

**DR. S. PARKAR, DR. A. SATTAR, DR. H. NGUYEN**  
**HIGH STREET SURGERY**

15 HIGH STREET, CHESHUNT, HERTS.EN8 0BX  
Telephone: (01992) 642446

Dear Patient

**Re: Demand & Capacity at High Street Surgery**

We have seen a huge increase in demand for our services and we genuinely are sorry to hear of experiences of patients trying to secure appointments with us. We understand that there are often long waiting times on the telephones to make an appointment. This is due to the high call volume which we are trying our best to get through as quickly as possible. There are times when we will not have an appointment to offer you as soon as you would like. This is not the service we strive to offer but we, like many other 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. We have increased the number of staff answering the telephone calls in the morning trying our best to reduce the waiting times.

Sadly, there has been a huge increase in verbal abuse to staff, over the telephones, in person and online. The staff that work at the surgery do so to help patients and we ask patients to treat staff with courtesy and respect. The surgery has a zero-tolerance policy and patients that verbally abuse staff may be de-registered from the practice list.

**Our current policy for booking appointments is:**

By phoning the surgery – Tel 01992 642446 - Same day appointments are released at 08:00 for both urgent and routine appointments. This does not apply to nursing appointments and these appointments are available to book in advance as long as capacity allows. We have also now opened up 25 slots a week for GPs for Routine and Chronic Long term conditions separately on top of what they see and do every day.

We have previously offered appointments becoming available at different times of the day to accommodate patients who cannot call at 8am. We found that this made no difference to the morning rush and caused more frustration when we asked patients to call back yet again later in the day to secure the next wave of appointments becoming available. The main issue is that we cannot meet the demand that we are currently faced with.

Many patients 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, ordering repeat prescriptions and seeing your test results. The App is free to

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download. In addition, there is also information on our website –  
<https://www.highstreetsurgerycheshunt.co.uk/>

**Accessing Health Services if the Surgery is Closed or Fully Booked.**

Although we acknowledge there is still an unmet need, we are offering as many appointments as we physically can. We aim to provide high quality, safe care and therefore cannot offer limitless appointments but are offering more patient contacts now than we did pre Covid. The clinical staff normally arrive early and it is not unusual for them to be working beyond 8pm due to their increased workload. They often work continuously through their lunch breaks carrying out home visits, dealing with hospital letters and prescriptions. We physically cannot safely offer more appointments than we already are. We have increased our appointments as much as we are able within a safe level, and we will try to provide an alternative or signpost you to other services who can help. We also have eConsult which you can access on our practice website. This is an online triage form that you complete which will then be seen and dealt with. You will then be responded to within 48 hours, although we do try to respond sooner. This is a very useful and easy way of contacting us rather than having to telephone and possibly wait during busy periods.

The European Union of General Practitioners and British Medical Association (BMA) have recommended the safe level of patient contacts per day 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 the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, states that 28 patient contacts per day is safe. Our GPs frequently have in excess of the recommended patient contacts per day, which is now about 45-50 patients 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.

The reality is that there are simply not enough Clinicians or resources in General Practice to meet demand. This puts immense pressure on all staff who are working in General Practice. Despite this, we have been 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.

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 DECLINE in GP workforce numbers, the Government announced a drive to

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recruit an additional 6,000 GPs by 2024, In 2015 the Government announced a drive to recruit an addition 5,000 GPs by 2021. NHS England/ICS are trying hard to meet the criteria but not been successful as yet . There is no reason to believe that they will be any more successful with their new 2024 target. 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 other staff members.

**Additional challenges:** Some patients generally have a lower tolerance for requesting help, with many appointments requested at the surgery being for minor ailments that are usually self-limiting, such as sore throats, hay fever, coughs and colds. These conditions are best managed at home without GP input and usually resolve on their own within a few days. Your local Pharmacist will be able to provide advice and over the counter medication to treat these and advise if you need to see a GP. The Community pharmacy Consultation Service (CPCS) has also been launched by NHS England and have been implicated and part of our service also at high street surgery. This allows the patient care services team to refer you straight to the pharmacy for minor illness advice if you contact the surgery in the first instance instead.

High Street Surgery is not an emergency service. We work alongside emergency services to try to meet the needs of our patient and refer onto A&E or 999 if the condition is not something we can treat within general practice. 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. You can find more information about NHS 111 on their website. <https://111.nhs.uk/> Life threatening conditions (severe chest pains, severe bleeding, stroke, if someone is unconscious and can't be woken etc, severe allergic reactions ) should all be directed to 999

The scope for more complex disease management has increased, (such as Diabetes, COPD, heart failure, chronic kidney disease and mental health) and a large portion of the maintenance care of these conditions, has moved from Hospital lead Care to GP lead care.

Realistically, we get the fixed amount of funding which is enough for each patient to receive an average of about 1.5 appointments per year. Ten years ago, this was the average number of times a patient visited their GP. However, the average pre covid figure was six appointments per year with some elderly and vulnerable patients seeing us ten to fifteen times a year, but the baseline figure and the funding to general practice has not been increased to reflect this.

The waiting times for hospital appointments has also increased massively. Where pre covid we may have seen or spoken to a patient once or twice before they saw a hospital

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consultant – with the increase in waiting at the hospitals this has now increased to 8-12 contacts before they receive the specialist advice we referred on for. We are also seeing increased requests from hospital consultants to carry out blood tests and investigations on their behalf as they are not seeing a majority of their patient face to face, this takes extra time to request and then the results to reviewed and sent on.

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/gppractices/support-yoursurgery>

In summary there is not a solution that will solve all our capacity and demand issues and suit everyone. In the past we have always been able to meet the needs of our patients and provide sufficient appointments and methods to book them to meet their needs, but the current increase in demand has provided a challenge we cannot solve immediately.

**As a proactive and innovative practice, we will continue to investigate the best way to provide General practice services with the funding that we have been given and with the resources that we have and will always strive to provide high quality safe care to our patients.** we can only guarantee that the staff and doctors at the Practice 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 meet the demand; therefore, we have written this letter advising how we can best support our patients given the incredible level of demand we are receiving from our 6500 patients.

Kind regards

Sharon Turner

**Practice Manager**

**On behalf of the Partners and staff at High Street Surgery**