

Update from the Ongar Health Centre - April 2021

In response to comments received from patients, Ongar Health Centre has made a number of changes to the appointments system.

- * Appointments are now available to pre-book up to four weeks in advance
- * A range of appointment options are being released each day with the aim of providing a constant flow of bookable appointments
- * The online booking system has been reinstated (with a limited number of appointments)
- * Patients will now be given a three hour window for telephone appointments and clinicians will do their best to call patients within the time frame given, subject to emergencies, etc
- * A cancellation option has been reintroduced on the telephone system so patients can cancel appointments without needing to speak to a receptionist

A daily release of advance booking appointments, on-the-day appointments, e-consultations and face-to-face appointments are being made available however face-to-face appointments can only be booked directly by a clinician following an initial telephone consultation. This includes appointments made using the online booking system.

When booking an appointment you may be asked the reason for your visit in order to book you in with the correct clinician and prioritise your need, if you would prefer not to discuss the reason for your visit you can state that it is personal and an appointment will be made for you on that basis.

We have continued to see long wait times to contact the surgery by telephone. We acknowledge and sympathise with the frustration and upset this has caused patients and hope these changes will mean patients now feel able to contact the surgery throughout the day, between 8am and 6.30pm, rather than just at specific times for morning and afternoon appointments. This will hopefully ease the peak demands on the telephone system and reduce patient wait times.

We also aim to ensure patients only need to contact the surgery once to request an appointment with the hope a suitable appointment can be offered on the first time of contact.

We would be grateful if patients could assist by selecting the correct extension option when telephoning the surgery, and making full use of the new extended contact times.

There are a number of infection control measures that will remain in place at the surgery for the time being:

- All appointments must first go through a telephone triage service where a clinician will telephone first to assess your case. The clinician will then either be able to deal with the issue, arrange a secure video consultation or, if necessary, arrange a face-to-face appointment. This is for the safety of patients and staff and to try to ensure the continued operation of NHS services during the pandemic.
- Face-to-face appointments have been and continue to be available but they can only be booked directly by clinicians based on clinical need and must follow strict risk assessment protocol.
- The number of people inside the building must be restricted to prevent the spread of infection. Therefore patients will often be asked to wait outside until they are called in for their appointment. This may not always be the case however and patients will be advised where to wait. The dispensary has reopened on the second floor for specific collection times but this is with strict social distancing measures in place.
- All patients are asked to wear a face covering when attending the surgery.

During the initial pandemic response a decision was taken to stop undertaking medicine reviews. This policy is no longer in force and medicine reviews are now being undertaken in the usual manner, however there has been an inevitable backlog to work through. If any patient feels they have a medicine review still outstanding we would ask them to please contact the surgery to arrange an appointment with one of our clinical pharmacists. The surgery now have two clinical pharmacists who can undertake medicine reviews.

The surgery are currently facing support staff shortages and where vacancies have been filled, new staff members require training and time to settle in to the policies and practices of the surgery. We would ask for your patience while we overcome these difficulties and can assure patients that staffing issues are limited to support staff only.

We are grateful to our patient community for communicating concerns and hope the changes made begin to address the issues raised. We would like to ensure all patients feel there is a constructive and open dialogue between the surgery and the community.

The Patient Participation Group acts as the voice of the patients and regularly liaises with senior surgery staff. Patients are invited to submit any feedback, opinions or suggestions to the PPG by emailing ongarppg@gmail.com so these can be communicated to the surgery.

The PPG will be organising an online Patient Meeting with Practice Manager Chris Duguid on **Monday 7th June at 8pm**. Further details will be published nearer the time and all patients are encouraged to attend. Regular patient meetings will also be organised going forward to enable continued communication between the wider patient community, the surgery and the PPG.

To further assist with communication the surgery, in partnership with the PPG, are looking in to launching a Facebook page in order to post regular updates and news. The surgery website is also in the process of being updated. Regular updates relating to the surgery will also be published in the Ongar News.

We would ask that patients please refrain from posting negative remarks about the surgery and practice staff on social media. These comments are often seen by staff and can have a profound affect on morale and wellbeing. There are channels available for patients to feedback concerns, views or suggestions to the PPG. Should a patient feel they have a formal complaint this must be directed to the Practice Manager, Chris Duguid. A list of surgery and PPG contact details, together with current opening hours and useful information, is included at the end of this update.

We would like to thank patients for their continued understanding and support during unprecedented times. Surgery staff continue to work exceptionally hard and we would again like to thank all staff for their outstanding commitment to our community and our patients.

The Patient Participation Group, Partners & Management Team at Ongar Health Centre

Ongar Health Centre

Website: www.ongarhealthcentre.co.uk

Telephone: 01277 367200

Email: weccg.ongarhc@nhs.net

Practice Manager: Chris Duguid

Patient Participation Group

Email: ongarppg@gmail.com

PPG Committee Members:

Jenny Juttner (Chair),

Roberta Abbott (Secretary),

Liz Barber, David Jackman, Dawn Roche

**Surgery Opening Hours:
8am to 6.30pm Monday - Friday**

**Dispensary Opening Times:
11.30am to 1.30pm and 4.30pm to 6pm Monday - Friday**

Extended Access appointments are available outside of the normal surgery opening times, please speak to reception for further details.

If you need urgent medical assistance outside surgery opening times please call 111.

If you are experiencing chest pains or shortness of breath, or if you have a medical emergency, please call 999.