Face-To-Face Appointments

We know there has been a lot of discussion in the news this week about GPs providing face-to-face appointments. We wanted to reassure patients that NHS Digital have confirmed that in July over 50% of the 22.8 million appointments carried out were in fact face-to-face.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have remained open to patients. We’ve offered appointments using new ways of working and new technology. We’ve worked hard to make sure we’ve remained available to speak to, and to offer appointments to anyone who’s needed them.

We know that patients sometimes prefer to see a GP face-to-face, but there are reasons why we have offered additional online or telephone consultations, and government guidance has played a big part in this. It’s remained the case that if we’ve needed to see a patient face-to-face, or felt it was important for their care, we’ve asked those patients to come in to see us.

Offering new ways of working has helped some patients to access appointments who wouldn’t normally be able to due to other commitments, such as their work or caring responsibilities.

The cleaning required between patients during the pandemic means that if all patients were to come into the surgery, we wouldn’t be able to offer the same number of appointments because of the amount of time that cleaning between each patient takes. However, we will always see patients face-to-face who need to be seen face-to-face.

Changing PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) between each patient adds additional time to the end of each appointment. The difficulty in obtaining PPE has also meant that we have needed to be more cautious than normal about the way we use scare resources. We continue to work hard daily to source the PPE we need.

We understand that some patients are reluctant to come and see us in the surgery as they’re worried. We’re making sure that social distancing is as good as it possibly can be and that we maintain a ‘COVID-secure’ environment. Some of the things we take into account when we’re considering this are: the number of people in the waiting room, the number of people who pass each other in the corridors, and the toilet facilities that are available.

Our staff are people too, and some may have ethnicity or health issues that make them more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19. As caring employers, we need to ensure that we keep our staff safe as well. We take the necessary precautions to keep both our staff and our patients safe.

We have many elderly and vulnerable patients with health conditions that make them more vulnerable to coronavirus than most. We also know that there are young and healthy people who have been seriously affected by COVID-19, so it isn’t just the elderly or infirm we need to protect.

Increasing the number of patients in the surgery would mean that we’d increase the risk for everyone – particularly if some of those people had symptoms of COVID-19 and were unwell enough to need to be seen. For this reason, we’ll keep a balance of the types of appointments we have available.

There is nothing we would like to see more than a return to ‘normal’ life and the easy face-to-face care we’ve always provided, but at the moment offering fewer face-to-face appointments keeps patients safe and provides the maximum number of appointments we can.

We are available to talk to, and we always want to hear from, patients who need us. While we understand patients’ frustrations with the current situation, we hope you’ll continue to help and support us, as you’ve always supported the NHS, so that we can go on providing you with care and support in the coming weeks and months.

*Thank you for your understanding and continued support during these challenging times.*

***The Partners***

***Deal Tree Health Centre***