



# Arthur Medical Centre

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## Open Letter to Patients of Arthur Medical Centre

1<sup>st</sup> March 2024

Dear Patients,

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, we hope you find it a useful update. Particularly we hope it addresses any concerns you may have **about our appointment and telephone systems** topics raised by some patients.

Firstly, we would like to thank the many patients who are kind to our team, understanding when we are at capacity (full) and continue to work with us as we adapt to the ever-changing (and political) world of healthcare. I know I speak for the whole team in saying that being able to help really is why we come to work and we always strive to provide an exceptional level of care and support to this community.

Constructive feedback to the practice (there is a link below to info on ways to provide this) is welcome. We hope to address some recent themes from this feedback in this letter. These are:

- Accessing the practice via telephone – particularly at peak times
- Making an appointment and Signposting to other services – such as NHS 111 or local pharmacies

We take any concerns very seriously and would like to apologise to any patients who've experienced any difficulties or frustrations. We hope this letter explains the current situation and what we are doing to improve things.

We (the practice team) are finding the national situation surrounding healthcare increasingly difficult, as are all other primary care (GP) teams. It is also difficult to work in an environment where you want to help patients but feel under resourced. We would like to share more details about this with you so please read our extended letter [here](#), or come to our next open patient meeting in April (details to follow in the near future).

### **Accessing the practice via telephone**

Currently there is a set number of calls that can be handled at any one time. Once this is reached, patients hear an engaged tone when trying to contact the practice. We appreciate needing to redial is really frustrating but this is changing with a new system which should be in place by the end of March. The newly purchased telephone system has more capacity, allowing more patients to be queued (removing the 'barrier' of the engaged tone when ringing us). It also has a callback option, which will allow you to end the call and the system will call you back when you are at the front of the queue for Reception.

## **Making an appointment and Signposting to other services**

Arthur Medical Centre has approximately 9200 registered patients. Over the last four weeks, we have provided 3,713 patient appointments, 2,412 of which were with a GP or an Advanced Clinical Practitioner (ACP). With the exception of the 'On-Call' emergency GP list, patients are generally given the choice of having a telephone or face-to-face appointment and typically around 60% of appointments are face-to-face.

In November 2023, we started operating an 'on-the-day' appointment system. This was needed to keep 'urgent access appointments' available over the winter when there is increased demand related to higher infection rates and an increased likelihood of staff sickness.

The appointment system is frequently reviewed and we adjust the mix of urgent vs pre-bookable appointments to try and best meet your needs, national agendas (targets), respond to patient and staff feedback and keep our unwell and vulnerable patients or those with the greatest need cared for.

Patients are surveyed after their appointments (using texts). Around 90% of patient responses are positive and many patients prefer an on-the-day appointment. NHS England also ask us for rapid patient access (and performance measure us on a 14 day target).

Like any service a GP surgery can only offer a certain number of appointments per day before they are fully booked. The BMA advises that a GP can safely conduct around thirty patient contacts per day.

To ensure we have availability at the practice for those most in need, we may need to "signpost" you to other services when appropriate. "Signposting" means when we are fully booked, or when your needs maybe more appropriately met elsewhere, we will direct you to other services such as NHS 111, physiotherapy, community pharmacies etc. We acknowledge that many patients would prefer to receive as much care at the practice as possible, however the design of healthcare service provision, the systems funding and how patients are being asked to access healthcare is being driven by national and regional political agendas and is beyond the control of the practice team. Examples of such services that are now commissioned entirely separately from the practice are phlebotomy, complex wound care and some areas of minor illness (pharmacies are now paid for this per contact).

## **Why are there difficulties with patient accessibility?**

The resource / capacity we have as a practice is ultimately decided by our funding and the availability of suitably skilled professionals to fill vacancies. NHS Primary Care funding has not increased in line with rising costs and GP surgeries are simply unable to hire additional staff.

We would love to share additional details about the funding of primary care ([link](#) to BMA article) and how this has decreased despite an ongoing increase in patient demand. You may wish to write to your MP about any concerns you have about the NHS and how the Government chooses to resource it.

Thank you for reading this far, we understand that access to care is a critically important matter and that the difficulties and frustrations that patients may experience can have a very emotive effect. We hope you will be reassured that every member of our team at Arthur Medical Centre is passionately committed to the care of our patients. We are making every effort to ensure that we provide the very best levels of care, service and support with the resources we have. We also hope that the information we have shared in this open letter will give some insight into some of the increasingly complex challenges that all GP surgeries are facing and will be a

reassurance that we are receptive to our patients and that we are doing our best to make improvements where we are able. Please take the time to read further on this important subject and follow the links provided or join us at our next open patient meeting.

Yours sincerely,

(On behalf of the Partners and staff of Arthur Medical Centre)

Azeem Climie  
Practice Business Manager  
Arthur Medical Centre

Patient feedback can be submitted either in writing to our postal address, or via webform on our contact us page on our website, at  
[https://www.arthurmedicalcentre.co.uk/contact\\_dlg1.aspx?p=T12345](https://www.arthurmedicalcentre.co.uk/contact_dlg1.aspx?p=T12345)