

**To: All patients**

**November 2021**

Dear Patient

**Branch Surgery Closure**

We have been given approval by South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to close our branch surgery which is based at Stanhope Parade Health Centre. This is subject to us addressing some concerns raised by patients about parking, access to appointments and public transport.

Please see our response to these issues below:

**1. Can I get parked at the main site?**

We have a car park situated to the rear of our main site at 435 Stanhope Road, this has 11 spaces and designated disabled parking. There is a further car park with 15 spaces immediately to the front of Farnham, with street parking available in all the surrounding streets. There is also a council run car park to the rear of Stanhope road, which is a 2-minute walk from the surgery. If any patients are concerned about parking and have a booked appointment, please speak to reception who will try to help.

**2. Will you be taking on new clinical staff to meet demand?**

We have recently employed 2 additional Advanced Nurse Practitioners, 1 who is a paediatric nurse practitioner, who will see all acutely unwell children which will greatly improve access for children. We have employed an additional treatment room nurse.

We have a new full time GP joining us in February 2022.

**3. Why did you change your appointment system?**

At the start of the pandemic, we were told by NHS England that we needed to change our appointment system to ensure that we were operating safely and reducing the risk of COVID transmission to patients and staff. This meant that we were required to introduce a system of telephone triage.

Overall, we are receiving a lot of positive feedback about the new ways of working, however, some patients have expressed a strong wish for the return of face to face appointments. We would like to reassure patients that we have never stopped seeing patients face to face throughout the pandemic or currently.

**4. How to get help for a medical issue?**

- Patients can seek medical help by using the e-consult function on our website or by ringing the practice. Both are dealt with in the same way and on the same day.
- Trained care navigators will assess the patient request and signpost to the most appropriate clinician/service, this might be pharmacy, self help, direct physiotherapy, mental health practitioners, practice nurse, health care assistant, Advance Nurse Practitioner (ANP) or GP.
- If the patient needs to be dealt with by a GP or ANP they will be offered a same day telephone consultation. If the request came in via e-consult, the patient will receive a text with the appointment time.
- Patient can request a face-to-face appointment and will be offered the next available routine appointment (could be up to 2 weeks ahead)
- If patient accepts same day telephone triage appointment, patient will be added to GP/ANP list for that morning or afternoon.
- Most conditions can be assessed without the need for a physical examination. The clinician might ask you to send a photograph to help assess you. Clinicians are trained to consult with patients over the phone.
- GP/ANP rings patient and discusses patient medical needs. A thorough assessment will be made, the clinician will use the same consultation diagnostic methods as if the patient was sitting in front of them. If the issue can be dealt with safely over the phone (immediate prescription to patients nominated pharmacy, referral to other services, advice), this is better for the patient as it will be dealt with much quicker and there will be no need to make a trip to the surgery.
- If GP/ANP thinks that after discussion over the telephone that a face-to-face appointment is needed as they want to examine the patient, they will discuss with the patient the most convenient time to come to the surgery. This will usually be on the same day but can be a few days ahead if more convenient for the patient.

## **5. How long will I need to wait for a routine appointment?**

Pre-pandemic our usual wait for a routine appointment was 10-14 days, urgent requests were dealt with on the day. Now patients are dealt with on the same day in the majority of cases.

## **6. Why can I not get through on the telephone sometimes?**

Some patients have stated that it is difficult to get through on the phone, we are seeing significantly higher number of telephone calls at the moment and are in discussion with our telephone provider regarding increasing our lines. If you are ringing us with a query, it might help to ring after 10am when the lines are quieter.

Please remember to use e-consult via our website, as this takes some pressure of the phone lines.

We are recruiting more reception staff to assist with answering the phone.

#### **7. Will closing the branch mean that the number of appointments available will decrease?**

We will be increasing our appointment availability due to the new clinical staff we are recruiting, closing the branch surgery will not affect the number of appointments available, in fact, there will be more available as the new clinical staff start.

#### **8. I have to get 2 buses to main site, how can you help?**

Some patients expressed concern over public transport to the main site, 435 Stanhope Road. We are aware that some patients lived closer to the branch site and may need to get 2 buses to the main site. If this is the case, please speak to the reception team, as most medical complaints can be dealt with over the telephone, it is likely that this will not be an issue.

If the GP/ANP wants to see you, or you want a face to face appointment, please discuss the best time with the reception team who will try to accommodate a time that works best for you.

#### **9. Can I register elsewhere if I wish to?**

Yes, there are other GP practices in the local area that you can register with. You can find practices near your address using [www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-GP](http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-GP).

***We hope that this addresses some of the concerns that patients might have had with us closing our branch surgery. If you have further concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.***

***We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and understanding in what has been the most challenging year ever!***

**THANK YOU!**

