

Changes to how you book to see a Dr or nurse

The White Horse Medical Practice is doing everything it can to cope with the increased volume of requests for appointments. To help us sustain a safe, caring and responsive service for our patients we have introduced a patient centred triage or assessment system.

'Triage' simply means that we screen patients to decide how urgently they need to be seen. Some may need to be seen very urgently – within just a few minutes – while others may quite safely wait, either to see a doctor of their choice, or to book an appointment that fits with their week's schedule.

Telephone triage was recently introduced to achieve this and has already been found to work well, by both patients and staff. Every patient ringing for a doctor's appointment will be called back promptly by one of the GPs or a nurse practitioner who will assess the level of urgency of their problem. It is important that patients keep their mobile phones with them and switched on, so that the clinician can contact them easily. If you are at work and can only be called back in your lunch break, please ask; this can be arranged.

We can see patients almost immediately if their problem is so urgent it would be unsafe to wait. Most patients will be seen within a few days. If a patient prefers to wait for a specific GP or to book a future appointment this can be done too; up to a month ahead following discussion with a GP. The system allows for continuity of care, so that if you need to see the same GP for the same medical problem, this can be arranged.

We are not blocking appointments, we are simply making sure that all patients are booked with the appropriate level of urgency or need to see the clinician best able to meet their current problem.

The appointment process is more complex now that traditional GP work is carried out by other professionals such as opticians, nurses, pharmacists and physiotherapists. By making the first, and every conversation with our patients count, triage ensures that each of them will be seen by the right clinician first time, regardless of whether the appointment request is routine or urgent.

This system has reduced the waiting time for routine appointments from over three weeks to under one week and many patients now have their need dealt with on the same day that they contact us. This has also helped to reduce the number of non-attendances at the surgery.

We appreciate that this is a new process: we are continually reviewing its effectiveness and welcome feedback both positive and negative.

There is a national initiative to move to more telephone work and more triaging of appointments, so we are not alone in this approach, even if other local practices have different systems.

The White Horse Medical Practice

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