

## Statement by Northbourne Medical Centre – December 2020

We are aware of the struggles patients have had in getting through on the phone in the past few weeks. We have not had our full quota of reception staff due to unexpected staff sickness, and because we have to follow government advice for staff needing to self-isolate or shield. I am pleased to report all staff have now returned to the practice with a clean bill of health.

In addition to this we are experiencing higher than usual call volumes. Anecdotally, all practices are experiencing unprecedented demand via the phones at the moment, not just Northbourne. This is due primarily to this year's flu campaign, and also in response to the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the usual 'winter pressures'. The lower than usual staff numbers answering the phones, in addition to the higher than usual call volumes, means that unfortunately some patients are having to wait longer. I am very sorry if this has been your experience. We pride ourselves on offering a good service to our patients, and I hope we are able to give a more positive experience in the future.

How are we going to improve telephone access?

- We have recently appointed a new receptionist to join our team – she is doing brilliantly well learning as much as she can to support all our patients during this challenging time.
- We have increased our telephone lines from 8 to 30. Whilst we do not have 30 reception staff available to answer the phones, the introduction of a new queueing system means a caller can decide if they want to continue to hold until a receptionist becomes available, or call back later. Our busiest times are between 8am and 10am and between 12pm and 3pm, so if your call is not urgent, please do try to avoid these times.
- We are looking at replacing our current telephone system with a new system, which will have the very latest in terms of digital technology. We hope to introduce a new telephone system early in 2021.
- We have implemented eConsult – an online consultation system which is available to patients 7 days a week. You can get help for your condition, general advice, and even ask for sick notes and other administrative items or test results, using an online form. A GP here will then review your form and decide on the best course of action for you. We will respond to all eConsults with advice, a prescription, or an appointment, by 6:30pm the next working day. Further details about this service, including how to submit an eConsult, can be found on our practice website: [www.northbournemc.co.uk](http://www.northbournemc.co.uk)

### Interesting phone statistics, for those who like hard facts!

We made and received the following calls during September, October and November:

	Incoming calls	Outgoing calls	Hours on the phone!
September	14,250	3,016	233
October	13,494	4,088	315
November	9,954	4,565	316

We would like to thank all patients, and most especially our wonderful Northbourne Patient Group, who have reached out to our practice team during these difficult times with messages of support. We know life has been hard for so many people during the pandemic and we have all had to make adjustments. Please be assured, everyone at Northbourne is still here and committed to supporting you as best we can. The team is working incredibly hard, and we ask that you please be patient and #bekind

Sarah Ellett, Practice Manager, Northbourne Medical Centre

