



Appointment System

Advanced Access

This government introduced initiative states that a patient should have access to a nurse within 24 hours, a doctor within 48 hours and also be able to make an appointment some time in the future. We operate our appointment system to endeavour to meet these rules.

Making an appointment

Everyone knows that the first point of contact when one is unwell or has a minor ailment is your local doctor. Except, of course, if it's an emergency in which case it's the ambulance service. As we are normally your first point of contact, we are the first to diagnose your condition. Most of these are of a relatively minor nature but when you phone in, we don't initially know that.

"What is the nature of your medical emergency?"

For Star Trek Voyager fans, these are the words spoken by the doctor every time he is consulted. These are in fact, very good words as at this point he is treating everything as an emergency and then scales down the urgency as required.

We are sure that you wouldn't want our receptionists to greet you with this announcement but in essence that is what they are trying to determine. They need to find the best clinician and the best time slot to deal with your problem. They have all signed the confidentiality agreement so we ask you to refrain from saying "it's confidential between the doctor and me". Even though it is your right to say that, it could slow up the process to get you treated.

Seeing the right clinician

Although we have specialised services we are not a specialised unit. Although you could say we specialise in all things general. This is why we are called "Primary Care" and has "General Practitioners" as doctors. We need to channel your problems and ailments to the right clinician to ensure you get the best service either at the surgery or elsewhere. Please remember that we get everything from the most minor of symptoms to very serious situations and the channelling starts with the receptionist.

Our doctors and practice nurses do have a range of specialist skills. These skills vary from person to person so that we can give the best possible coverage. You may find that your normal doctor does not specialise in your problem. If you wish to avoid having to make two appointments (doctor then specialist) then please let our receptionist assess your problem first and direct you, where possible, to the clinician that can help you most. If the problem is more general or doesn't fall into any particular category then you will be given an appointment with a doctor who will investigate further.

Urgent Cases

To reiterate, the government guidelines state that you should have access to a nurse within 24 hours and a doctor within 48 hours. If you think your condition is serious enough to be seen in less time than this, or if the receptionist, following her guidelines considers that you should be seen that day, then you may find yourself being assessed by the duty doctor.

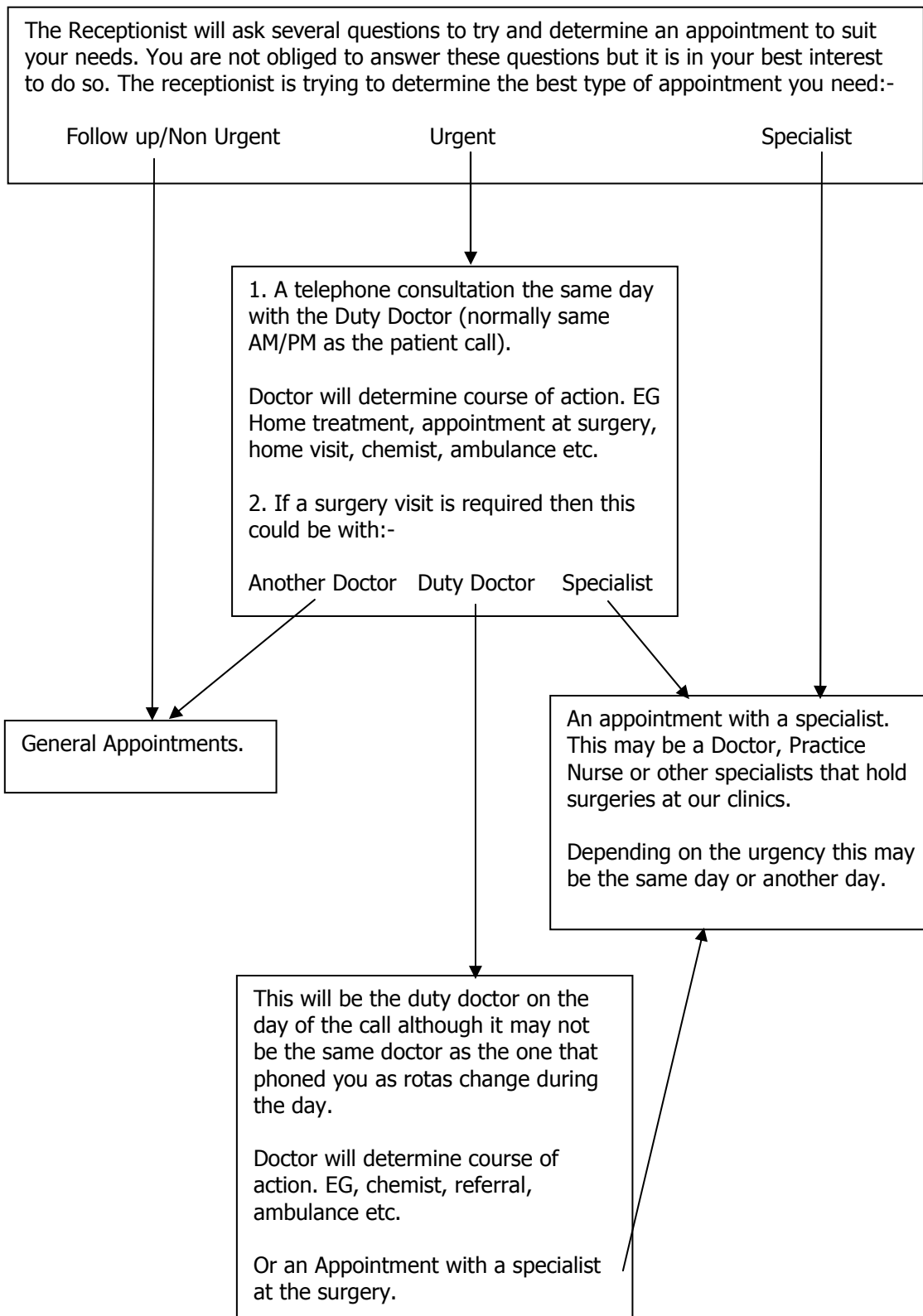
The duty doctor's role is to assess urgent cases. Because a large proportion of our cases turn out not to be urgent, it is easier and often quicker to conduct a telephone assessment by the duty doctor. The outcome of which may be simple advice right up to an ambulance being called. The duty doctor is also responsible for emergency call outs which take priority. Although you will be given a time for a duty doctor appointment or telephone call it can only be an indicative time. Emergencies do not fit into regular 10 minute time slots. If it is not urgent then please do not insist on seeing the duty doctor as this only delays real emergencies.

Appointment times

Normal appointments take 10 minutes for doctors and 15 minutes for nurses. Some specialist appointments are longer and some types of ailments warrant a double appointment. Occasionally we get a patient that requires special attention and 10 minutes becomes 30 minutes. Obviously we can't say your 10 minutes is up – goodbye, so please allow yourself plenty of time when visiting the surgery. The person in front of you may be really ill and doesn't know it. What if that person was you?



Appointment Flow



For further information please ask for the following leaflets:-
Frequently Asked Questions ([Frequently Asked Questions V1.doc](#))
Theale Medical Centre Services – in Brief ([TMC Services V1.doc](#))