

Dear Sir/Madam,

Over the last few years there have been large changes to the system of booking appointments at the practice. With lots going on in the background and the speed of these changes, it hasn't always been possible to keep you, our patients, up to date.

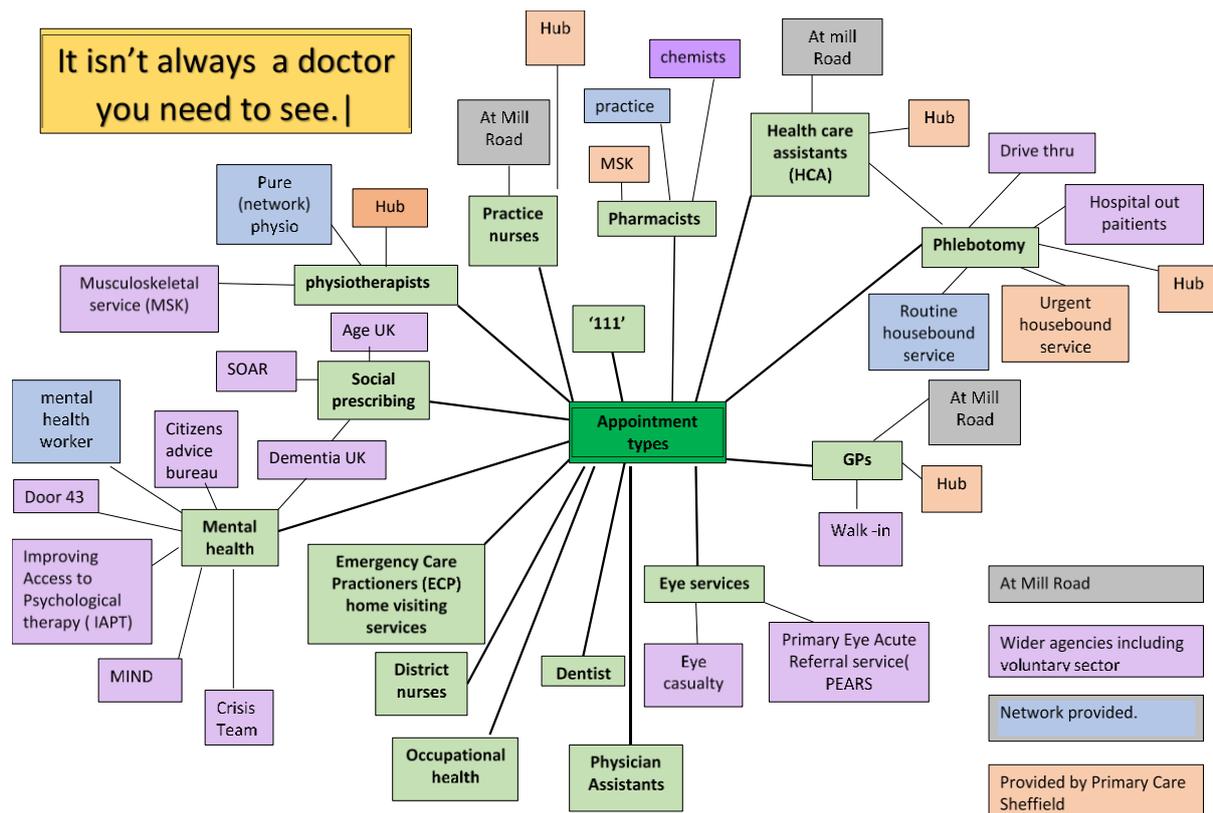
When Covid appeared and the Government enforced the most rigid social isolation rules in living history we were compelled to change from seeing the majority of patients face to face to a telephone first appointment system. Initially, this worked incredibly well and with reduced demand for healthcare services we were able to provide appointments for everyone who requested them on that day. However, it was clear even then that a lot of patients were not seeing us for ongoing problems and from around March 2021 the floodgates opened and more people were needing more from our service than ever before. The issues we see now are often more complex and coupled with the COVID19-related fallout and general problems in secondary care and social services, the last couple of years have been tough on everyone. Despite employing doctors for more sessions, this has still meant that we were unable to see everyone on the day.

Before Covid we ran a routine appointment system – this was face to face and often took three to four weeks before a doctor could be consulted. Often this involved sitting in a cramped and busy waiting room for a prolonged period of time and it was often difficult for our work-aged patients to receive care. In addition, if staff were unwell, full clinics would need to be cancelled. With Covid, the risk of people being unable to work has increased significantly, meaning that this way of working was untenable. In addition, the demand for appointments has increased and the general number of doctors (and other clinicians available) has dropped. In the current climate we are unfortunately less able to find someone to 'cover' additional work or clinics.

These pressures have caused us to re-evaluate the appointment system, which has brought us to the system we are currently using.

First and foremost we still maintain an 'urgent' or "same day service". It may not be possible for a doctor to speak to or see everyone, but in line with Government policy we have a widening team of clinicians who may be more suitable to address your issue. Alternatively, you may be advised to seek advice elsewhere if another service can address your issue more appropriately.

If you are offered a face to face appointment, this may be at a local hub rather than your usual surgery – a hub is a GP surgery in the local area with extra appointment capacity, to ensure that you can be seen by a clinician if required.



For all other appointments we are running a “routine waiting list” (RWL) system.

When you ring for an appointment with a doctor the reception staff will place your name on a list with the day that you requested the appointment along with a brief details of the problem you are ringing for. In addition they can take any preferences you have for times/days/clinicians, though these preferences may result in a longer wait for an appointment. The current predictive wait is between 7-14 days although this may fluctuate depending on the capacity we have in terms of staff or our ability to provide extra staffing. This is still an improvement on the 3-4 week waiting time prior to COVID.

Clinicians will try to review the RWL to see if there are any appointments that may be dealt with more quickly, directed to other services or if anything obvious seems to need seeing more quickly we will try and expedite that. You may be asked to provide further information via text (if able) to try and assist with this process. **However, if you feel your routine issue becomes more clinically urgent then please contact reception.**

The day before the appointment you will receive a text message or call to ask you to expect the doctor to ring the following day. This may be from a withheld number. The doctor will try to ring on 2 occasions. They will then provide any treatment needed, or arrange any face to face or follow up as required.

We would be grateful for your patience while systems evolve to meet the changing needs of our patients and the changes to the larger NHS as a whole.

We would also like to say that whilst the majority of our patients have been wonderfully supportive during this incredibly difficult period, there has been an increase in the number of incidents of abusive behaviour. In line with the Government's Zero Tolerance Policy we will not accept verbally or physically aggressive behaviour against any member of the Practice team who are trying their utmost to support all our patients.

We are hoping to compile feedback from patients on the new system in the near future but would be happy to hear any thoughts on the current system.

We would also like to remind you to allow 72 working hours for medication requests to be processed. Urgent requests for medication will be processed at the doctor's discretion. Please bear this in mind when ordering your medication so that you do not run out.

Thank you for your understanding.

Yours Sincerely,

Doctors Ashton, Lowe, Vas, Warwicker and Wong.