



Update for all Patients

April 2022

We thought that now would be a good time to give an update on what's happening at Fulwood Green for all of our patients to read.

It's clear from articles in the press and online that the NHS is in a bit of trouble currently. After 12 years of reduced funding and a global pandemic, we're in a situation where the whole system is struggling to manage the demand. It's certainly feeling busier every day in General Practice, the busiest I've known since I joined Fulwood Green 20 years ago. The British Medical Association has launched a Rebuild General Practice Campaign to highlight the challenges we're facing. For more details, see here:

<https://www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion/gp-campaign-time-to-rebuild-general-practice>

I think it might be helpful to break this up into a number of areas to update our patients on:

COVID-19

Despite the government abandoning all COVID precautions, the NHS continues to have to manage our working days differently. We're still wearing masks and gloves for seeing patients and ask all visitors to our building to wear a face covering to help protect our patients and our staff.

NHS Staff still have to isolate if they test positive and this will continue to have an impact on the number of members of staff able to work on any given day.

Cases of COVID remain really high in Liverpool and we will continue to screen all patients who are acutely unwell with a telephone call before we can arrange to see them safely face to face. This remains in place for the whole of General Practice nationally. It means there will be no return of our traditional walk-in emergency surgery.

At no stage since March 2020 has the front door been closed at Fulwood Green. We wanted our patients to know we were there for them in difficult times and have continued to see

patients face to face throughout the pandemic. It's really frustrating when patients that are in a room with one of our GPs ask us when we are opening again! We're aware that many other local NHS services did operate a locked-door policy and patients and family members have reported difficulty getting to see somebody face to face but that did not happen at Fulwood Green and we're really proud of that.

We've invested in more clinical staff during the pandemic to try to improve our access. We are delighted to welcome back Dr Sophie MacMurray who spent a year with us as a trainee GP. She's joined us 3 days a week permanently and we're very lucky to have her back. We're also really excited to welcome Rosie Ford, our new practice nurse who joins us part-time. Her role is vital this year as we increase further the amount of routine care and disease monitoring we offer. Myself and other colleagues have also been done extra days at the surgery during this latest wave of COVID so we have more appointments to offer patients than we've ever had.

Same Day (Emergency) Care

As you can no doubt imagine, this is the part of the service that keeps us the busiest. The demand for this is the highest we have ever known and we have been monitoring our telephone call numbers and appointment availability to make changes where we can to improve access for patients. It is clear to us, however, that we cannot sustain the current level of same-day demand and continue to offer a safe service across the whole week for all patients.

We will continue to triage all requests for a Same-Day assessment by one of our clinicians. There are two ways to request this:

- 1) **Complete an eConsult here:** <https://fulwoodgreen.webgp.com/>

We triage all eConsults on the same day and will call you, send a text or offer a Face-to-Face appointment based on our assessment of your clinical need. It's best to put as much information on the eConsult as you can to help us make the right decision.

- 2) **Phone reception on 727 2440 between 8 and 11am.**

Our staff will ask you some simple questions about your symptoms and may signpost you to other services such as GP Enhanced Access or Pharmacy First. They may add you to the triage list for a clinician to assess and contact you as appropriate.

ALL PATIENTS THAT WOULD BENEFIT FROM A FACE-TO-FACE CONSULTATION WILL BE OFFERED ONE. This will be based on clinical need. We are unable to offer face-to-face appointments to all patients based on preference alone. When we respond to requests for same-day assessment, it is reasonable to make yourself available for an urgent appointment that maybe offered. We totally appreciate how busy and hectic people's lives are and how

difficult it is to fit healthcare activity around all the other responsibilities. However, if you feel an issue is urgent, and are offered an appointment on the same day, we will not be able to be endlessly flexible about when you can be seen. This applies to work and school arrangements as well as simple convenience. If your preference is for a time and date of your choosing then we will not consider your problem an urgent one. This applied to choice of doctor or nurse too. We have a fair duty rota at Fulwood Green and cannot accommodate requests for a specific doctor or nurse for an urgent problem.

There are face to face and telephone appointments that are bookable in advance for a time, place and clinician of your choice.

We have always endeavoured to respond to every request for same-day help every day to support our patients and deliver the best possible care. This is becoming increasingly difficult to do, even with the most appointments we have ever had. There will be times, on particularly busy days, or when we have staff at home with COVID or other illnesses, when we are unable to manage your problem on that day and you are asked to contact us again the following day, attend a walk in centre, ring 111 or, if particularly poorly, attend an Emergency Department. We will never do this lightly, and if we do it will be because the workload our doctors and nurses are dealing with has become so excessive as to not be clinically safe.

I thought it might be useful to give some general advice about the kind of things we're seeing in these same-day clinics.

Sore Throats – The vast majority of sore throats get better on their own in a few days and are caused by viruses that we are good at fighting off. Self-care with paracetamol and lots to drink is usually all that's needed. We certainly would not need to examine or treat any sore throat until it's been present for at least 48 hours.

Useful advice here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sore-throat/>

Children – It's totally normal to worry about our kids when they're ill, and they seem to catch every bug that's around, don't they? However, they fight the vast majority of these off and develop their immunity for later life. We're being asked to assess lots of children and babies with a temperature or snotty nose who have had their symptoms for less than 24 hours. The treatment for this sort of thing is almost always just to give them paracetamol and/or ibuprofen and lots of liquids to drink. That's the advice we will give over the phone.

We're really lucky to have the best children's hospital in the world on our doorstep and they've made a brilliant online tool to help worried parents:

<https://alderhey.nhs.uk/symptom-checker>

We will NEVER refuse to assess a child that you are worried about but we may do that assessment over the phone or by asking you to send us photographs or complete an eConsult so we can safely triage how best to look after your little one.

Pharmacy – Pharmacists can do so much more than dispense medicines and we're extremely lucky to have a fabulous pharmacy in our building. Pharmacists can advise on lots of conditions like hay fever, skin rashes, coughs and colds, sticky eyes, sore throats etc. Medicines can be offered for free for children through the care at the chemist scheme. Our staff may redirect your call to the new Pharmacy First service where a skilled pharmacist will contact you to manage your problem.

Walk-in Centres – Our Walk-in centres are ideally placed to help with simple illnesses that come on quickly and aren't linked to more complex health problems. We work closely with the WiC at South Liverpool Treatment Centre and often offer advice to their staff or arrange to see a patient here if needed.

NHS 111 online is a really good place to start to decide what help you need to seek:

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

Routine Care

Our fantastic nurses have been working really hard to catch-up with routine long-term condition management since the summer of 2020 and we've had extra support from Tim and Craig, our brilliant pharmacists to ensure prescriptions are reviewed annually.

If you get a reminder from us about blood tests or an annual review, please don't delay and book an appointment for these important checks.

We now have routine telephone and face-to-face appointments available for nurses and GPs for non-urgent matters. These can be booked online or by telephone.

Workload Priorities

Taking all of the above into account, it is clear that we need to ensure we prioritise our work to ensure we deliver the safest possible care. For that reason, you may find that requests for "letters from the GP" from other agencies such as schools, employers, insurance companies, solicitors etc are not dealt with as quickly as you would like. This especially includes requests by airlines or holiday companies for confirmation of COVID status or vaccination exemption. Many of these functions are not covered by the NHS and we may charge for them.

We will continue to generate fit notes as quickly as we can but please note a consultation about employment related issues will never be treated as urgent.

We know how difficult it is to get in touch with other NHS services currently and that waiting lists are getting longer by the day. We're frustrated that many of our referrals are being delayed or rejected as hospitals bear their share of the current NHS problems. We are certainly having to pick up a significant amount of the work that would traditionally be done by other providers. We will always do our best to make sure you get the best care but please understand that most of this is totally out of our control and we do not have the time to chase referrals or appointments with hospitals. We may give you the contact details and ask you to do this on your own behalf.

I'm really sorry to have to give out these messages but we are in unprecedented times and must protect our ability to do the work that really matters to our patients. I'm afraid everybody's expectations of what the NHS can do need to be tailored to the current situation we find ourselves in through no fault of patients or staff.

Our Duty to You

Everyone at Fulwood Green comes to work everyday to do the best they can for our patients. The leadership team here have been humbled by and grateful for the extra work and responsibility everyone has taken on since the start of the pandemic. Please be assured that we all continue to work as hard as we can, every day, to deliver a high-quality service to our community. I am really angry when I read articles online about "lazy GPs not doing their jobs". I can give you all our absolute assurances that this has not been the case at Fulwood Green. Our whole team continues to go above and beyond every day.

If we are falling short of our goals of a high-quality service then please let us know. We always appreciate feedback and always respond to complaints in a thorough and professional manner.

Your Responsibility to Us

Since COVID started, our patients have been fantastic! We have been bowled-over by the kind comments, feedback and little treats our staff have been given. It's so nice to know you appreciate what we do.

We have recently noted an increase in the number of occasions when our staff have not been treated in the most respectful way. This is really unusual for Fulwood Green but I'm afraid it's getting worse.

The NHS has a Zero Tolerance policy for aggressive or abusive behaviour and we have been forced to apply this recently by issuing final warnings and removing patients from our list.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/stronger-protection-from-violence-for-nhs-staff>

Dealing with the NHS can be really frustrating at the moment, but there is absolutely no excuse for rudeness, aggression and abuse to hard working NHS staff who are all going through the same trials and challenges as our patients. We will all try to help you as best we can at all times so please always treat our team the way that you would like us to treat you.

As we're booking more routine appointments and more face to face appointments we're also finding more incidents of patients not turning-up without prior warning. This is a waste of an appointment that someone in need could have used. A waste of NHS time and money.

Please contact us to cancel if you can't make it.

I hope that you have found this update useful and that we can continue to work together to deliver excellent care to our population.

Many thanks for all your patience and support.

With very best wishes

Dr Simon Bowers