

Dear Patient of the Nelson Medical Practice,

We wanted to update you on what we are doing as part of our continuous improvement work and also to apologise if you have had any problems with the service provided by the practice. In the last few months we know that we have had problems in the following areas:

## **1. Appointments**

It feels that we have not been providing enough routine appointments to adequately deal with current demand and patients have complained that it is difficult to make an appointment.

There are a number of reasons for this:

- We have had a reduction in the number of regular doctors owing to maternity leave and some unexpected long-term illness and we were unable to secure new doctors on fixed term contracts to provide cover.
- We have sought in the short term to replace their time with locum (temporary) doctors but have struggled to find adequate cover since we are very careful about ensuring the quality of any cover that we bring in and availability has been limited.
- There have been many virus infections circulating in the community which have caused more patients to seek appointments and have also caused us problems with short-term sickness absence amongst clinicians and other staff.

What we are doing:

- **Ensuring that our patients understand our same day access system**

Some patients have complained that they are told *"there are no appointments"* or *"we are fully booked"*. This is not correct and we will ensure that this is not said to patients since we have **uncapped "on the day" capacity** on every weekday. We have a certain number of appointments reserved for booking on the day but once these have been used we have two doctors permanently available between 8am and 6.30pm Monday to Friday (and three on a Monday morning and at some other times) which we call **"the same day team"** and they will speak to every patient who calls us (usually through a call back) and if necessary will bring them in to be seen by the team on the same day. Please rest assured that **you will get a call back** and **we will make sure that we deal with your problem on the day**. We should never ask patients to call back the next day since we aim to deal with today's problems today.

- **Increasing our appointment numbers and recruiting more doctors**

We have explored further options for providing increased locum cover for the next few months whilst we are recruiting and have set an **increased minimum number of appointments** to be provided weekly. We expect to be able to achieve this.

We are currently **recruiting three new full time doctors** to join our team so that we can significantly increase our appointment numbers permanently. This will place less reliance on temporary locum doctors as well as freeing up some of our regular doctors from same day team duties so that they are more available for routine appointments.

- **Patient Care Coordinators**

Each patient has a named doctor and each doctor is a member of one of four clinical teams (see our website for more detail). The aim of this team-based approach is to try to provide better continuity for our patients, especially as a number of our more senior doctors only spend part of their working week in clinical practice.

Each clinical team (green, blue, red or yellow) now has a dedicated patient care coordinator whose job is to help look after patients who belong to that team.

If you are struggling to have your needs met then you might find it helpful to ask to speak to your patient care coordinator.



## **2. Prescriptions**

There have been some delays in prescriptions being processed.  
The reasons for this have been:

- Lack of clarity over processes
- Staff sickness causing delays in prescription handling
- Doctors' workload causing problems in issuing prescriptions in a timely manner particularly when covering for colleagues who are absent on a given day

What we are doing:

- **Clarification of internal processes and work with pharmacies**

We have clarified our internal processes and are working with local pharmacies to try to improve the whole process from original request for medication to the medication being available from the pharmacy.

We would encourage all patients to use the EPS electronic prescription request service which reduces the risk of prescriptions being lost and allows much better tracking of prescriptions (see our website for details).

- **Improved cover for sickness absence**

We are ensuring that prescription handling is prioritised and if we are short of staff on particular days we are able and willing to bring in agency staff to help.

- **Care coordinator oversight**

We have asked the patient care coordinators to take responsibility for ensuring that all their team's prescriptions are dealt with on a daily basis.

## **3. Phones**

There are still problems with the phone system dropping calls unexpectedly and without reason which means that sometimes patients get suddenly cut off and sometimes patients can be stuck in a phone queue without registering on our system. Clearly this is unacceptable and we are doing everything we can to work with the South East Commissioning Support Unit who are responsible for the phone system at the Nelson Health Centre to resolve these issues.

We sometimes also have insufficient numbers of staff members answering phones when there are surges in demand.

What we are doing:

- **Formal escalation of our concerns about the phone system**

Although fixing the phone system is outside of our control we are escalating this issue since we regard it as a major problem and we will not rest until this is resolved to our satisfaction.

- **Improved flexibility in our call handling numbers**

We have implemented a system where extra staff members can be pulled onto phone answering when the queue starts to lengthen.

- **Improved website**

We have improved our website to allow as much as possible to be done through the website to prevent patients from having to phone the practice. This includes our "decision support tool" which you can access on our website by clicking the "Get Help Now" icon.

We are constantly working to try to improve our service and take patient feedback very seriously so please continue to let us know when things are not working. Equally we all take great pride in our work and in the practice and we work in the NHS because we want to help people so if you feel we have done well then please also let us know since it is very encouraging to our practice team to hear this.

We wish you all a very happy Christmas and New Year period.

The Nelson Medical Practice Management Team.

<http://www.nelsonmedicalpractice.co.uk/>



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