

HOPWOOD HOUSE MEDICAL PRACTICE

An Open Letter from your GP

What we've been doing

We are writing to update you on recent developments in general practice and how you can help make sure we can continue to be there for you when you need us.

As you may know, general practice has remained open throughout the pandemic, although we have had to work differently. We have carried out consultations by phone or video, but we have continued to see patients face-to-face and make home visits where clinically appropriate. In addition, we have embraced new ways of working and where appropriate, use digital technologies to enhance patient care and access. We have been asking patients to use online consultations, in line with national guidance, where patients are able to access our website or Patient Access (which gives you access to a range of GP services such as booking appointments and ordering repeat prescriptions, as well as access to your health records). We also use a system that allows us to text and carry out video consultations to communicate with our patients.

During this time, we have also undertaken the huge task of setting up and staffing COVID vaccination clinics across Oldham. Primary care staff have been extremely busy booking patients and key workers into these clinics, while answering patient queries. Since December 2020 our Primary Care staff have succeeded in delivering 120,000 of the 200,000 vaccines given to citizens who are registered with an Oldham GP, for which we are very proud.

The current position

Although practices continue to be fully up and running, we know patients are often struggling to get through on the phones and book appointments, this is because we are currently seeing unprecedented levels of demand, much higher than before the pandemic.

There are many reasons for this – patients whose mental health has suffered as a result of social isolation, patients who we are managing in primary care while having extended waits for hospital treatment and those who have held off contacting us because they lacked the confidence we could see them or they didn't want to make a fuss during an ongoing health emergency.

What we're doing

We are determined to continue to do the best we can for all of our patients, to ensure clinical needs are met and general practice can respond to future needs by also supporting the wellbeing of our staff.

We are doing all we can to make appointments available to meet heightened demand. But for the foreseeable future, it's unlikely we will be able to see everyone as soon as they would want.

To manage the situation safely we are likely to need to 'triage' calls, to prioritise those patients whose needs are most urgent, to decide which member of our clinical team is best placed to support each patient. We are lucky to have excellent First Contact Physios,

Advanced Nurse Practitioners, Practice Nurses, Health Care Assistants, Clinical Pharmacists, Paramedics, Mental Health Practitioners and other Allied Health Professionals, as well as other Specialist Community Services that work with us. We will also advise and direct patients to other sources of care and support where appropriate, such as pharmacies, self-care or support groups.

For those patients who need a consultation, we are continuing to determine the mode of consultation based on clinical need, while minimising risk to both patients and staff. This means, where it is safe and clinically appropriate, most patients will continue to be contacted first via phone rather than seen face-to-face.

This approach is supported by NHS Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group and will be reviewed as we hopefully continue to come out of the pandemic.

What patients can do to help

- If you feel you need us – do get in touch. We don't want patients to think they must not bother us because we are too busy. We are here to help you. We can help you and others even more effectively if you are able to use the online consultations found on our practice websites or through Patient Access as we can assess any red flags or worrying/concerning symptoms and gather important information about your medical problem that enables us to respond in the best way possible with the right clinician in a timely manner. It also frees up phonelines for those who can't access the online consultations or have very urgent health needs.
- Please be patient and kind– it may take longer to get through to practices on the phone. You may be offered a telephone appointment with a GP or other clinician, contacted via video or text. Everyone, patients, carers and our practice staff are all doing their best under challenging conditions. If you have a query regarding Hospital and Specialist Care treatment, please contact them rather than your GP. They remain open and seeing patients and have also adopted remote consultations alongside face-to-face services.
- We also have some great self-referral services available to patients that you can access directly. You don't need to see your GP first. These self-referral services have increased during the last 12-18 months and can enable patients to see the right person for their problem much sooner and often have access to information and self-care in the meantime. These include;

<https://usetherightservice.com/self-care/nhs-symptom-checker/>

<https://patient.info/symptom-checker>

<https://111.nhs.uk/>

<http://childhealth.oldhamccg.nhs.uk/>

Adult Mental health;

- Tameside, Oldham and Glossop MIND <https://www.togmind.org/>,
- Healthy Minds Oldham <https://www.penninecare.nhs.uk/healthymindsoldham>,
- Silvercloud
<https://www.iaptportal.co.uk/ServiceUser/SelfReferralForm.aspx?sd=91902c96-6c8e-4bcc-94bc-c3957d9d1190>

Young People and Children's mental health support;

- Healthy young minds <https://www.penninecare.nhs.uk/hymoldham>
- Youth in MIND <https://www.togmind.org/youth-mind>
- Kooth <https://www.penninecare.nhs.uk/kooth>
- B-EAT Eating disorder support <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>

Alcohol & Drugs support;

- Turning Point <https://www.turning-point.co.uk/services/rochdale-oldham>
- Drink Aware <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice/alcohol-support-services>

Physio; Physiodirect <https://physiodirect.northernalliance.nhs.uk/>

Primary care eye Care; <https://primaryeyecare.co.uk/>

Community & Social Care Support;

- Community support @ The Link Centre https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200369/help_to_live_at_home/552/the_link_centre
- Carer Support @ The Link Centre <https://www.carersuk.org/search/oldham-carers-centre>
- Adult social care referrals for carer or patient care support <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Oldham+adult+social+services&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

In conclusion:

Your GP surgery remains open to see patients who need us, but you may be offered a telephone appointment, based on clinical need. You can help us by trying [self-care](#), get advice from your local pharmacist first, or use the self-referral links listed above for certain conditions, unless it is an emergency. Using online consultations for yourself or family members allows us to help you the best we can. Please be patient and above all else be kind.