**NEWSLETTER November 2021**

This coming winter could be one of the most difficult for the NHS in recent history. Sadly the pandemic is far from over with over 30 000 new cases being diagnosed every day. At Elm Tree Surgery we remain committed to providing safe and effective services. We strive to offer accessible appointments, conducted professionally to provide good quality care. Although we are extremely busy, we are still here to help.

**We need your understanding**

As a surgery we are fully open, offering telephone consultations as well as face to face appointments. We are working at absolutely full capacity as well as contributing to the Covid and flu vaccination programmes, and our finite resources are being stretched to their limits by increasing demands. Our situation as a surgery is not unique, the unprecedented rise in demand on primary care services is happening nationally as well as locally. This is not all due to Covid - There has been a lot of publicity about face to face or telephone appointments lately. It was only 2 years ago that the then secretary of state for health was urging patients and GPs to have nearly all consultations by telephone or video, but the government policy has now changed again.

No-one knows what is the best proportion of face to face (F2F) appointments versus telephone appointments: clearly it cannot be 100% for either option. There is no evidence that a high proportion of F2F appointments results in better care. The Press seem to think that most GP consultations are for diagnosis, but most are actually for follow-ups, health promotion, chronic disease management, results of tests, medication queries and general advice.

**Help us, to get you the right help**

The advantages of non-F2F appointments, where appropriate, are patient convenience – no time is needed off work or school or child care; no transport is needed, and such appointments do not involve contact with other patients (who may be carrying infection) or with our staff, who risk infection from patients. The other difficulty we have is that our building is very small and can rapidly become crowded, with a risk to infection control. So, we will continue to offer a mix of F2F and telephone appointments. You are welcome to book for F2F appointment, as long as you do not have any symptoms of Covid or have been advised to isolate by Test and Trace services, but please do think first about whether you need a F2F or telephone appointment; if you are not sure, let the reception team know and they will book a telephone appointment and ask the GP whether a F2F would be more appropriate. Telephone appointments are appropriate for medication queries, follow-up appointments, test results or general advice unless you have been asked to book a F2F appointment. In addition, all the doctors scan their lists in advance and arrange for some patients’ appointments to change to F2F. Patients with skin lesions or rashes will usually be asked to submit photographs, as we do now, and F2F appointments are arranged subsequently if needed.

**Have you met our extended team?**

Don’t forget that not everyone needs to see a doctor – you can book directly with the nurse for dressings, wound care, general advice and health promotion; with the Elm Tree physiotherapist for new injuries, aches and pains and back problems, with the midwives for all ante-natal and immediate post-natal care, and you can contact the local pharmacy for queries about medications or the management of minor illnesses and complaints.

**We need your patience**

Finally, we too are having great difficulties with supply lines from our drug wholesalers (Brexit and Covid, again). In order to maintain good and reliable continuity of supplies to our patients, we ask that 5 days’ notice is now given for all repeat prescriptions. This brings us into line with all the other local practices

**Help us, to help you. We are all in this together**

Throughout the pandemic, we have witnessed kindness, resilience and teamwork from many of our patients. We thank you for all your support, and urge you to continue to work with us at this difficult time. Please help us, to help you. After all, we are all in this together.

[www.elmtreesurgery.co.uk](http://www.elmtreesurgery.co.uk) – for further information and updates

<https://bswccg.nhs.uk/your-health/hospital-care/our-gp-practices> to see what is happening in other practices in our CCG