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Open letter to Patients of The Three Spires Medical Practice

Dear Patient

Patient Information Regarding Changes to the Appointment System

Thank you for taking the time to read this important information about changes to the appointment system at The Three Spires Medical Practice. I will explain why changes are necessary and how you and your families can help us to improve the service that we offer.

The Three Spires Medical Practice is one of the few remaining large surgeries that has managed to continue to operate a Personal List System, where every one of our 16,000 patients is registered with a named GP who is ultimately responsible for the healthcare that you receive. We strongly believe that a Personal List has huge benefits in terms of continuity of care, improved health outcomes and a reduction in unnecessary tests and referrals, and, importantly, you have told us in our patient surveys that you like to be able to see your own doctor.

However, the job of a General Practitioner has changed dramatically over the past ten years and many doctors are struggling to provide the level of care that we were trained to give. Most of us now spend more time on the telephone or in front of a computer than seeing patients face-to-face which is a situation that none of us wants. This has contributed to GP burnout, GP's leaving the profession early and a large reduction in the number of newly qualified doctors choosing to come into General Practice. Hence the very real GP recruitment crisis leading to multiple recent practice closures, for example Polkyth in St.Austell and 5 practices in Plymouth.

We are determined not to find ourselves in that situation in years to come and have taken several steps to ensure our long time viability. We are investing heavily in encouraging future generations of doctors to become GP's through our work hosting students from the University of Exeter Medical School as well as being a training practice for GP's. Several of our GP Partners also provide additional services at the Practice such as vasectomies, skin cancer work and participation in local health service planning (all of which makes the Practice more attractive when we are trying to recruit).

All of these things remove that doctor from being available for their list, and currently all of that work (phone calls, letters, blood test results) waits until they are available again which is unsustainable and potentially unsafe. Each GP will often have 20 phone calls to make per day and it is very hard to sift through what is urgent i.e. actually needs dealing with on the same day; and what can wait and be dealt with more effectively by another member of the team.

The Personal List system where every single query comes to the registered GP has become unworkable and we know that 30-40% of all calls can be dealt with effectively by a member of the team other than the registered GP. The GP Partners also feel that we can maintain our continuity of care for our patients if we accept that urgent problems that need to be seen on that day do not need to be dealt with by the

registered GP and should be seen by a duty team. This allows us to separate the same-day requirements from the management of long-term conditions such as diabetes and heart failures.

So, what have we done about it so far?

We have recruited and enhanced our workforce with more salaried GPs (doctors that see patients on our behalf), Practice nurses and Health Care Assistants. We have also employed a Clinical Pharmacist, a Care Co-ordinator and Social Prescriber who can all help to resolve your health problems without you needing to come to see your registered GP.

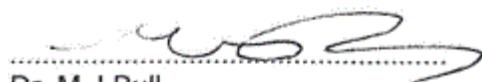
We have also trained our already very skilled Patient Advisors to play a much greater role in taking clinical details from patients when they ring. This is so incoming calls can be directed to the most appropriate person without the need for the GP to ring everyone back. If adequate clinical details are given we will often be able to book you directly into a same-day urgent slot giving you a very rapid clinical opinion for you or your child. To preserve this there will inevitably be a longer wait to see the GP of your choice for chronic conditions.

The next step is for us (that's you and all the staff here), to undergo a change in culture that adheres to the following principles.

- 1) If your problem is urgent and you need to be seen or contacted on the same day we will provide this, but this will not necessarily be with the person of your choice.
- 2) If you want to see a specific doctor that you know about a medical problem then you will be able to pre-book with that doctor, but it might be several days until that named doctor is available.
- 3) When you contact the Practice we will ask for much more information about the reason for your call so that our Active Signposting team can get you seen or answer your question as quickly and as safely as possible.
- 4) If you have a minor or self-limiting illness or injury then you will be directed to seek healthcare advice from other sources such as pharmacists, minor injury centres or online via the excellent NHS Choices website.
- 5) Doctors will have a set number of face to face and telephone appointments available and once these are full subsequent calls will go to the duty team for triaging.
- 6) We are asking everyone to consider the cumulative demand made on the system when you request a ring back or phone the Practice. Every Monday we receive 1500 phone calls (10% of our registered patients) which places an enormous strain on a finite workforce. We often have appointments available later in the week and not everything needs to be dealt with on the day that you call.
- 7) Home visits use up a lot of GP's time and are an inefficient way to consult. Home visits are reserved for the truly house-bound and terminally ill. If you can get to a hospital appointment or to the hairdressers then you can get to the surgery.

We are making these changes so that we can be certain that when you are ill and really need us then we will have capacity to see you promptly on the same day, and still be able to offer you a pre-booked appointment with the GP of your choice if it can wait. We are confident that by adopting these changes we can successfully adapt to the current demands on General Practice whilst ensuring our ability to continue to provide you with first class health care now and into the future.

Best wishes



Dr. M J Bull

On behalf of The Three Spires Medical Practice