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| NEW DOVER ROAD SURGERY | |  |
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18 September 2020

Dear Patients,

We know there has been a lot of discussion in the news this week about GPs providing face- to-face appointments. We wanted to explain some of the reasons why we have been offering a reduced number of face-to-face appointments. We also wanted to reassure patients that NHS Digital have confirmed that in July over 50% of the 22.8 million appointments carried out were conducted face to face.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have remained open to patients. We have offered appointments using new ways of working and new technology. We have worked hard to make sure we remained available to speak to, and to offer appointments to anyone who needed them.

While we appreciate that patients sometimes prefer to see a GP face to face, there are reasons why we have offered additional online or telephone consultations, and government guidance has played a big part in this. It has remained the case that if we have needed to see a patient face to face, or felt it was important for their care, we have asked those patients to come in to see us.

Offering new ways of working has helped some patients to access appointments they wouldn’t normally have been able to attend due to their commitments, such as their work or caring responsibilities.

It remains the case that bringing patients into the surgery while coronavirus is with us presents some significant challenges. We want to explain more about these challenges.

We always pay close attention to the cleaning of our premises. However, the level of cleaning required between patients during the pandemic means that if all our patients were to come into the surgery, we would not be able to offer the same number of appointments because of the increased cleaning time that would be needed.

Additionally, changing PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) between each patient adds additional time to the end of each appointment. The difficulty in obtaining PPE has also meant that we have needed to be more cautious about the way we use scare resources.

Another challenge we face is how to make sure that social distancing is as good as it possibly can be, and that we maintain a ‘COVID-secure’ environment. Some of the things we need to take into account when considering this are: the number of people in the waiting room, the number of people who cross in the corridors, and the toilet facilities that are available.

As caring employers, we need to ensure that we keep our staff safe as well. Our staff are people too, and some may have ethnicity or health issues that make them more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19.

Finally, and we think most importantly, we need to consider you, our patients. We have many elderly and vulnerable patients with health conditions that make them more vulnerable to COVID-19 than most. We also know that there are young and healthy people who have been seriously affected by COVID, so it isn’t just the elderly or infirm we need to protect.

Increasing the number of patients in the surgery means that we increase the risk for everyone – particularly if some of those people have symptoms of COVID-19 and are unwell enough to need to be seen.

As doctors and staff working in GP practices, we really want to do the best we can for our patients. We do the jobs we do because we care about the people we look after.

We would all love to see a return to ‘normal’ life and the easy face-to-face care we have always provided, but at the moment offering fewer face-to-face appointments keeps patients safe and provides the maximum number of appointments we can.

As always, we are available to talk to patients, and we want to hear from those who need us. While we understand patients’ frustrations with the current situation, we hope that you will continue to help and support us, as you have always supported the NHS, so that we can go on providing you with care and support in the coming weeks and months.

Yours faithfully,

*The Doctors and Managers at New Dover Road Surgery*