

**We would like to give a big thank you to all those people who completed our patient questionnaire survey. This is the only way we know how we are doing and helps us to focus on areas of weakness in the surgery for us to concentrate on in the forthcoming year.**

It is of great concern to us to see that communication access to the surgery is still of such a great issue; more so than the previous year, despite the actions we took last year to address these issues.

Thankfully however, when you do eventually arrive at the surgery most people are very happy with the service the practice provides; with very high praise indeed for the doctors and nurses. Thank you

Below are some of the comments that you have provided in the questionnaire (in blue) together with our responses which we hope goes some way to explain some of the reasons behind these complains/issues and what we have done/ are doing to address them.

Some of these issues, as you will discover, are unfortunately not fixable by us.

### **Telephone Access:**

- Another phone line would be good.
- Someone to pick the phone up from 8 o'clock onwards, instead of waiting for 15 to 30 minutes
- More appointments available over the telephone if you're elderly, not everyone has a computer
- Speaking to a person in reception from 8am not having to wait on the phone for (average) 45 minutes. There is always a queue at 8am.
- Telephone lines always busy. When a phone appointment was arranged it was impossible to get through
- Tried using the new computer appointments system - vision - awful.
- More receptionists for answering morning phone calls for people who do not have a computer
- The booking system is awful, getting the engaged signal continuously followed by being told that there were no appointment
- A better appointment booking service. It's a nightmare trying to book an appointment at 8am. There should be more pre-bookable appointments for the next day and onwards.

- Making it easier to phone surgery for appointments, perhaps more receptionists on phone.
- It can be difficult to contact the surgery for an appointment on the day. Sometimes if I have phoned after 8.45 no appointments are available and you have to go through process again the next day. However recently I have had less trouble getting an appointment on the day. Also always very good with appointment for young children.

Last year as a result of the annual survey we introduced a completely new phone system with increased capacity and call stacking facilities, as well as an automated phone appointment booking system at great cost to try and improve patient access, particularly for the busiest 8-9 am time.

We have 4 incoming only telephone lines, which is more than similar sized practices. We have 2 dedicated out going lines and 2 direct dial lines via the hospital switchboard to other hospitals and GP surgeries so that outgoing calls do not interfere with blocking incoming calls. Unfortunately we cannot have any more incoming lines as we are limited by the number of lines coming into Uckfield hospital switchboard.

Currently there are 2 telephonists taking calls in the morning from 8am. Unfortunately the reception area is too small to have a 3<sup>rd</sup> telephonist working at the same time. However we have just received permission from the Hospital trust to allow us to make minor structural alterations to the reception area to open up the area and extend into one of the side rooms to accommodate a 3<sup>rd</sup> telephonist , and once everything is complete we will look at having a 3<sup>rd</sup> person taking calls in the morning.

Many of the complaints were with the way the appointment system works. Our biggest difficulty is balancing the appointment system to complying with the requirement to have on the day appointments, as well as pre-bookable slots and all this with your choice of particular GP! We also are required to offer this with both on-line bookable slots as well as on the telephone bookings.

It is very difficult to balance the available appointments allowing for all these requirements and give equal access to those using the internet booking facilities, those making phone appointments and those just turning up at reception.

We could offer more on-line slots as many of you have requested, but then we would get complaints from people when they cannot get appointments on the phone! And there are already enough complaints about the difficulty of getting telephone appointments. It's a no win situation!

Approximately one third of appointments are for on-line bookings, a third for telephone bookings on the day and a third for pre-bookable bookings up to 8 weeks in advance for both on-line and by phone.

Because it is an area of such concern, we are going to arrange another questionnaire to specifically look at the appointment system to see how we can improve upon it to provide a better balance of appointments on offer.

There were a few comments about the difficulty of getting through to the surgery on the phone for pre arranged phone consultations. When patients book a phone consultation with their doctor we request a telephone number to call them back on at the designated time as we are well aware that phoning in at a particular time and getting through to the surgery is very difficult and frustrating. This allows the doctor to phone you at the designated time on time, and ensures the incoming telephone lines are kept free for other patients use.

Because we know illness in young children is of great concern to parents, we always try to see them the same day regardless of how busy we are.

If any of you have any suggestions that we have not tried we are very open to ideas. Please contact the practice manager.

### **On-line services**

- Prescriptions still items missing from 'online' service i.e. 7 items 8-5 missing
- Tried using the new computer appointments system - vision - awful.
- Nothing about internet appointments on this form. Lost opportunity. Very unreliable - far too often not work
- Online booking mostly waste of time.
- My vision can be a problem

On our questionnaire problems with Vision On-line was commented on by many of you.

The Vision On-Line appointment and prescription request service (which is used by a third of GP surgeries in the UK) has been plagued with problems and patients have had difficulties with booking internet appointments and discovering prescription items are missing from their repeat request forms, or have had difficulty with passwords not being accepted and issues with logging on to the web site.

This problem is a nationwide one and one which we have absolutely no control over, nor can we personally fix.

The software developers are very slow to fix bugs and problems despite our continual complaints to them

If you see a medication has disappeared from your repeat list, it has not been removed by the practice. It means that you have exceeded your repeat request quota and your doctor needs to reauthorize the medicine. This has been designed by Vision as a safety reason so you cannot keep getting repeats without a doctor reviewing you or your medication, but Vision does not indicate this clearly on the request form and your prescription request suddenly disappears from view and in some cases you cannot request your medicines. Clearly this is very frustrating and infuriating, but until Vision fix this problem we can only ask for your patience and understanding.

Usage of our internet booking facility and electronic on-line prescription ordering service was the highest in England in 2013. In November 2013 we were awarded **Vision Practice of the Year 2013** as result.

Last year 25% of your appointments booked at the surgery were over the internet. The average for the rest of England was 5%.

We have for many years embraced the use of internet for appointment booking and prescription requests and these statistics and being awarded Vision 2013 practice of the year is a great accolade for us.

In many ways our old bespoke on-line appointment and prescription ordering service was far more reliable and easy to use than "My Vision", and patients will inevitably compare the current service offering with our previous system and prefer and want the old one back, but unfortunately it no longer integrates with our computer clinical system, nor does it work with Windows 7.

Hopefully with the imminent release of version 2 all these issues will be resolved.

## **Premesis**

- Improve waiting room area - it was better before the change
- extra consulting rooms are rarely used.
- Waiting area is too small
- Make more room at busy times in the waiting room by using the small outside patio - where weather permits.
- Improve ventilation of waiting area during the summer!
- When waiting in the waiting room you can hear private and confidential information being discussed

We have also had complaints over the size of the new waiting area since alterations were made last year and that conversations can now be overheard.

When the surgery was first opened in the hospital in 1994 it was to accommodate 4000 patients; we had just over 3000 patients at the time. Due to the massive explosion of new homes in Uckfield since then we have more than doubled the number of patients we now look after (8000 patients) and also doubled the number of doctors and ancillary and nursing staff working in the surgery. However the surgery building size has not expanded as we are constrained by the area the surgery occupies within the hospital, and despite continuing negotiations with the hospital trust we cannot expand into any of the surrounding space.

Closing in and using the quadrangle is unfortunately not feasible.

Consequently we have had to utilise what space we do occupy as best we can and that has meant reducing the waiting area to accommodate 2 new admin rooms, which were desperately needed and which may not appear to be used, but they are!

The reception desk has had to be left unglazed due to various governmental regulations, but as conversations are being overheard, we will now be looking at alternative ways of glazing in the area.

We like the idea of using the quadrangle in summer months as a waiting area, and will look into this, as it will also aid ventilation, but will have to negotiate with the physiotherapy department as they use this area for exercising sessions as well.

## **Parking**

- Have a multi-storey car park! (Only joking).
- Improving the car parking as it's a great worry having to find a space in time for your appointment

Again this is a common complaint and something we cannot address. The increase in medical outpatients, investigation services, community and inpatient services offered at Uckfield hospital has expanded so much since it was built, far beyond original expectations, and with the requirement for equality of access to all patients, it now has to serve the whole of the CCG not just the local people of Uckfield as it was originally designed for, and so parking space is now at a premium. Even our staff members have difficulty finding parking spaces if they drive to work!

If the proposed new housing estate is ever built on the fields behind the hospital, we will be pushing for an area to be designated on this land for parking for the hospital and for our patients use.

## **Consultations**

- More doctors or less patients.

- Offering more appointments and over longer amount of time i.e. more evening surgeries
- The person who saw me was awful.
- Getting continuity of treatment is helped by seeing own doctor but waiting times for this are long
- Get good replacing doctors. Saw a doctor, few weeks back. They were awful! No welcome greeting, didn't ask anything, didn't advice anything. Overall they were 0/10.

We are close to maximum capacity for the size of our practice, but we cannot close our books due to the government's requirements for patient choice.

We cannot employ more doctors as we do not have the consulting rooms for them to use, and we cannot reduce our number of patients.

The 2 new GP surgeries in and around Uckfield have been built to allow for the future expansion of Uckfield and to take on new patients; however many patients still prefer to register with us, which is very gratifying to know, but it doesn't address the workload situation.

We have had a very high use of locums in the last 4 months due to doctor illness and a delay before Dr Heal's replacement could start.

This has lead to comments over dissatisfaction with patients about not being able to see their chosen doctor and dissatisfaction with the doctor they did see.

Dr Heal, as many of you know, has decided to step down from general practice to spend more time with her young family. We wanted to ensure that her replacement was as good as she, as Dr Heal will be sorely missed by us and her patients. Recruiting new good permanent doctors into general practice in the current climate is very difficult. Finding her replacement took some time to get the right person, but it has been worth it and Dr Sarah Crowley has now joined us and has stepped up to the mark admirably. We hope you will agree with us.

We do try to employ good long term locums if we know someone is going to be away for a lengthy period of time to improve continuity for patients and their quality of care, but this is not always possible, especially with sudden illness. We do have a "bank" of locums that we can call on and know are good, but they are not always available when we need them.

We don't like using locums but some times we don't have any choice and we would ask that our patients understand and recognise the need for this and make allowances for it.

We currently have 3 extended surgeries per week taking pre-booked appointments up to 8pm in the evenings and an early morning surgery from 7.45am once a week; again significantly more extended hours than surgeries of a similar size, and these extended sessions we know are very popular and appreciated by our patients and are often booked up well in advance.

## **Other comments**

- [Allow patients to email nurses/doctors.](#)
- [Keep website 'up to date' - not months out of date](#)

Unfortunately we cannot use email as a way of giving medical advice or being used as an alternative way of offering consultations or for conversing with patients as it is not a confidential communication medium to use. Emails are unsafe and can be intercepted leading to breach of confidentiality issues. The medical defence unions advise against its use as a result.

The government is looking at ways of overcoming these issues and want to have email based communication facility in place by 2015, so watch this space...

Yes, we are not good at keeping our website up-to-date so this will be a priority for our new practice manager.

## **In Conclusion...**

We are not perfect but we hope you now have an insight into some of the reasons behind the results and patient dissatisfaction comments of the survey and appreciate the steps we have or are taking to address them if we can.

We are already in touch with the phone company to see if we can tweak the phone system better and will be relocating the main surgery switchboard into the new side room to reduce overhearing conversations in the waiting area.

We will be looking at installing a glazed panel at the reception desk to further cut this down.

The staff are being trained to take calls quicker in the mornings and defer requests for test results etc to the afternoon, and we will have 3 telephonists answering the phones at the busiest times.

We will also be auditing the appointment system to try and get a better balance of appointments on offer.

We are replacing the seats in the waiting area with less bulky ones to try and make the waiting area more appealing and open, and will look at the feasibility of extending the waiting area into the quadrangle during dry hot periods.

We also now have a full complement of doctors and nurses so we will be much less reliant on locums.

If you have any suggestions to help improve the service and care we offer we would really value hearing them. Please leave a message with the receptionist and our practice manager will contact you.

Hopefully next years survey will be more favourable!