**Phone System Development**

**What is the issue?**

One of the most consistent frustration patients have told us about is the length of time they have to queue in the phone system before they can speak to a receptionist.

After initial feedback we upgraded the phone system to provide patients with a queue position so that they could make an informed decision on whether they wanted to queue or would call back at another time.

More recent feedback has highlighted difficulties that patients are choosing to queue in the phone system as they are not aware that all of the appointments for that period are full.

We have been investigating ways to advise that we are full to prevent this redundant queuing happening.

This has been challenging as it is not possible for the clinical appointment system to be connected to the phone system due to the security that is applied to the clinical system.

**What are we doing?**

We have purchased a new configuration for the phone system that will allow us to advise patients once our appointments are full to prevent people queuing redundantly.

This means that there will be less people waiting for their calls to be answered, and we anticipate that those who are trying to contact the surgery for another reason will be answered more quickly.

**What this will not do?**

This will not change the number of available appointments. Once all of the appointments are full, you will still need to wait for the next release. However, this change to the phone system means that you will be advised immediately rather than waiting on hold.

This will not change the speed at which the reception team are able to process the calls, but it does mean that once the appointments for that period are full, the receptionists will have more availability to deal with people calling for any other reason.

**What can you do?**

Remember the reception team want to help. They cannot give you what they do not have. Once the appointments are full, they will signpost you to other services. This is to give you the opportunity to use other avenues to find the support you need.

**How will it work?**

We release the appointments at 8am and 2pm every day. If you call after the appointments are full you will be advised that we are full and asked to call back at the next release time.

**What it if is medically urgent and I can’t wait?**

If you have a medical emergency you should call 999.

Most things that a GP surgery deals with can usually wait a few hours until the next release of appointments. There will always be a few exceptions and so there will be the option to advise that your request is urgent and you cannot wait. Any such requests will be reviewed by a doctor who will decide on the most appropriate action. This may be that they deal with it before the next release of appointments, or it may be that they advise that it can wait until the next release and you will be asked to call back.

**What else will it achieve?**

Our priority is to improve the patient experience of trying to contact us via the phone. By ensuring that people aren’t queuing in the system once all of the appointments are full, means that the lines should then be freed up for other patients.

**Other projects we are under taking to reduce the number of calls coming into the surgery?**

We have conducted an internal review of a number of our procedures to identify ways in which we can communicate information that you need, directly to you, to prevent you having to call into the surgery. A good example of this is how we communicate test results.

Previously, you were asked to call into the surgery if further action needed to be taken following a test. For example, you may have needed to have a follow up call with the doctor or nurse, or you may have needed to repeat the test.

We now have a dedicated member of staff who will contact you if you need follow up rather than asking you to call us.

Another example is a trial that we are currently conducting which allows us to text a URL to your mobile so that you can book an appointment online for Chronic Disease reviews, for example diabetes or regular blood tests. This then reduces the number of calls that need to be made into the surgery. If successful, we intend on rolling this out across more appointment types.