

Doctors Under Pressure

Many people don't understand how a GP surgery works, so here is some useful information to help you get the most out of your visit.

1. GP appointments are generally 10 minutes – an increase from the 7.5 minutes 20 years ago. To offer longer appointments would compromise on the total number of appointments they could offer. Depending on your reason for attending 10mins may be long enough e.g. if you have a sore throat, but if you know you will need more than that please ask reception if it is possible to have a longer appointment.
2. As routine appointment times are limited to 10 minutes please don't come with a list of 5 or more problems – this is pretty stressful for your GP. Be realistic and prioritise your problems.
3. If you arrive 10 minutes late then you have missed your appointment – you're not just late; your appointment time has been and gone and the next patient is due. Being late has an impact not only on your GP but also on the other patients in the waiting room who turn up on time for their appointments.
4. Your doctor has specialised in General Practice – ie in being a generalist and will have spent a minimum of 5 years training AFTER medical school and have lots of experience. Going to A&E to be seen by a 'proper doctor' often means that you will be seen by a junior doctor with far less experience than your own family doctor. Your doctor will refer you to a specialist if they feel you need specialist expertise.
5. Your doctor is probably self-employed – the GP partners own the business of the practice and are 'independent contractors' to the NHS. All the staff at the surgery are employed by the GP partners, not the NHS. Theale Medical Centre receives a set amount of money per patient per year to provide all your care – whether you come once a year or once a week the amount is the same – approximately £140 per year. This money is to provide all the services and to pay all the staff, including the doctors.
6. Your GP is contracted to provide certain things and not others – this is why you may be asked to pay for certain things e.g. insurance forms, private medicals and letters.
7. Payment to GPs is not affected by referrals or prescribing. People often think that GPs switch medicines to cheaper ones in order to personally benefit financially. This is not true – they are trying to help the NHS budget which we should all support.
8. Because the surgeries are small businesses the doctors have to bear increasing costs themselves. Rising indemnity costs (insurance against being sued) have to be paid by the doctors themselves – this could be up to £10,000 per year for a full time GP – money which could have been spent on additional reception staff or a nurse or a doctor.
9. GPs see an average of 17 patients in the morning and 17 patients in the afternoon – sometimes it is more than this on a normal duty day. In addition to these face to face consultations there are telephone calls to make, paper work to do, referrals to make, test results to check, hospital letters to read and action, prescriptions to check and sign and

home visits to make. Just because the waiting room is empty doesn't mean the doctors and staff have nothing to do.

10. If you're waiting for test results it is worth considering the following:

- If your test was arranged by your hospital consultant that is who you should go back to for the result, not your GP. The specialist is best placed to give you appropriate advice.
- If your GP asked for the test, we request that you do not assume that a result is normal if we do not contact you. The surgery will contact you if there is a significant problem with your results, but please contact us for all results as the GP may have made some suggestions or advice based on your results even if there is not a significant problem.
- When you have your test you will be told how long it will be before the results are returned to the practice.
- Test results are only given out over the phone after 2pm each day.
- You can also request your results via our website at <https://www.thealemedicalcentre.com/navigator/test-results-request/>

11. Reception staff do a really valuable job for the doctors. They are not medically trained but they have a very good understanding of the services on offer. They are not trying to make it difficult for you to book an appointment – they will be able to direct you to the most appropriate service or clinician if you give them an indication of our problem. If you're polite and friendly to the reception staff they will be polite and friendly back and help you as best they can.

We all know that the NHS is struggling financially. Did You Know These Facts about costs to the NHS?

- An ambulance call out costs a minimum of £223
- A visit to A&E costs at least £114
- A visit to your GP costs a minimum of £36
- A call to NHS 111 costs £12
- The cost of self-care is FREE

Shingles – are you eligible for your vaccination?

Shingles is an infection that causes a painful rash – usually on the tummy, chest but sometimes face, eyes or genitals. It can take 4 weeks for the rash to heal but the skin can be painful for weeks after the rash has gone. You can't get shingles from chickenpox – but you can get chickenpox from someone with shingles if you haven't had chickenpox before!

When people get chickenpox, the virus remains in the body. It can be reactivated later and cause shingles if someone's immune system is lowered. This can be because of stress, certain conditions or treatments like chemotherapy.

Since the start of the national shingles vaccination programme in 2013 evidence has shown that there has been a marked reduction in cases and long term complications - an estimated 17,000 GP visits for shingles were avoided among the 5.5 million individuals who were given the vaccination in the first 3 years of the programme across England, according to the study.

Once you reach 70 years of age you are eligible to receive a shingles vaccination – you remain eligible until your 80th birthday – the reason for this cut off is due to the reduced efficacy of the vaccine as age increases.

If you haven't had your vaccination already and are in the eligible age group please phone reception and book your appointment.

Long term Conditions

Did you know that 30% of the population are living with one or more long term condition eg asthma, diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure). As we get older the number of conditions we live with increases – some patients may have 4 or 5 different conditions to cope with. This can be quite a daunting prospect and we want to help our patients to have the confidence to be able to manage their conditions well themselves – in general patients spend only 4 hours per year with a healthcare professional whereas they have to manage the remaining 8756 hours themselves.

So, with this in mind we are introducing a different approach to our routine annual monitoring of patients with some of these long term conditions. We want the consultations you have to be collaborative – you will be involved in devising your own care plan to identify goals, support needs, develop your action plan and monitor your progress.

We will be inviting some patients to attend for their review in their birth month. You will need to book two appointments – the first one with the healthcare assistant (HCA). Our HCA will gather information at your first appointment eg height, weight, take bloods etc. You will receive a result letter a week or so later informing you which nurse to book your second review appointment with. At this appointment, together with the nurse you will be able agree a plan of care going forward. Any issues or worries can be explained so that you can go away with a clear understanding of how you can help yourself to manage your own health.

We already do this with our diabetic patients and this has proved successful. Our aim initially is to roll this out to patients who may have diabetes and COPD, extending this to other chronic disease areas eventually. We hope that this will be an efficient use of time for both you as a patient and for us as a GP practice, reducing the number of times you need to come to see us for annual check-ups.

You ask us

Q. What does NHS 111 do and when should I call it?

A. If you're worried about an urgent medical concern and can't get through to the Medical Practice you can call NHS 111 to speak to a fully trained advisor.

Depending on the situation they can:

- Give you self-care advice
- Direct you to a local service that can best help with your concern
- Connect you to a nurse, emergency dentist or GP
- Book you a face-to-face appointment
- Send an ambulance directly, if necessary

The NHS 111 service is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. It is free to call from landlines and mobile phones. You can also call them if you think you need to go to a hospital Accident and Emergency Department (A&E) or another NHS Urgent Care Service.

Life threatening emergencies - 999 is still the number to call when somebody is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk.