12th July 2023

Dear Patient,

You may have noticed a few changes at Knowle House Surgery recently; you may have had a phone call rather than a face to face consultation or received a text rather than a phone call. You may well have had a medication issue dealt with by a pharmacist rather than a GP or seen a Paramedic or Nurse Practitioner for an illness.

Most of our patients seem very happy with this.

We appreciate that some of our patients may be apprehensive about this, and we hope this letter will help explain why we have made some changes.

There have been several factors that have increased the demands on the GPs at Knowle House Surgery over the last few years. Perhaps most importantly, four of our GPs have left over the last few years, and we have not been able to replace them. There is a national shortage of GPs, and this is particularly badly felt in Plymouth. We have over 13,000 patients to provide with medical services.

You will be familiar with long waiting lists for operations and outpatient appointments in Derriford Hospital, and this also has an impact on us. We are having to continue to manage patients who have yet to be seen in the hospital.

We are also having to manage more complex patients as the population gets older and diseases such as diabetes and heart disease become more and more common.

Since Covid, the demand for appointments has also increased. It is not totally clear why this is the case, but it is well recognised locally and nationally that the number of patients requesting appointments with a GP has increased significantly.

So, with fewer doctors and more demand we have had to change the way we work. We hope to continue to offer what we believe is a high quality health care service.

A major way we have changed is by encouraging you all to contact us via Klinik, an online consultation tool, which allows you to pass us relevant information about your needs. They are all looked at by a GP within a few hours of being received, and from the information given we can allocate them to the most appropriate health care professional in the most time appropriate way. The more relevant information you give, e.g., how long have you had the problem for and how much it affects you, then the better we can be at allocating an appointment to you.

Our receptionists cannot directly book appointments anymore. If you cannot use Klinik, you can phone the surgery and a receptionist will fill it in for you over the phone. This takes time and can lead to long waits on the phone, so it is better to go online if you can.

If we feel your condition can be managed safely by yourself or by a pharmacist then we will advise you of this, and perhaps send some information over from an NHS webpage to help you manage your condition. The government has been encouraging everyone to try to manage minor illnesses such as colds and hay fever themselves, and we would encourage this.

We may also ask you to attend the Cumberland Minor Injuries Unit if we feel you have injured yourself and would be best dealt with by their team.

If we feel that your condition can be dealt with safely over the phone, then we will arrange a phone call. This has been shown to be a popular and efficient way of dealing with many illnesses such as urinary tract infections. If during the phone call, we feel that you would benefit from seeing us then we can always arrange another appointment.

We have several Allied Health Care Professionals working for us including paramedics and nurse practitioners. Many illnesses can be dealt with by this team of experienced professionals. They are all appropriately trained, some can prescribe medications and a GP will always be on hand for a second opinion if needed. If your illness is related to your mental health, then you may well get an appointment with our Mental Health Nurse. She has a wealth of experience in mental health and knows the best way to access other services offered locally.

We also have an excellent team of pharmacists working with us. They are qualified and well trained in dealing with many medication queries, and often have more knowledge of medications and their interactions than GPs. We have asked them to manage our patients with high blood pressure, high cholesterol and for dealing with Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). They have the expertise and knowledge to manage these conditions following best NHS guidance, and always with help from a GP if needed.

We belong to a group of practices that have access to several physiotherapists, and you may be given an appointment with one of these professionals. They are extremely knowledgeable about muscular-skeletal conditions such as back pain or osteoarthritis, and are often more skilled at dealing with these conditions than a GP.

Finally, we have a Social Prescriber who is best placed to help with social needs such as housing and access to benefits.

If many of our patients are seen by other health care professionals, then it will free up our team of GPs to deal with more complex cases such as seen with the elderly, or patients at end of life, and those with long term conditions such as diabetes or dementia.

Of course, it is your right to ask to see a GP or indeed any health care professional working with us. We will do our best to accommodate your request, but you may have to wait longer for that appointment. We also firmly believe in continuity of care; it is better for you and better for us if we know our patients. However, with such demands on the whole of the NHS this is not always possible.

We hope this letter goes some way to helping you understand how our surgery is currently running. We always strive to offer the best possible health care service and any feedback, positive or negative is welcomed.

Yours sincerely,

**On Behalf of all GPs at**

**Knowle House Surgery**