



# WESTGATE SURGERY



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**May 2021**

## **Letter to patients regarding care at Westgate following the Covid pandemic**

Dear Westgate Surgery Patients,

Thank you for bearing with us during the last year which has been a stressful time for everyone. We have been touched by the many kind messages of support we have received whilst we tried to provide you with the best care.

Previously we have written newsletters and patient information leaflets to keep everyone updated on how we are working to support patients.

This letter is to update everyone on how we are coping post Covid pandemic with the increased demand, the changing delivery of primary care and how we can work collaboratively with you to deliver safe care.

### **Increased demand**

NHS England has published data on the increased numbers of appointments within General Practice compared with the same period in previous years, the following link displays the data:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/appointments-in-general-practice/march-2021>

With a very elderly population who naturally have a greater need for primary care we are experiencing a huge increase in demand. This demand is above what we would expect and includes:

- Consultations from patients with a long list of problems that they want sorting instantly
- Requests to chase hospital appointments
- Requests for help with minor problems where self-care would be more appropriate.

Examples of recent consultations include:

- I had a headache overnight.
- I have had a sore throat since this morning
- I have had one episode of diarrhoea
- I have felt tired since waking up this morning

All of these are genuine examples of what our doctors are being asked about each day, all of these patients were well in themselves so were advised to take the

course of action of waiting to see what develops to help determine the best course of action. Please see below.

## **Self-Management**

When patients contact us in the very earliest stages of their condition, they expect we will immediately cure them, without having tried any form of self-care. Many patients phone without trying home remedies such as simple pain killers or other treatments for problems like constipation or diarrhoea.

We are not suggesting that if you are seriously ill, or if you have a red flag symptom, that you wait to get worse before getting in touch with us. We're talking about lots of people who are still very well in themselves, carrying on with all usual activities, going to work, or to the shops with very short-lived minor symptoms and who have not tried anything to help themselves.

*Red flag symptoms are symptoms like chest pain, bleeding, paralysis, difficulty swallowing that could indicate serious disease like cancer, a stroke or heart attack. We actively encourage you to get in touch with the right professional if you have red flag symptoms*

With self-care most cases of minor illness do resolve without ever needing treatment from the GP, by encouraging self – management in these instances will reduce the huge pressure we are currently experiencing.

## **Changing Primary Care**

Some of you, who have been with us for a long time, might have been surprised, at having consultations or visits from other teams and not your usual doctor. This is because General Practice is changing.

NHS England, Primary Care Network (PCN's) and CCGs (Clinical Commissioning Groups) have set up many new services to manage increased demand and to support patients and practices alike. This ensures practices can continue to offer you care for complex ongoing needs and also facilitates support from the appropriate speciality.

Some of these services are

1. Home visiting services for housebound patients.
2. The ART (Acute Response Team) for assessing and treating acutely unwell patients.
3. The FCP (First Contact Physio) who is trained in diagnosing and treating musculoskeletal problems.
4. The ICM (Integrated Case Management Team) comprising of Nurses and other clinicians to help patients with complex social and medical problems.

These services will evolve with changing needs of our population.

## **Sign Posting**

Westgate Surgery has been using active signposting for some time. This is an official and integral part of the NHS' High Impact Actions plan to help free up time for General

Practice, but it does require patients to engage with this and contact services they are directed to for help.

We aim to improve the patient's journey by signposting to the appropriate service and will continue to develop this once work on covid vaccinations allows us more time to develop the services we were initiating a year ago.

### **Telephone Consultation**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, NHS England and NHS Improvement supported all GP practices in England with the rapid implementation of a 'total triage' model using telephone and online consultation.

Total triage means that every patient contacting a GP practice is first triaged before making an appointment. It is possible to do this entirely by telephone.

The benefits of telephone consultations have surprised everyone working in primary care and we are the same. We have found that the doctors can deal with many things efficiently on the telephone and the use of electronic prescriptions means that any treatment can be ready for you to collect from the pharmacy almost instantly. It has also had simple benefits such as reduced traffic congestion as well as allowing the doctors to spend more time with patients that they need to see face to face and then physical examinations are not rushed.

We have continued to see patients face to face throughout the last year and this will continue to be an option after a telephone consultation/assessment with the doctor.

We are not going to change to full face to face booked appointments but we are going to work with patient's representatives to look at how we manage and offer telephone consultations at convenient times as many of you return to a normal working day.

### **Working collaboratively**

There remains a lot of work for the team to do at Westgate Surgery such as palliative care, care of the elderly, support for those with chronic conditions, immunisations, planning and working with others such as secondary care colleagues to improve health outcomes.

Whilst we continue to do this you can help us by:

- Using services carefully and thinking about self-care first.
- Helping the doctor to prioritise care if you have a number of problems that need to be dealt with.
- Not being surprised if you are seen by another service.
- Contacting others that can help you like mental health support services.
- Letting us know when it's a good time to call you for telephone consultations.

Please continue to work with us, to help us help you.

We have learnt a lot during the pandemic and want to improve care as we come out of it however we can only do this within the resources we have and we need to use them wisely. We have more patients wanting to register with us whilst dealing with an increasing flow of work from the hospital.

We will be using social media more to help keep you informed and are planning articles on mental health support, and other health topics to support you to make decisions. Please look at our Facebook page, but also let us know your email address by contacting us on [Tccg.WestgatePatient@nhs.net](mailto:Tccg.WestgatePatient@nhs.net) so that we can send you surgery updates and newsletters.

With many thanks from,

All the Doctors, Nurse and Support Staff at Westgate Surgery