

Patient Update – Coronavirus Pandemic 2020

Over the last few months staff and patients at Close Farm Surgery have had to adapt to new ways of delivering and receiving healthcare in light of the Coronavirus pandemic. We feel that we have all managed to do this exceptionally well, with minimal disruption to services and we would like to thank our patients for their support during this testing time.

Sadly Covid-19 doesn't appear to be going away any time soon and so we are looking at how we can continue to deliver high quality healthcare to our patients whilst also maintaining their safety, and the safety of our staff.

Over the next few weeks and months we will gradually be reintroducing services that were temporarily stopped as a result of the pandemic, as well as implementing new ways of working. This is so that we can protect the most vulnerable patients at higher risk of developing complications from Covid-19, whilst still providing treatment and diagnostics for more common health issues.

This will mean things like having set clinics for specific issues/procedures, e.g. family planning, childhood immunisations, wounds and dressings, bloods and observations etc. Whilst this might offer less flexibility in appointment times for some patients, we are doing this to reduce the opportunity for patients who are acutely unwell to be in the building at the same time as patients attending routine appointments. Similarly, all face-to-face GP appointments will be held in the afternoon so that patients being seen by our nursing team can come in for the morning, reducing numbers of patients in the surgery at any one time. GPs will have the option to bring patients in earlier if they feel it is clinically necessary, and these patients will be asked to come into the surgery via an alternative entrance.

We are also going to retain the telephone triage model for all GP appointments. This means that patients will be reviewed over the phone in the first instance. During the pandemic we have found that many health issues can be dealt with quite safely over the phone, and we are also gradually introducing video consultations where patients have a smartphone enabled. This again reduces the need for patients to attend surgery and allows us to implement social distancing more easily.

Telephone and video consultations will be used more widely and will extend to not only GP appointments but also medication reviews with our clinical pharmacist, some annual reviews of certain long term conditions with our nursing team, and support from our social prescriber.

However this doesn't mean that face-to-face appointments will not be available. They certainly will, and in some circumstances are absolutely necessary. However these requests will still need to be triaged before an appointment is made. So please do not be offended if our Reception team ask that you have a telephone appointment in the first instance as this is our new procedure.

Whilst the lockdown measures have been in place we have also seen a massive increase in the number of patients using the Electronic Prescribing Service (EPS). This has meant that

patients have been able to easily request repeat prescriptions via Patient Access, the NHS App, or via email and we have been able to send their prescription straight onto their nominated pharmacy. This has saved patients many unnecessary trips to the surgery to drop off and collect paper prescriptions. We are keen to continue this process and ask all patients to request their repeat medication in this way going forward. Please continue to allow 48 hours for us to process your request, and be mindful that your chosen chemist may also request an extended timeframe to do their bit as well.

Our patients have also taken to using electronic methods of communication like ducks to water and so we have today launched a new online service called e-consult. You can access this tool via the homepage of our website – www.closefarmsurgery.co.uk – and use it for the following things:

- Ask about common health problems, including where to access help and how to self-care
- Requesting things like sick notes, letters or enquiring after test results
- Asking general queries of our surgery team

E-consult has the option for you to add photographs to your enquiry, something we have been encouraging patients to do by email up till now, which has really helped the GP team deal with lots of queries around skin conditions, eye problems etc. remotely. From today we will ask patients to submit photographs through the e-consult platform rather than by email as this a much more secure method of sending information through. It also ensures that it is actioned quickly. Any query you submit is added to your medical record and a member of our team will respond to you within 48 hours. If an appointment is deemed necessary, we will contact you to arrange this.

We really want to encourage use of this system as it helps to relieve pressure on the telephone system and appointment availability, and ensures we capture as much information from you as possible. If you would like to use this system but feel you need support in learning how to access it, please make contact with us and we can arrange for a member of staff to call you or video call you to take you through it.

A perspex screen has gone up in our waiting room and we have reduced the number of chairs available so that we can distance patients from one another. In future we will be asking patients who do have appointments at the surgery to ensure they attend **at their allotted time** – if you attend early you may be asked to wait outside, if you attend late your appointment may be cancelled. This ensures we have enough room in the waiting room to ensure social distancing continues. If the waiting room becomes busy, we may have to ask patients to wait in their cars to be called in. Over the next week or two we will be implementing signage in the practice to help patients keep to the 2m distance rule.

We would also encourage patients not to “pop in” with a query or request if they can help it. The e-consult service and our telephone lines are there to deal with general enquiries remotely. As most of you are aware, it only takes a few people to create a “queue out the door” in our small waiting room, so please avoid coming in if you can help it. Boxes for samples and paper prescription requests will be set up in the front porch for patients to drop items off in without having to come into the building. All samples need to be brought

in by 11am each day unless requested by a GP. Any samples brought in after and not requested will be rejected.

It is a strange new world we are heading into, but please be advised that these measures are being put in place to protect patients and staff and enable us to continue to provide high quality medical care to all of you. Please bear with us during the next few weeks and months as we look to embed these new measures. Feedback is always welcome and can be emailed to close.farm@nhs.net

We also update our Facebook page regularly with information on services, links to resources and health promotion information so please do follow us @Closefarmsurgery

Stay Safe > Save Lives > Protect **your** NHS.

With thanks for all your support during these last few months,

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