeing a vast increase in patient demand for appointments at the current time. This creates significant extra volume in all areas of the GP Practice, including telephone access.

Overall, this has created enormous pressure on our telephone system and on our reception staff, most of whom have worked an incredible number of hours as overtime.

We are working with the CCG IT to join and implement a whole new telephony system but this will take time.

We truly understand and apologise for the frustration this causes. We would ask during this difficult time, that you treat our staff with respect and refrain from taking your frustrations out on them. They are working extremely hard for all our patients.

We have kept our reception desk open all through the pandemic to ensure that all our patients can access our support, including our most vulnerable patients who do not have a telephone or any digital means of contacting us. Guidance distributed by NHS England (13th May) is now mandating that all GP Practices open their reception desks. We are already compliant with this.

We would ask that patients continue to telephone us for support as every person that enters the premises, increases the risk of infection, which we must carefully manage for the safety of all our patients and our staff.

Appointments

Appointments by telephone and video will remain and we will continue to triage our calls as we did pre-covid. This allows us to maximise the efficiency of our clinicians time at what is a very pressured time in general practice.

We have heard that a number of patients find it beneficial when they do not have to attend in person and are very satisfied with telephone appointments and video consultations.

Conversely, some patients would much prefer to see a clinician for a face to face appointment.

Face to Face Appointments

Every day during the pandemic we have seen patients for face to face appointments in the GP Practice when the clinician determines that the patient should be seen. This will remain and we will increase face to face appointments where possible. Increasing face to face appointments needs to be considered carefully, as overall this will reduce the volume of appointments that are available. Currently patient demand for appointments is incredibly high and decreasing the overall volume to provide more face to face (they take longer and factors such as cleaning, PPE change need to be factored in) is in direct conflict to our aim to provide the most appointments that it is safe to do so.

We have to carefully manage our small waiting areas and narrow corridors, when considering more face to face appointments. Our patients are often clinically vulnerable and placing people in close proximity to others in a waiting room is not advised. Minimising the possibility of transmission of infection to vulnerable patients must remain a priority.

Pre-Booked Appointments

A number of patients would like us to pre-book appointments. We are still in a situation where it is a weekly occurrence that our staffing situation changes in an unplanned way. This might be due to sickness, immediate

family issues or situations such as a child being sent home from school with COVID symptoms. In the latter instance, our staff member would be sent home to isolate until the COVID test for the child was known. Cancelling appointments on the day is frustrating for patients and creates additional pressure on an already stretched telephone system and reception staff.

Additionally, when we start any day with an unbooked appointment list, this allows us to move staff to cover issues that arise on any given day without negatively affecting any expectations that we have already given patients.

As time becomes pressured for patients as many head back to work, our clinicians will try to manage face to face and the occasional pre-booked appointments in a safe and considerate way.

What is being done in General Practice?

The demand for appointments at the current time (May 21) is extremely high. Where possible we are employing extra locum GP's and Advanced Nurse Practitioners to help provide additional capacity. We have been effective in recruiting locums despite there being high demand for staffing capacity across the Country. Unfortunately, we still cannot meet the demand as it currently exists but are doing everything we can to be as effective as possible.

Currently our GP Practice has prioritised all work relating to our NHS contract as we believe this is most important. This has meant that we have stopped certain private services that used to bring us in income, but were not necessarily vital for patients health. This includes medicals and travel immunisations. These can all be accessed from other settings although may cost more.

You may have seen in the media the national campaigns targeting certain conditions which explain symptoms to patients. We are aware that there are some conditions where we would have expected to refer more people for investigations and to secondary care. We are working hard to try to identify these people and also to provide catch up screening and prevention services.

There is a lot of work in a GP surgery that happens behind the scenes and much of this also involves clinicians time. We will aim to shed some light on this in the coming months as we think it may help if our patients have a little more understanding of certain procedures eg. How prescriptions are processed.

COVID Vaccination Programme

In December 2020, we agreed to work with local GP Practices to set up and operate the COVID vaccination programme that many of you know as being at Adams Park. Across ten local GP Practices, this site has delivered well over 50,000 vaccinations (May 21), which increases as every week passes.

This is the biggest vaccination programme in the history of the NHS and takes vast resources to operate. Operating the site in addition to operating our GP Practices is no easy task but one that all our staff have been proud to support. Our receptionists have spent hours booking patients and following up lists of patients who have not yet been vaccinated. Our administrators have attended the vaccination site and input data into the national system to ensure that every vaccine is recorded. Our clinicians have either been vaccinating patients

or have put in extra to cover other staff who may be doing this. Whilst we have a superb volunteer workforce at the vaccination site (including our retired GP's and nurses), delivering this vast programme means that many staff have put in considerable amounts of their own time as overtime or working through annual leave.

Staffing

General Practice has remained fully open all that way through this pandemic, despite what you may have heard or read. We have sent staff to operate the "hot hub" at Wycombe hospital and cancelled our training afternoons and worked through Bank holidays to ensure that this did not create extra pressure for our colleagues in emergency and secondary care.

Many of our staff have worked a vast amount of overtime, and many have not taken as much annual leave as would be beneficial.

We remain aware that many of our staff have found the last year extremely challenging and it is important that we support all our staff to take time off and recuperate.

The best patient care, relies on our staff enjoying their work and being in a healthy place as an individual so that they can help you. As an organisation we are working hard to try to help our staff recover as we know that this is one of the best ways that we can help you, our patients.

What can our patients do to help?

1. Please try to be kind to us. We know everything is not perfect but we promise that we are trying extremely hard to get our services as efficient and effective as we can.
2. Get your vaccines or encourage others to get theirs where possible.
3. Sign up for online services if you haven't done this yet. You can order your repeat medications online and you can see various parts of your medical record. We will in the future open up booking online when we are in a position to be able to do this safely.
4. Our colleagues in secondary care (departments that accept referrals) are also very busy and have back logs in all their clinics. Please be understanding that all but the most critical referrals are experiencing long delays. Critical referrals are normally known by the term "two week wait" and often ensure that people with suspected cancer can be investigated very quickly.

We thank all our patients for their support and understanding whilst we recover from the pandemic.