

APPOINTMENT SYSTEM CHANGES - 22nd NOVEMBER 2021

Dear Patient,

Since the Coronavirus pandemic struck last year we, like all general practices, have had to change the way we deal with patient contacts and requests. Our appointment system evolved significantly as we were asked to provide triage-first care, ensuring that patients and staff remained safe whilst attending the Surgery. For a long time NHS England advised all GPs to avoid face to face consultations where possible and revert to remote consulting, treating patients over the telephone and online. Where it was clinically indicated patients would be invited to the practice for a face to face review.

Our system changed in early summer due to the success of the Covid-19 vaccination programme, and instead any patients wanting a face to face appointment could have one, with a triage system at the point of booking on the telephone. As a practice we will continue to see patients face to face, as we recognise how important an in person encounter can be, both for accurate diagnosis/ treatment planning, and continuity of care.

You are no doubt well aware of the current challenges facing general practice. Despite the media rhetoric, I can assure you that we, our fellow GPs, nurses and practice staff have never worked harder. We are short of doctors, and this is a national issue. We also face staff shortages due to absences associated with the pandemic. That said, we are doing our utmost to recruit new GPs and allied health professionals, and are consistently looking at ways in which we can best serve you all as patients, as well as protecting the welfare of our teams – we know that we can only keep you well if we remain well ourselves!

Despite these challenges, we remain committed as ever to you as patients. As we've progressed onto a different phase of the pandemic, we have taken another look at how best to manage our appointments, in order to best meet your medical needs, and ensure that you are getting the best from our services by using them appropriately.

*As of **Monday 22nd November** the following system will be adopted :*

Routine Pre-bookable Appointments

Patients may telephone the practice after 11:00am (when phone lines are less busy) to book face to face routine appointments in advance. Appointments will be available 4 weeks ahead.

We are unable at this time to facilitate online booking of face to face appointments, but will keep this under review in line with national guidance.

Telephone appointments can be booked online via Patient Access.

Same Day Appointments

Appointments can be booked the same day by telephoning the practice between 8:00am and 11:00am only.

On days with exceptionally high demand when all appointments are booked, you will be advised to telephone back the next morning.

We will try to accommodate requests to see specific doctors, but please bear in mind that this may not always be possible.

For acute problems you may also be booked in to see one of our Advanced Nurse Practitioners or a Physician Associate. ANPs are senior nurses with a background in acute medicine, who can perform assessment and management of acute illnesses. PAs are a new type of professional, with similar but briefer training to that of Doctors, but who are able to perform the majority of functions provided by a doctor, under supervision. Receptionists will ask the nature of your problem to ensure you are booked in with the most appropriate person.

You will not be able to arrange appointments the same day if you telephone the practice after 11:00am.

Telephone Appointments

These may be booked in advance online using the Patient Access system via the practice website. Telephone reviews are most suitable for problems where a physical examination is not required, such as a medication review or test result follow-up.

E-Consults (Online Consultations)

The e-consult facility is available Monday to Friday in line with our opening hours. Again, they should ideally be used for routine problems where an examination is likely not to be necessary.

We kindly ask that you refrain from submitting multiple E-consults on the same day.

Finally, we would like to take the opportunity to mention a couple of final points:-

For Self-referral

Please also note, there are 2 very important self-referral pathways you may not be aware of:-

- For **Physiotherapy**, patients can self-refer for assessment and management with the VitaHealth team on 01689 88 77 10.
- For **counselling and other talking therapies**, you can visit <http://www.talktogetherbromley.co.uk>, or call 0300 003 3000 for Talk Together Bromley.

Both of these services can be accessed without the need to wait for a GP appointment

E-mailing the Practice

Please do not e-mail the practice with clinical queries or to request an appointment. The e-mail accounts are not monitored as regularly and should only be used for administrative queries or repeat medication requests. Clinical enquiries will not be looked at by a clinician, so instead please submit an e-consult or telephone for an appointment.

Treatment of Staff

We would like to thank the vast majority of you who treat our highly valued staff with the respect and appreciation they deserve. The reception, secretarial and admin staff are working incredibly hard, under increasing amounts of pressure, and greatly value the support and kindness shown to them.

As GP Partners we would like to re-iterate that the practice policies applied, and appointment structure revisions, are as a result of decisions we make. Our staff should never come under threat or be abused for doing their absolute best. Like all of you, they do not come to work to experience aggressive, intimidating, confrontational or abusive behaviour. Any such instances of inappropriate treatment of staff will be dealt with accordingly.

Face Coverings

The practice still requires patients to wear face coverings when entering the Surgery unless you are exempt. This is to protect yourselves and others.

We thank you for your patience and understanding.

Keep well and keep safe,

GP Partners

Elm House Surgery