

12th May 2023

Patients at Norton Medical Centre

Dear Patient

We are sorry to hear of your difficulty in getting through to Reception/an appointment, this is not the service we strive to offer, but we, like many other GP Practices in the UK, are struggling to meet the current level of demand for our services. We will continue to do our best each day to deliver as many appointments as it is safe to do so. **Ultimately, we do not have unlimited resources and are currently working to maximum capacity.**

The reality is that there are simply not enough Clinicians or resources in General Practice to meet demand. In December 2022, the NHS lost the equivalent of 17 full-time fully qualified GPs compared to the previous month, and there are now 1,990 fewer fully qualified full-time GPs than in September 2015. This long-term decline coincides with a rise in patients. In Dec 2022, 62.2m patients were registered with practices in England, with a record-high average of 9,689 patients per practice. As a result, the average number of patients each full-time equivalent GP is responsible for has now reached 2,273 - a 17% increase since 2015 - demonstrating the mounting workload in general practice. Despite this, we were at the forefront of the NHS's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, delivering thousands of vaccines whilst maintaining non-COVID care for patients throughout.

The European Union of General Practitioners and British Medical Association (BMA) have recommended a safe level of patient contacts per day in order for a GP to deliver safe care, at not more than 25 contacts per day. At Your Service, published by the Policy Exchange and forwarded by Sajid Javid, states that 28 patient contacts per day is safe. Our GPs regularly have more than double the recommended patient contacts per day, but unfortunately it is still not enough to meet demand. This is a National-level problem that cannot be resolved at individual Practice-level.

Unfortunately, the increase in abuse, accusations and general negative attitude towards staff who remain working extremely hard in General Practice is not a good advertisement for more to join the profession, further compounding the problem. In February 2020, in a bid to reverse the stasis in GP workforce numbers, the Government announced a drive to recruit an additional 6,000 GPs by 2024, an aim in which Sajid Javid admitted would not be achieved. Thus, GP practices across the country are still experiencing significant and growing strain, with rising demand, declining GP numbers and struggles to recruit and retain staff.

Additional challenges:

- Patients generally have a lower tolerance for requesting help, with a large number of appointments requested for minor ailments that are usually self-limiting, such as sore throats, coughs and colds
 - These conditions would previously have been managed at home without GP input and would be better dealt with at a Community Pharmacy
- General Practices can now be contacted in more ways: over the telephone, via online services, eConsultations and in person, but the number of GPs, and thus GP appointments to offer, has not increased
- The scope for more complex disease management has increased, and a large portion of the maintenance care of these conditions, such as Diabetes, has moved from Secondary to Primary Care
- GPs can make referrals into consultant-led outpatient services, however the pressure in hospitals means there is no capacity in secondary care, and those referrals are rejected.

Norton Medical Centre

- The number of GP referrals to consultant-led outpatient services that have been unsuccessful because there are no slots available has jumped from 238,859 in February 2020 to a staggering 401,115 in November 2021 (an 87% increase).
- When GPs are unable to refer into hospital services, the care for these patients does not disappear. Instead, these patients need to be cared for by GPs while they wait for hospital treatment to go ahead, adding to the backlog in primary care.

The BMA have addressed the mounting pressure on general practice in England with the Support Your Surgery campaign. To see how you can help, visit: <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/covid-19/gp-practices/support-your-surgery>

Although I recognise there is still an unmet need, local data provided by NHSE Data Quality for March 2023 (the most recent data available) showed Norton Medical Centre provided 1 appointment for every 1.98 registered patients, which is higher than the Clinical Commissioning Group average of 1 appointment per 2.29 patients. This is an increase from December 2022, where we offered 1 appointment for every 2.48 registered patients (which was higher than the Clinical Commissioning Group average of 1 appointment per 2.71 patients). Sadly, local data from NHSE Data Quality also shows that Norton Medical Centre has a higher rate of patients who do not attend ("DNA") appointments, with 1 DNA per 29.02 appointments, compared to the local average of 1 DNA per 24.72 appointments, despite introducing a cancellation line.

I wish I was able to tell you that I will take the necessary action to rectify this situation, but in reality I can only guarantee that the staff and doctors at Norton Medical Centre will continue to work as hard as they can, to deliver the best service they are able to provide, within the limitation of the resources they have at their disposal. We appreciate that this must feel frustrating, and we share this frustration, as we really want to help you when you need us most. All our patients are equally important, but as previously stated the resources we have available to us does not always meet the demand; therefore, we have drafted the "Contact Information" document attached, to advise how we can best support our patients given the incredible level of demand we are receiving from our approximately 17,400 patients.

Having gone through the complaints procedures, if you are still not satisfied but do not wish to take the matter further within the practice, then you have the right to request an independent review of your complaint from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) within 12 months of the date of the final response letter.

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London
SW1P 4QP
Tel: 0345 015 4033

Yours sincerely



Leigh Malloy
Practice Manager

Norton Medical Centre

CONTACT INFORMATION

Opening Hours

Please note Monday-Friday the Surgery doors open at 08:00 and the phone lines open at 08:30.

Monday	08:00-18:00
Tuesday	08:00-18:00
Wednesday	08:00-18:00
Thursday	08:00-12:00 then 15:00-18:00
Friday	08:00-18:00
Saturday	10:00-13:00 (PRE-BOOKED APPOINTMENTS ONLY)
Sunday	CLOSED

Ways to make an appointment request/clinical query

Types of Appointment

Our doctor's ledgers are designed to allow time for telephone, video, face to face and online consultations, in addition to reviewing hospital letters, blood results, signing repeat prescriptions requests, providing sick notes etc. The surgery also allows booking of routine appointments. However, this is a limited number to ensure that patients can also access same day appointments for acute problems. Once all routine appointments are full our duty Doctor provides telephone triage appointments for patients who contact us with problems that they consider requires same day attention. We can only safely provide so many appointments each day and thus the more routine appointments we allow to be booked in advance, the less appointments there are to meet the same day needs, and vice versa.

Reception

Pop into the Surgery and speak to our Reception Team.

Telephone

Our Reception team are available by telephone on 01642 745 350.

Responding to patient feedback, we have invested in a new telephone system that reduces the burden on patients who are trying to contact the Practice. The new system includes 50 phone lines and a call back option for the patients who would otherwise have a wait to speak to Reception. We have invested in additional staff, and have revised break times and hours of work aiming to ensure we have sufficient staff to deal with incoming calls. Please note this system was implemented to improve ability to access NMC via telephone, however it does not increase appointment capacity. This means appointments may be fully booked to safe capacity by the time your call is answered or returned. If this is the case, patients will be navigated to the most appropriate alternative service, whether that is Community Pharmacy, Crisis Team, Social Prescriber, Mental Health Practitioner, 111 or A&E.

Patients with internet access can complete an eConsultation via our website at www.nortonmedicalcentre.co.uk and register for online services as an alternative way to communicate. You may find this a more convenient alternative way to get the support you need, and it helps free up the lines for those patients who are only able to contact us by phone.

Online booking and requests (SystemOnline)

Patients can perform several routine tasks online:

- Book appointments (depending on availability)
- Order repeat prescriptions
- View past/future appointments
- Cancel appointments
- View coded information from your medical records
- View test results
- Update your contact details

Practice Manager
Leigh Malloy

Salaried GP
Dr Karen Dacombe

Salaried GP
Dr Alicia Stanley

GP Specialist Trainee
Dr Ravinder Kumar

GP Specialist Trainee
Dr Rajendra Rijal

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- Answer questionnaires

Many patients also have the NHS App on their mobile phone and find this incredibly useful. Not only will it provide your widely needed COVID pass (if applicable), it can also assist in finding advice and order repeat prescriptions. The App is free to download.

If you have not already done so, please complete our Online Services registration form and return it to the Practice along with some identification. Acceptable forms of identification include:

- Passport
- Driving licence
- Birth certificate
- Marriage certificate
- Bank statement
- Utility Bill

If you do not have any of the above forms of identification, please speak to a member of staff. Please note that existing online users will be asked to provide identification if they wish to access their medical records online.

Practice Website – eConsultations

You can obtain advice or request administrative tasks such as fit notes by submitting an eConsultation via our website. You will receive a response to your query within two full working days. Please advise your availability around commitments in any eConsultation submission so that the Doctor can take this into consideration, where possible, if they need to contact you.

Please note: eConsultations are turned off once the eConsultation appointment slots are fully booked for that day and will be turned on again the following day. Not all eConsultations require an appointment, these messages are reviewed to decide the most appropriate action for you, it may instead be advice, signposting, medication, or another action.

Accessing Health Services If Your GP Surgery is Closed or Fully Booked

Due to the demand on clinician time, we cannot provide unlimited appointments as this would be unsafe and it would compromise the service you receive. Once our appointments are fully booked we are unable to create more, and we are sure you would not want us to run a service where we cancel appointments that are already booked to offer quicker access for one patient above someone else. We have increased our appointments as much as we are able within a safe level and if we cannot offer an appointment at a time you want we will try to provide an alternative or signpost you to other services, including those below, who can help.

Please note: Norton Medical Centre is not an emergency service, but we work alongside emergency services to try to meet the needs of our patients. Anyone unable to reach us who feels that they will come to harm if they do not receive medical assistance should contact 111 online in the first instance, or ring 999, where appropriate, to access emergency services.

In-Hours Care

There are a few other options you can use to get the support you need when you need it, including 111 online, self-help, NHS app and community pharmacies.

Out-of-Hours Care

When Norton Medical Centre is closed your local Pharmacist may be able to help with minor ailments (coughs, colds, sore throats, hay fever etc.) or queries about medication.

You can also access medical help or advice by calling 111 or visiting their website. You should use the NHS 111 service if you urgently need medical help/advice, but it is not a life-threatening situation. The call handler will assess your need and direct you to the most appropriate service.

Access 111 if:

Practice Manager
Leigh Malloy

Salaried GP
Dr Karen Dacombe

Salaried GP
Dr Alicia Stanley

GP Specialist Trainee
Dr Ravinder Kumar

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Dr Rajendra Rijal

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- you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency
- you think you need to go to A&E or need another NHS urgent care service
- you don't know who to call or you don't have a GP to call
- you need health information or reassurance about what to do next
- You can also get medical advice by using the NHS symptom checker.

You can find more information about NHS 111 on their website.

For immediate, life-threatening emergencies call 999.

If a health professional has given you a specific phone number to call when you are concerned about your condition, continue to use that number.

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