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Open letter to patients

You may be aware from press and social media reports that there is increased demand for appointments nationally and at Merchiston we are currently experiencing unprecedented levels of requests for GP and nursing appointments. You may want to read this link to learn the extent of the problem nationally:

www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinions/gps-rise-to-challenge-of-burgeoning-workload

The increase in demand comes at a time when we are also responsible for delivering COVID vaccinations to our patients at STEAM. This affects the number of GP and nursing appointments we can offer as our staff have been working at the clinic twice weekly instead of at the surgery.

Unfortunately, our staff have been the target of abuse from patients which is adversely affecting their mental health and resilience. This is unacceptable and we have a Zero Tolerance policy on abuse of all forms and in extreme circumstances patients showing this behaviour may be removed from our Practice Patient list.

As we are still in the Covid pandemic, the NHS recommends that we triage or phone back every patient who wants advice from a nurse, doctor or other healthcare professional. Therefore, we cannot offer GP appointments to book in advance. These appointments are for routine matters and acute problems and are bookable "same day" in the morning from 8am and in the afternoon from 12. Clinic days and times vary for individual GPs and may change from week to week.

We also have a daily Triage GP available to deal with clinically urgent same day requests from patients. This GP decides what and when treatment is appropriate.

Our patients tell us that they prefer to see the same GP and we are keen to offer this continuity of care, so patients are encouraged to book with their named GP for routine matters. Each GP has a list of assigned patients which is proportional to the hours they work so there is a fair split of patient associated workload.

We continue to be proactive in reviewing our resources and process to maximise the number of appointments available. Patients will often be signposted to other Health Care Professionals in the Practice based on the information GPs ask our receptionists to gather. We have increased the number of support staff we employ and in the past few months, we have taken on a Clinical Pharmacist and First Contact Physio and are looking at the roles of Advanced Nurse Practitioners (ANP) within the Practice. We also have a dedicated GP working with our receptionists to ensure our processes and communications are robust.

At present we can never satisfy every patient requirement for an appointment, and this is unlikely ever to be the case as there is a finite number of appointments that it is clinically safe for each GP to deal with daily. We will always offer an alternative and strongly suggest patients call NHS 111 if we are unable to offer an appointment.

111 is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week advice service for patients to phone if they have a medical concern. It is there to make it easier for patients to get the right advice or treatment they need, be that for their physical or mental health. They triage all calls and manage health complaints appropriately which may include booking appointments, appropriate referrals and advice to help patients manage their symptoms. To contact 111:

Call 111 for free from a landline or mobile phone.

Go online to 111.nhs.uk (for assessment of people aged 5 and over only).

Thank you for reading. We appreciate your understanding, and your valuable support at this challenging time.

Merchiston Surgery Partners