



# HADDENHAM Medical Centre

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**31<sup>st</sup> March 2022**

## **Spring Update**

We would like to update our patients on how we are currently running.

## **Staff Sickness**

As a result of taking care and following the infection control measures required by the NHS, we have kept patients visiting the surgery and most of our staff safe from COVID over 2020 and 2021. With the emergence of the more transmissible omicron variant and the easing of infection control measures in the community, we have been less fortunate since the start of 2022. We have had at least one member of staff off due to COVID most weeks since the start of the year, including members of our medical and nursing teams. This, combined with long-term sickness, has been very challenging at times. We are very grateful to our amazing team who have stepped up, worked extra shifts, and often worked in roles they do not normally do. Please continue to be kind to our front-line staff who are, frankly, very tired, but remain committed to doing the best we can for our patients with the resources we have.

## **Staff changes**

Working as an NHS GP practice receptionist is very challenging work and even more so over the last two years. Like most practices locally and nationally, we have struggled to retain receptionists and recruit new ones. We have lost some valued colleagues over the last two years and, despite many rounds of recruitment, are still understaffed in some areas. Please be patient with our new receptionists as they get settled into the practice.

Ellen Solley, our Practice Manager, has been an excellent leader in our practice over 9 years but has decided to relocate to be near family. She has been a key part in many of the improvements we have made over her time with us and a significant part of the reason that CQC awarded us "outstanding" in terms of our leadership. She will be sorely missed. With her help, we are looking for a suitable replacement.

## **PPG**

We met with our Patient Participation Group (PPG) working group a couple of weeks ago. It was a useful meeting to hear about patient experience, to discuss where we are and to seek their views on how we'd like to work going forward. A particular focus of our discussions was how to make the appointment system work for both patients and staff. We all hope, infection control rules permitting, to get back to face-to-face PPG meetings later in the year.

## **Appointments**

It remains a very difficult time in the NHS with GP practices and hospitals all working very hard. We are still dealing with COVID (no, it has not "gone away" despite what politicians might say!), increasing cases of long COVID, new problems, a backlog of old problems, long waiting lists in the hospital and a continued requirement to follow NHS infection control rules. We are speaking to and seeing high numbers of patients at the practice, but this is difficult with staff shortages. The current

waiting list for some hospital care locally is now over a year which is frustrating for patients but also for GPs and hospital specialists.

We need to ensure that patients with urgent problems are dealt with safely and quickly; and that patients with routine problems are dealt with by the right person at the right time. For these reasons, we will continue with our current “doctor first” appointment system which means if you think you need to see a GP, you will speak with a doctor first on the phone. If you have a problem and think you need help from a doctor, please ring the surgery. The receptionist will take some details. To be clear, the receptionists do not make clinical decisions. They will only try to guide you to the right member of the team for your problem. For example, an issue with medication may be best managed by our attached pharmacist; a musculoskeletal problem may be best assessed by our attached specialist physiotherapist. Much of the time, they will take your details and you will be added to the list for a GP to phone you back. If there is a particular GP you would prefer to speak with or who knows your problem well already, then please request this and we will try our best to make this happen if we can. In asking for a few details, the receptionist is not being nosy but trying to give the GPs as much information as possible so the GPs can prioritise those patients who might have more serious problems and need a more urgent call back. When a GP rings back, it may be that the problem can be dealt with over the phone, that you need to come down to the surgery to be seen, visited at home by one of our specialist paramedics, or that your problem can be best dealt with by a different member of the team.

There is a limit to how many patients a GP can deal with safely in one day and once this number has been reached, we can only then safely deal with urgent problems. In this case, if your problem is routine, you will be asked to ring back another day or offered an alternative option. These options include being offered an evening video GP consultation, seeking advice from a local pharmacist or from NHS 111 Online, or using the free “AskFirst” app. With “AskFirst”, Olivia, a virtual health assistant provides patients with trusted advice for urgent, but not life-threatening emergencies. The system can intelligently connect patients to the right care pathway, such as arranging a 111 call back or an appointment booking. “AskFirst” is available via the practice web page or can be downloaded as an app.

We will continue to keep the appointment system under review and discuss this with our PPG.

### **Spring COVID boosters**

The NHS has started to provide Spring COVID boosters for selected groups who might be at very high risk from COVID infection. These are:

- aged 75 years old or over
- aged 12 years old or over with a weakened immune system
- residents of care homes

Patients will be contacted directly by the NHS with an invitation to book at the right time if they qualify. They will then be able to book via 119 or the online booking service here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/>

Please do not contact the surgery to book an appointment and be aware that we have no ability to arrange spring boosters for those who are not in the above groups.

### **Finally**

Thank you again for all your support. Please continue to be kind to our team and all those working in the NHS.