

## Open Letter

The Norfolk and Waveney Local Medical Committee and Healthwatch Norfolk is issuing this joint letter to all patients in Norfolk and Waveney. It provides information to patients about accessing general practice and how patients can help.

GPs and their staff have been at the forefront of dealing with the Covid pandemic and it has been challenging in many ways.

Despite this, the total number of appointments being delivered has increased by almost a fifth in the last year and an average of 60 per cent of consultations are now happening face to face.

The huge demand for help remains and this is why patients are being asked to give an idea of their needs, and how best GPs and their teams can help them, by phone or online. This helps prioritise patients and ensure they can be seen in a safe and socially-distanced way. We know that practice staff can be seen as obstructive and putting up barriers, but this is far from the truth as they have this difficult and unenviable task of assessing and helping those most in need of immediate care.

Modern GP practice teams also have also changed a lot with many expert members in the team such as pharmacists, physiotherapists, nurse practitioners, paramedics, and social prescribers to help signpost patients to more care.

So how can you help? We know people only contact their surgery or health centre when they are concerned or worried. The teams there do want to help but we would ask you to be as kind and respectful as you can. As well as GP care, they are providing 75 per cent of Covid vaccinations and have the mammoth task of the flu vaccine programme as well as the consequences of hospital delays. There is also a danger that this perception of some patients being aggressive could put people off working in general practice or becoming a GP, which is not going to help attract more people in to help you.

If you can use new technology or know someone who can help you with it, please do so. It really helps to speed up your access to care and makes sure you are getting help from the right people as well as help staff identify those most in need of clinical intervention. As with all contact, it does take time for a response, but clinicians and reception staff are working as quickly as they can.

We are aware that the pandemic has had devastating effects on hospital waiting times and general practices are having to deal with increasing queries by their patients as to when they will be seen but GPs have little clinical influence on this, so we would suggest contacting hospitals directly.

We hope outlining the pressures GPs and their colleagues are facing will help set in context how difficult things are and you can all help support them as they navigate these challenging times.

Everyone wants to continue providing a high standard of care in a timely way, prioritising patients in the most urgent need and they do not want anyone to feel they should not get in touch if they have serious or worrying health concerns.

Thank you for reading this. We would also like to thank all the people of Norfolk and Waveney in advance for bearing with us and reassure everyone that your health and wellbeing is at the core of everything we do.

DR TIM MORTON

ALEX STEWART

Norfolk and Waveney Local Medical Committee

Healthwatch Norfolk

Chair

Chief Executive