

# Revised Appointment System

Ripon Spa Surgery

23<sup>rd</sup> April 2019

## **Introduction**

We have decided to revise and update our appointments system. Our aim is to offer an efficient and clinically safe service that can respond to the needs of our patients, our surgery and to the changing requirements of our NHS contract.

## **What will change?**

We will build on the success of our existing telephone-based consultation model, which we have found to be very successful and generally popular with our patients. Currently this service is offered as an alternative when a suitable face-to-face appointment is not available, but a large number of patients are actively requesting an initial telephone consultation when they feel a query can be dealt with efficiently without coming into the surgery.

In the future we will offer an initial telephone consultation as the first point of contact for all requests. You will be able to receive a telephone consultation with a doctor on the same day or on another day. We aim to return all calls or urgent advice within three hours, and pre-booked calls can be arranged with a specific doctor, same-day calls may be returned by any one of the doctors who are available that day, although we will endeavour even then to maintain continuity with one doctor for ongoing problems.

Following this initial telephone consultation the doctor may recommend some tests or a face-to-face consultation with one of the health care team. In the case that a series of face-to-face consultations are required, this will be arranged on discussion with the doctor.

Later this year we intend to introduce an on-line service that will allow an initial contact by means of a short typed message. Pre-booked telephone appointments may also be available to book online.

## **Why change it all?**

This change has been brought about for a number of reasons

- Safety
  - When demand is high it is impossible to assess everyone face-to-face. Telephone consultations allow us to ensure that patients with an urgent clinical need are treated as soon as possible
  - Patients who find it difficult to get to the surgery are not disadvantaged by being kept waiting for advice while potentially less poorly people who are being seen
- Efficiency
  - Calls are all answered on the same day, and usually within a few hours. This removes the delays what traditional appointment systems imposes
  - A large proportion of calls can be completed without the need for face-to-face consultation, which removes the inconvenience of attending the surgery for an appointment
  - Investigations that are required (blood tests or X-Rays for example) can often be arranged following a phone call, so the information a doctor needs is at hand when you consult them subsequently.

- Workforce
  - In recent years the number of doctors choosing to train as GPs has fallen significantly, while at the same time the number of doctors leaving the profession or having to reduce their hours of work has increased. The total number of full time equivalent GPs has dropped by about 1500 since the government has pledged to have 5000 more GPs in post by 2020. This has, naturally, made it difficult to recruit and retain GPs, and has made locum (stand-in) provision prohibitively expensive. It is now expected that an increasing number of the other health professionals (e.g. pharmacists) will be joining GP practices over the next few years, and a system of first contact telephone consultations will enable us to direct patients to the appropriate person in the practice much more effectively
- NHS
  - The contract we hold with the NHS requires us to prioritize ease of access over the continuity of care. There is also requirement for us to develop online services. Telephone consultations allow us to maintain continuity as much as possible while providing a rapidly accessible and responsive service. In the future we also intend to offer telephone consultations that can be booked online. We shall also be introducing an online service to allow secure communication with the practice.