An Open Letter to Our Patients

Dear Valued Patients

General Practice is currently facing a burden of increasing demand and continued underfunding. We are aware that many forms of media, including social are currently fuelling a backlash against General Practice which is unfortunately being felt by all our staff and patients at this moment. We wanted to take the time to reach out to our patients to give the key message that:

*Good patient care is at the heart of everything we do, and everything that we do, is in the best interest of our patients. We work tirelessly to ensure that we offer patients the best possible service, ensuring safe and effective healthcare that is accessible to all our patients in a timely and appropriate manner.*

In light of the above we wanted to take time to convey to patients exactly what steps we take as a Practice to improve both access to, and provision of healthcare services.

**Additional Staffing**

We have been utilising a growing variety and number of clinicians to build a diverse workforce of various clinical expertise. Our workforce now includes:

Pharmacists,

Paramedics,

Pharmacy Technicians,

Mental Health Workers,

Social Prescribers,

Wellbeing Coach,

Physiotherapists, and

Care Coordinators.

We have also increased our number of Nurses and Doctors in the past year whilst continuing to train and develop our current staff to be able to offer additional services and improved healthcare access and service provision.

**Appointment Booking**

Our reception team face great pressure every day and, unfortunately, too often take the brunt of patient frustration via aggression and abuse. We please ask patients to be patient and kind to our reception team. They are working tirelessly to ensure that all patients can access appointments and appropriate clinical support.

Our receptionists work under a misconception that they are trying to ‘deny patients appointments’ and ‘are trying to diagnose patients’. This could not be further from the truth. Our receptionists have all received training on Care Navigation and when they are asking for information regarding your request, they are assessing what your need is, and who is best placed to help you. In doing so they ensure that patients are seen by the most appropriate clinician in the most appropriate time frame whilst trying to ensure that every patient receives some form of appointment when one is needed.

This means that they may offer seeing a clinician other than a doctor, or may even direct you to other services which can assist such as Minor Injuries, Local Pharmacies, Minor Eye Condition Service etc. They can also offer appointments at other locations so that patients can be seen sooner including evening and weekend appointments.

We have been working to offer more appointments to patients here at Burnham Surgery too. Looking at the last 3 months of the year in comparison to previous years, it is clear that, by utilising additional staffing roles, we have been able to grow our appointment offering and availability with significant effect:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
| September | 5083 | 5599 | 5532 |
| October | 6497 | 7017 | 8127 |
| November | 6850 | 5786 | 5981 |

Changes to our appointment system have meant we have increased the percentage of patients being seen within 2 weeks of appointment booking from 57.8% to 75.99%.

We have moved our telephone system from an analogue system to VOIP (Cloud Based). This has allowed us to remove the restriction of fixed phone lines. Previously the Surgery had 8 phone lines for all incoming and outgoing calls whereas internet calling means we can make and receive calls simultaneously from all 25 phones in the Practice.

We have also introduced the Call Back service meaning patients do not have to wait on hold for their call to be answered. There is a National target that telephone calls placed to GP Surgeries are answered within an average of 10 minutes. Currently our teams are achieving an average call waiting time of just 5 minutes. Waits at peak times may be longer so please avoid the ‘8am rush’ and call later in the day – you will still be offered the same level of service and as previously stated we offer appointments based on clinical need and not on a first come first served basis.

**November 2024 317 appointments 4183 minutes Over 69 hours**

**Patient Satisfaction**

Despite the challenges faced in offering Primary Care services, we continue to achieve excellent levels of patient satisfaction feedback.

Our monthly Friends and Family Test feedback from patients is **83%** positive!

Some of our headline scores from the 2024 GP Patient Survey include:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Burnham Surgery | National |
| % of respondents usually get to see or speak to their preferred healthcare professional when they would like to | 45 | 40 |
| % of respondents knew what the next step would be within two days of contacting their GP practice | 98 | 93 |
| % of respondents had confidence and trust in the healthcare professional they saw or spoke to during their last general practice appointment | 94 | 92 |

**We are continually looking at innovative ways to improve patient access:**

In a changing world we are embracing the role technology can play in improving healthcare access and provision

Promotion of the utilisation of the NHS App enables patient to be able to:

* View their future and past appointments
* Order repeat medications
* View test results
* View your medical record
* Manage your referrals when we refer you to another service (for an operation for example).

In addition, The Burnham Surgery will also soon to announce the introduction of an additional communication platform that allows you to seek care from our GP service online and even consult online for fast response. When you have an issue that you want to contact your GP about, you can use the platform to submit your request online, and it’s absolutely free for patients to use. This will allow patients to contact us throughout the day and all incoming patient requests will be triaged and handled appropriately. This will give patients flexibility in the method, and time at which they contact us. We anticipate this will result in improved access, more effective triage and care navigation, a reduction in the number of phone calls and subsequent call waiting times, an increase to our appointment capacity, and handling of patient requests in a shorter time frame further reducing waiting times between contact and treatment.

*We do appreciate that technology can be difficult for some patients so please be assured of our commitment to patients that, despite the development of technology in healthcare, we will always be accessible to patients in a variety of ways to suit all needs.*

We also appreciate that most patients are indeed kind and considerate to our staff and understand that we are trying our best to work in the interest of patients under challenging circumstances. Unfortunately, this is not always the case and sadly too frequently our staff do face abusive and aggressive patient encounters. We would therefore like to remind all patients that we do operate a Zero Tolerance policy and abusive and aggressive patients will be challenged accordingly.

We will do everything we can to continue to provide you with good quality care. We are very grateful for all the support that patients offer us.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.



Dr F J Kamlow



Dr S M A Rahman



Dr S A Ali

Burnham Surgery