

## An update from the Partners and Management Team

Dear Patient,

In the last few weeks we are aware that it has been harder than normal to get through to our reception team and access appointments particularly with a GP. We realise the frustration and difficulties this causes our patients and take pride in the service we provide. We always monitor and try to respond to the demands on the practice and wanted to explain what has been going on and the reasons for the difficulties as well as our responses.

First and foremost we have seen an unprecedented amount of calls in recent weeks. We know this by looking at reports generated by our phone systems and by listening to feedback from patients and our reception team. On a single day recently our reception team answered 2045 calls. That's over 500 per receptionist in one day. This is double the already increased number of calls we have received up to now in the pandemic, and we believe reflects a significant rise in demand related to multiple factors:

- The increased difficulties people have suffered in relation to the pandemic and lockdown- not least a dramatic rise in mental health difficulties.
- People increasingly seeking review for problems they have been living with or putting off earlier in the pandemic.
- People struggling with health concerns who are awaiting the significantly delayed secondary care support.
- A move to restart some of the more routine work that was put off during the pandemic such as annual reviews of long-term conditions.

Further to this we continue to provide general practice services in different ways, with national guidance that all contact should be online or on the phone initially. This means consultations often take longer. We are also managing the largest vaccination programme in our countries history and delivering this vital health intervention as rapidly as possible- we expect this to continue until at least August and possibly beyond if boosters are brought in. As demand increases for more face to face or traditional GP appointments we are constantly reviewing and changing our appointment rota to meet the growing demand, while ensuring we support our staff to keep safe and able to continue working (the need for social isolation of staff if contact traced can have dramatic impact on the business).

Over the Easter period we have also had slightly reduced capacity as practice staff have had well deserved annual leave which is carefully planned to ensure we maintain cover at all times, using locums to support if needed.



## **An update from the Partners and Management Team**

We are now conducting an urgent review and we are working with our telecoms provider to improve the call flow and capacity. Our hardworking reception team will keep trying to answer calls as quickly and efficiently as possible. We are now finding that, whilst NHS staff were championed and applauded in the early part of the pandemic, for a small number of our patients that support has now turned into impatience and even verbal abuse towards our frontline staff. We recognise patient's frustrations and are working hard to improve the situation, but abuse is never acceptable, and we expect staff, like you, to be treated with respect.

### **What are we doing about it?**

- Tripled the incoming line capacity
- Provide real time call activity monitoring to all reception staff
- Requested additional customized messages for our queuing system
- All queries are to be managed on the phone or online now rather than at the reception desk as this prevents one receptionist from answering the phone for significant amounts of time
- Reduced some administrative tasks allocated to reception to allow more time for answering incoming calls
- Increased the use of our online consultation portal to include all queries and vaccination queries as well as non-urgent medical queries
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### **What can you do to help?**

- Contact us if you are unwell and need a GP appointment- we are open and providing general practice care as we have done at all times during the pandemic. If you are genuinely concerned please do seek our help.
- Bear with us if we are taking longer than normal to complete routine tasks such as sorting prescriptions or sick notes
- Avoid chasing us up unless something is clinically urgent- we have good processes to ensure requests are not lost and answering calls to chase things up or worse using appointments prevents us from actually completing these tasks or offering appointments to other patients.
- Utilise the range of tools available for self-help and care- many of which are signposted from our website, including support tools for mental health problems at Mindwell Leeds [Home - MindWell \(mindwell-leeds.org.uk\)](http://mindwell-leeds.org.uk)
- Use our online consultation system if you have a problem or query you believe can be dealt with online without the need for a face to face or telephone appointment. But please be aware that clinicians and admin staff take the time to respond to these so again please avoid chase up requests.
- Treat our staff with patience and respect, they have all worked incredibly hard especially over the last year, going above and beyond and working beyond normal hours to help respond to this unprecedented challenge.

Dr Walling – GP Partner



Dr Nathan – GP Partner



Kim Holloway – Practice Operations Manager

