

## **Surgery Statement on Change of Service Delivery for Heighington Village Residents**

Bewick Crescent Surgery has had the privilege of providing you all with NHS services for many years. We understand that there is disquiet in response to the changes we have been forced to make on how you access GP services. This change is not simply a result of the pandemic, nor is this a change we wanted, but a change that is needed to provide a safer and sustainable service to protect both staff and patients.

There is clear evidence that demands on primary care, especially doctor-led services, have continued to grow significantly over the last decade outstripping resources. The amount of practicing GPs nationally is falling year-on-year and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future putting more pressure on an already overstretched service. Heighington Village had one of the few remaining walk-in surgeries in County Durham and Darlington where a same-day face-to-face appointment was guaranteed - a platinum service when compared to Newton Aycliffe patients' choice. This type of provision is suitable for a small population where demand meets a sustainable number. A typical GP session is four hours long and the British Medical Association (BMA) suggests 75% of this time is dedicated to clinical work, the remaining time for administrative work. Three hours' work could see between 12-15 patients depending on the complexity of the clinical issue patients wanted to discuss. The risk presenting itself to our GPs was that the average number accessing these services was frequently well over 20 and stretching over a solid four-hour period, up to six times per week, and therefore breaching BMA guidance. Fatigue and stress caused by excessive overwork remains an occupational hazard and one error made by one of our GPs in this state could have fatal consequences where the employer would have to take responsibility – a risk we are no longer willing to take. It is an employers' duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees and other people who might be affected by their business. Employers must do whatever is reasonably practical to achieve this; to lower this risk we had to reduce the throughput of Heighington patients being seen to a manageable state. We accept that this will mean some patients may not be seen where and when they want to be. We periodically review service delivery to respond to patient need which includes the appointment booking process.

We have found that we are able to manage more patient contacts using telephones meaning we can offer more appointments. This should be recognised as a new and efficient way GPs now work whilst still providing face-to-face services when needed. As previously mentioned, demand for services is high, which inevitably causes longer waits in queues resulting in disappointment for some. Rest assured that if you meet a specific clinical criterion then you will be triaged urgently by a GP. We understand that losing the walk-in provision has been frustrating, however, by making these changes we have been able to provide you with a safer, more sustainable service supported by best practice guidelines.

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Senior GP Partner