

8th December 2022

Dear PPG Members,

I am writing to thank you for the hard work and commitment you have shown in producing the survey of our patients that was presented to us recently.

As a partnership we had a planned meeting last week to discuss our appointment system and the way forward.

We as a Practice are extremely grateful for the time and commitment of the Patient Participation Group and we particularly appreciate your ability to reflect to us the views and opinions of our patients. We are equally grateful for your ability to explain to our patients the situation and realities of General Practice within the current NHS. We also hope that you feel able to lobby government and NHS governing bodies on our behalf.

We have not had a chance yet to look through all the 700 responses, but we have dipped in to get a flavour and we will look at this resource fully with time. I did want to write back to you though with some initial thoughts about the summary points you presented to us. As you state this is an opportunity for us to work through over a period of time and we will do this.

To start with I am afraid that I need to have a brief rant:

The Practice was disappointed by the overly negative content of your summary. I dipped into a reasonable sample of the 700 responses, and it seemed to me that the responses were very balanced between positive and negative. We do, of course, need to recognise that respondents to any survey are more likely to have negative views. Your summary has four lines about positives and then five pages of negative comments. That didn't go down very well with team members who are giving their all in an impossible situation that is not of their making.

As a reality check for you:

- General Practice nationally has just recorded the highest monthly demand in its history. Across the country in November, General Practice offered 36 million appointments. That means one in two of the population saw their GP in November.
- It may surprise you to know that on Monday and Tuesday last week at WPMC, 240 patients felt they had to have urgent contact with a GP. That was in addition to the similar number of patients who were booked into routine appointments. That means that over those two days, 1 in 25 of each of our patients (that's man, woman and child), were in contact with us. We recognise that some of the same day urgent demand is due to difficulty accessing advanced appointments, but we are still having to try and find the unwell patients hidden amongst all those calls.
- Our workload is currently twice what it was three years ago. Three years ago, we had contact with 300 patients per thousand on the practice list each month. We are now having contact with 600 patients per thousand each month of the year.
- We have been very fortunate at the Practice to be able to increase the GP workforce in keeping with our rising patient list. Many other Practices have not been able to do this

because of the shortage of GPs nationally, and as a result of this Practices are failing. Locally our patient list is rising because of local practices failing. We as a Practice are committed to trying to provide the best possible care for our patients, to provide a safe service and to provide a service that is resilient enough to last into the future. Nationally there has been a lot of talk about patients' rights to see a doctor within 24 hours; 7 days or fourteen days etc. Unfortunately, there is very little discussion about responsible use of a limited service.

- Currently, for doctors at WPMC, a day's work runs from 8am till at least 8pm. Often doctors are still needing to come in on days off or at weekends to complete administrative tasks. Clearly this is not sustainable. The rest of the team including Nurses, Receptionists, Secretaries and Administrators are all working at an exceptional level as well.

We would very much appreciate any ideas that the PPG has to get the message across to our patients that they need to care for their General Practice service or lose it.

During our discussions about the Practice appointment system and forward planning last week, we did address several the issues that you have raised. I hope that it is helpful if I go through these in order.

- The initial page of comments about wrong information being given by reception staff, prejudicial views, incivility by reception staff, presumably related to a few comments amongst the 700 respondents. We will look at the details of what these were and deal with the specific issues. Our practice population is one of the most diverse in Nottingham and we see this as one of the joys of working in this area. We have always had very positive feedback from our more vulnerable patients about their ability to access our services, so this feedback is disappointing.
- There is mention about us limiting the times of emergency calls. I just need to remind you that we are not an emergency service and do not have an emergency role. We have an emergency department very close to the Practice which is setup for dealing with emergencies. We have had to limit the time that patients can call for an urgent same day appointment. This is a matter of safety. Once we have reached our capacity for dealing with urgent calls in the day, patients are advised to phone 111 for a safe assessment. In practice this does not happen that often and we do communicate this very clearly with patients in this position. No one here is trying to defend this as an ideal policy but we do not, at the current time, have any choice. Hopefully demand will reduce in time to a more realistic level, but this is in the hands of our politicians and the press.
- With regards to face to face appointments, certainly we appreciate that many patients wish to be seen face to face. It certainly is easier and safer for doctors to see patients face to face compared to speaking to them on the phone. We do plan over the next few weeks to increase the availability of advanced booked appointments and we do currently offer patients the choice of a face to face or telephone appointment at the point of making their routine appointment.
- We appreciate your comments about communication about our appointment system. When we were sending out text messages with regards to our appointment system, we had a lot of complaints that patients did not want to receive these. We certainly take onboard that the website needs to be as clear as possible about the appointment system and if we make a significant change about the timing of when patients need to phone for different appointments, we will send this out via text messaging again.

- We also appreciated your comments about the online repeat prescription ordering system. We do feel that the ability to write notes on these requests is useful. It may surprise you to know that we get 60 to 80 notes attached to prescriptions requests each day and we are able to action most of these. Some of the notes attached to prescription requests are incomprehensible. If there is anything that the PPG can do to help patients to send clear and simple messages, then that would be greatly appreciated. We will see if we can get our computer system provider to make these notes stand out more. Currently the notes do seem a bit lost amongst lots of text about when the request was made and by when it should be actioned.
- At our meeting last week, we had a long discussion about the balance of urgent, routine and follow-up appointments. We agree entirely that it is unacceptable for patients to find that we are asking them to book an appointment to see us and then they are unable to access that appointment. In the New Year we will be increasing the number of follow-up appointments and we are going to try moving to a system where if a GP feels they need a patient to book an appointment with them, they will send them a text with an appointment attached. Hopefully this will prove more acceptable than the current situation. We will need to gradually adjust the number of routine and follow up appointments. We are currently working at capacity, so we need to see these changes bringing down the number of requests for same day urgent appointments. Hopefully over a few weeks we will be able to get a more appropriate balance.

We plan to look in more detail at the individual responses with time and reflect on comments that are made. I am sure that this will result in more changes to the systems in time.

I would like to end by once again thanking you for your hard work, your support and encouragement of the Practice team.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely,

Dr N Silcock