

# THREE VILLAGES MEDICAL PRACTICE

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18<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Dear Patients,

## **Subject: Important Update: Change in Appointment Booking System**

Following our last letter to you regarding a temporary change to the booking system at Three Villages we would like to thank you for your patience and provide you with an update.

The practice continues to review the way in which you, the patient, can access the practice and the associated demands and appointments required from this. In August 2021, we provided a full online access, which initially was met with resistance and complaints from many patients. We persevered with the process, and it is clear, following the recent temporary suspension of requesting GP appointments online, that there is a demand further for this service.

Thank you for all your feedback on the online system and how it has improved your access to medical help. Unfortunately, although this has aided your benefit, the practice has seen a huge increase in requests, some of which would be better dealt with by other services. This in turn prevents us from being an efficient surgery and has seen a delay in you getting the right care.

The NHS is under extraordinary pressures within the primary and secondary care settings; demand, access and financial. Increasing wait times to see specialists or treatment is having a big impact on us. Patients who would otherwise be receiving a timely appointment/treatment are requiring more input from us whilst they wait. The finance pressures are affecting us all. Just as household bills have increased, the cost of running a surgery have also increased. Without the necessary funding from the government, we will be unable to keep up with the demand. Over the last couple of years, the practice has continued to provide more appointments than contractually required. Unfortunately, with the financial pressures, we may not be able to maintain this.

The government has invested new monies into Primary Care Networks (PCN). We are part of Brierley Hill and Amblecote PCN, through which we have access to physician's associates, in-house pharmacists, first contact physiotherapists, mental health works and lower limb

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specialists as well as social prescribing/ listening and guidance service. To utilise their skill sets, all appointments are triaged by the reception team/ doctors to book a clinically appropriate appointment. Your requests are often triaged and signposted to other services such as self-help websites or pharmacy first. All these options are there to ensure that the right patient gets the right help at the right time. We need to ensure that patients seeing general practitioner (doctor) are patients that cannot be managed by other members of the team.

As the demand increases for appointments, we have seen an increase in our waiting times for routine appointments. As a practice we are disappointed that this has occurred as we strive for excellent timely care to be delivered. We therefore have taken the decision to make all face-to-face general practitioner appointments (doctor) on the day appointments. We are unable to offer an infinite number of appointments and the British Medical Association (BMA) have recommended that all doctors should work within a safe capacity to ensure that good clinical care is delivered. As with any resource, once these appointments are filled, we will be unable to offer an on the day appointment but will continue to triage and signpost where necessary. We strongly encourage you to try to self-manage minor illnesses by using other services when they are offered to you. Please may we remind you that appointments that are not attended also creates extra wait times.

If you feel strongly about the issue of general practice funding, you may wish to contact the politicians that control it – we are in an election year.

The online system via our website is available to ask the practice questions about appointments, results, referrals, medication queries and to request ongoing sick notes. We kindly ask that you use the correct form for the required query to help us direct your query in a timely fashion. We also ask that you use one form per query or problem.

The website for all enquiries is open during our working hours (as before – no change). As of Friday 19th April, patients will be able to request an appointment with a doctor either by phoning the practice from 8am or by using the website. The website link to 'request an appointment with a clinician' will be open from 8am to 8.30am only. All requests will be triaged and will be signposted as needed. Unfortunately, once all appointments have been booked for the day, we will advise where to seek the best help. Appointments will remain on the day for the foreseeable future, as the practice has seen a marked reduction in its 'Did not attend' rate, ensuring more appointments available for yourselves. We appreciate that this seems inflexible but last year alone over 4300 appointments were missed.

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You have brought to our attention a fault with the phone system. This has been reported to the provider company and we endeavour to have this resolved as soon as possible. Again we thank you for informing us about this.

We are aware that one system may not fulfil all patients' requirements. We want our patients to be happy with the service we can provide and this in turn will maintain our staff morale too.

We as a practice will do everything, we can do to continue to adapt and provide you with good quality care within the resources available.

Kind regards,

Three Villages Medical Practice