



An important update on your practice and how you can help us

Dear patients,

The clinical and management team want to be open and honest so you can be realistic about the service the practice is able to offer. We do not have a full team of clinicians. We have four full time equivalent doctors but need seven. We continue to advertise for replacements.

Everyone employed at the Practice is working under considerable pressure and doing their very best to serve the community. They cannot work any harder without making themselves ill. If this happens they will leave the practice, making us even more short-staffed.

Availability of appointments

We are offering 2,263 telephone and face to face appointments per week. That is 187 more appointments per week than expected in a similar sized practice to ours.

We cannot offer any more appointments because we cannot currently recruit more permanent doctors.

Calling us

The practice is receiving over 600 telephone calls a day. Nearly all of these come in during the morning.

Our phone system needs to be replaced. In the meantime, we have taken actions to improve phone access:

- Increasing the number of telephone lines from 4 to 10.
- We are recruiting two more receptionists.
- Staff are only making essential calls before 10am.

Now we need your help

- When to call: please call after 10am for anything routine – or you will be asked to call back. It is best to call in the afternoon. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday are much quieter than other days.
- Test results: we will contact you either by phone or letter about your test results - please do not call us.
- Repeat prescriptions: please submit repeat medication requests in writing and four working days before you need them. Drop requests off in the boxes at reception or register and order online.
- Medical certificates: the practice cannot deal with medical certificates on a Monday or Friday. Please note, they can be backdated so don't worry if you have one that is about to run out.

How else can you help your practice?

1. Please do not call for minor illness (e.g. new coughs and colds). Your local pharmacist has five years of training and a private room for consultations to help you. The NHS Choices website (www.nhs.uk) is a great source of advice. Use it before calling the surgery.
2. Please be understanding with our reception team who are under pressure and cannot produce extra appointments.
3. If you telephone please give our receptionist the reason for the call. They are bound by exactly the same rules of strict confidentiality as the rest of the clinicians. They are trained to allocate you to the most appropriate clinician who could be a pharmacist, physiotherapist, practice paramedic, minor illness nurse or otherwise.
4. Please do not bring in urine samples unless you have been asked to do so.

We now have a Patient Participation group meeting every month. The Group will allow patients to communicate their experiences and comment on proposed changes. If you would like to join please sign-up via our website.

What to expect this winter?

Your family doctors and nurses are working very hard and expect to work even harder in winter as this time of year is always more difficult.

Our clinicians have a fixed number of appointments each day. There are less if any staff are sick. We cannot increase the number of appointments.

We do not have enough doctors and nurses to safely staff Christmas Maltings every day. This means it will usually be closed. The dispensary will always remain open.

There are already days when all of our telephone triage and face to face appointments are filled. This will happen more often over the winter. When this happens you will get a recorded message telling you the practice is only dealing with emergencies and to please call the next day.

When this happens:

- We will cancel all booked routine appointments that day. No pre-bookable appointments will be made available.
- Please tell the receptionist the reason for your call so you can be booked with the most appropriate clinician.
- Telephone triage appointments with a doctor will only be for those with an emergency medical need.

Thank you.

The team at Christmas Maltings & Clements

If you have any questions about anything covered in this letter, please email info@suffolkfed.org.uk.