

Changes to the way we work at The Old Fire Station surgery

You will no doubt have noticed a large difference in the way that we are working at TOFS as we have had to swiftly adapt due to the effects of the covid pandemic.

We want to start off by thanking you all for so quickly having to adapt to the new way of working. It has been a significant change but is one that is essential for minimising the risks both to you and our staff. In order to do this, we have had to make changes to reduce the amount of people visiting the surgery to help reduce the spread of the virus. It is important though to emphasise that the surgery is still open with its usual opening times but is just functioning in a different way. It is essential that if you are worried you may have symptoms suggestive of cancer, DO NOT DELAY, contact us.

In order to reduce footfall, we have had to move away from the traditional model that everyone is used to, whereby the vast majority of people are seen face to face. Instead on the advice of NHS England, surgeries up and down the country have moved to a largely triage based model of care. This means that every person who wishes to seek medical advice are screened regarding their problem before being provided with an appointment at the surgery. This is why you are no longer able to book routine appointments online.

By screening every patient we ensure that those who really need to be seen in the surgery are those for whom the benefits of being seen (their health) outweigh the risks of attending (covid-19). There are certainly many problems which are able to be managed appropriately without being seen face to face or that can be signposted to an alternative and more appropriate service.

We have been using a range of different technologies that will support us to ensure that you will still receive the care that you need.

- **Same day emergency telephone triage:**

We still have telephone triage every day from 08.30 in the morning and running most of the day until we meet our capacity. Daily triage is for emergency problems only. When you call the surgery, the receptionist will ask you some questions related to the nature of your problem. This information is so that you can be redirected from the point of contact to the most appropriate service and also enables us to prioritise those who may need assessing earlier.

- **Video consultation**

Some problems may require the need for us to look at something for you ie a rash or localised infection. We may be able to do this with the use of video via your phone. This means that you can be assessed from the comfort and safety of your own home.

- **E-consults**

On our surgery website you can follow a link to submit an e-consult. You can use this for admin queries such as requesting a sick note, or asking about a physical or mental health problem. We also ask that you submit queries about problems that do not need to be dealt with the same day. This is as we aim to reply to e-consults within a 48hr timeframe. If you think that your problem can wait 48hrs then please submit but if not, then please access us via same day triage.

If you think your problem may mean we have to see something such as a mole, then please attach a photo at the time of submission.

Many problems will be able to be dealt with by a reply to your e-consult. If not, we will ask you to call reception to either make a routine telephone or face to face appointment, or to call to be assessed by triage.

- **Physiotherapy**

We now have direct access to telephone triage by a physiotherapist. If you have a new musculoskeletal problem which needs assessing you can contact the surgery first thing in the morning. You will be asked a few screening questions by our receptionist, but if then felt appropriate, you will be placed on the list to be called and assessed by a physiotherapist. We hope that this means your problem will be dealt with more efficiently with expert advice at the point of contact.

Other resources to help you available on our website via different tabs:

Please take a look at our website which has several helpful resources available, which we will continue to add to.

- **Mental Health:** Understandably, during the pandemic there has been an increase in people suffering from problems with their mental health which can cause much distress. The link on our website provides access to various resources that may be able to help you. This includes the link to our local counselling service – ‘Steps to Wellbeing’
- **Signposting:** You may not be aware of other services that can help you locally without the wait to see a Doctor. The information provided includes letting you know what other services are available locally.
Please look here for minor illnesses and injuries first.
- **Children’s Health:** On here are links to various resources including immunisation schedules and when you need to worry. In particular, we would highlight the ‘Healthier Together’ website which has a mountain of resources on many childhood illnesses.
- **Patient education:** On here you will find various links to resources that may be able to help you with several conditions, including managing your blood pressure and the menopause.

Other short term changes:

- **Phlebotomy:** Due to the pandemic we were asked by NHS England to suspend all chronic disease checks for your safety. As soon as we felt it was safe to do so, we recommenced this service. However, the delay has meant a much higher demand on our services whilst we address the backlog. In addition, the local HUBS that provided support have had to stop undertaking routine work whilst they help with patients who may have COVID-19. The significant increase in demand and accompanying reduction in support from outside means that despite putting on extra clinics, capacity far outweighs demand. It is for this reason that we have made the difficult decision to ask patients who are under the age of 60 and are usually in good health to attend Southampton General Hospital (UHS) for their blood test. This means that the frail, elderly or more vulnerable are able to obtain an appointment at the surgery.
We appreciate that this may make some people unhappy, but we hope that this is a short term solution only and that soon we will be able to return to normal.