

Worcestershire and Herefordshire Local Medical Committees Ltd

Belmont Medical Centre

Our Ref: RD/LJS/6167

29th September 2020

Dear Patients

A lot has changed in general practice over the past few months as a result of the pandemic. We would like to explain to you how general practice is working across Herefordshire and to reassure you that we are still here for you just as we always have been. We are just doing things a little differently because we have to at the moment.

From April, at the direct request of NHS England, all practices in the UK were advised to have a telephone consultation with patients as a first point of contact and not to allow patients to access the surgery site in the normal way. This felt odd for both patients and doctors alike. Many surgeries, of course, had already been offering telephone consultations and online appointments for several years, but there is no doubt that the sudden shift to this way of working for all practices has been challenging both for practice staff and our patients.

Throughout the pandemic, your GP and practice staff have kept working, in spite of having faced considerable challenges around PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) supply, staff sickness and rigorous infection control procedures. When staff were self-isolating or shielding, they could usually work remotely from home and continued to provide care to patients.

There are still some services that cannot be provided for patients such as some minor surgery. This is following current national guidance. Some services are planned to restart soon but if there is a resurgence in cases of Covid 19 infection, these may unfortunately be affected again. Our Clinical Commissioning Group, NHS England and local practices have been working together to determine how best to manage these difficult decisions and will continue to look at the evidence to see what can be provided safely. It is only by working together that we can help to contain the Covid 19 infection. We also very much need the support and understanding of our patients at this difficult time because everything we are doing is with a view to ensuring that you can still get the advice, support and services that you need to manage your health concerns in the safest way possible.

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Every practice in Herefordshire has continued to provide care to patients throughout the epidemic. Many of you are finding having your concerns dealt with by telephone or via online platforms both convenient and efficient and practices are able to see those patients who need to be seen in person for assessments safely because others are managed in different ways. This helps us to keep our most vulnerable patients safe, our practices “clean” and it means that our staff can be there for you when you need them.


We have also seen our own levels of demand increase due to cancelled/delayed hospital appointments and operations and we are working closely with our hospital colleagues where we can to ensure that patients receive the care that they need.

The time taken to see a patient face to face is now longer. This is because we now have to carry out stringent infection control procedures for your safety which includes decontamination of furnishings and equipment after every patient contact and the use of PPE. Practices have been heavily adapted to enable this but there is no doubt that we have not yet returned to a normal service and we need to continue to review how and who needs to be seen in the surgery, to keep all our patients safe.

Although general practice now looks very different, we are confident that the service we provide is as safe and as responsive to patients as we can make it.

We would like to end by thanking you all for your help and understanding as the pandemic unfolds, and ask that you continue to help us to help you at what remains a very challenging time for us all. Our GPs and practice staff have worked tirelessly and will continue to do so with your support and cooperation.

Yours faithfully,



Dr Richard Dales
Herefordshire LMC Secretary