

APPENDIX F

Difficulty Getting a Same Day Appointment (copied and pasted from our website)

The problem with this type of appointment system seems to be that when attempting to make an appointment for not necessarily the same day, the patient is often told there are no appointments available until seven or more days in the future but are recommended to phone in the next day to get a "same day" appointment. On doing this the patient is then often advised there are no appointments available for that day but to phone again tomorrow. Thus the patient is caught in a loop which seems difficult to break.

I suspect that most of the appointments are taken very soon after the Centre opens due to the problem of getting through on the phone first thing. This leaves the patient with the dilemma of "do I wait a week or more for an appointment" or do I take the chance of getting a same day appointment"

Regarding the problem of getting through to make an appointment first thing in the morning, I have been to the centre at this time and have observed the long queues that form at the reception and also the phones on the desks ringing incessantly. I am always impressed with the staff who deal with this very pressured situation in a calm and cheerful way. However I think that attempting to deal with patients with a phone beside you which is ringing non stop must be incredibly stressful and could explain why one is sometimes (but rarely) told in a slightly exasperated tone that there are no appointments.

I worked for a time in a sales office where the most of the orders for the day came in first thing in the morning. The first hour of the day was really busy, mainly with phone calls but also with face to face customers, after that the rest of the day was more steady, a bit like a Health Centre I would imagine.

The solution we found was to have a dedicated team answering the phones and another only dealing with face to face customers for the first hour of the day.

We had 7 folk on the phones (who took these calls on phones away from the public sales desk) and 3 with face to face customers.

The thinking behind this was that face to face customers could see what was happening and that staff were busy but those trying to get through on the phone had no idea of what was happening or how busy we were, for all they knew we were just sitting there drinking tea and twiddling our thumbs (I wish!!). We had to answer the phone in 4 double rings as well! Having said that it worked very well and staff were not stressed.

Might an early morning dedicated phone team help with this very busy period at the Centre?

I agree entirely with David's comments and welcome his suggestion.

I think the problems he highlights of wanting a not so urgent appointment but more urgent than a week away may really be the hub of the issue. We are regularly forced to take a same day urgent appointment as the only solution. Perhaps some solution along David's lines but with a specific phone in time or number for those who are not urgent but need an appointment before 7 days could be set up - or change 7 days to 3 or 4 days ahead.

I add my appreciation to the wonderfully polite and calm telephone operators.

Is there any chance of an online appointment booking set up?

Same day appointments at Pathfinder are very possible with Dr Plummer but seeing my own Doctor (Dr Rutter) on the same day is an impossibility (I've never achieved it!). As surgeries are only operated on 2 days per week it is usually necessary to try to get an appointment at St Thomas where same day appointments are usually possible provided one is prepared to see another doctor. Biggest difficulty is the congested telephone line.

Agree with David comments. I also find that a presumption is can made that you want a same day appointment when you ring in rather than being asked when you would like an appointment for. This can start the conversation of on an adversarial note when you are advised that "no appointments are available today" in a closed manner .

On the other hand, if an appointment is available that day,you are offered it immediately with out checking if you need/want to see the doctor urgently. Finding out what the patient is asking for rather than making a presumption will reduce the length of the phone call and manage patient expectations better.

From my point of view. If I need to see the doctor that day its for an emergency type thing and any doctor will do. However, I do think it is important that you continue to have a nominated doctor who you see for your main heath-care needs.

I'm impressed by these responses, as they are very considered. An online booking service would be great, particularly for routine things, but I suspect expensive to set up. It is absolutely true that when you ring for a routine appointment, whatever time of day, there is never any questioning about 'is it an emergency?'; or 'is this routine?';, simply an apology that there is nothing until tomorrow or whatever. I loathe the system, outlined by David *****, where you are told that there is nothing this week, but you can phone tomorrow when there will be more appointments released. I feel very sorry for the elderly in particular who can't cope with this. To remove the phones from the reception is absolutely the right thing. The other thing that might remove pressure is if appointments could be made further in advance. I often get told that I can't make an appointment with a GP or nurse 3 or 4 weeks ahead, so of course everyone is pushed into grabbing the next appointment. A little forward planning is needed - my dentist can do it!

If I require a same day appointment and a doctor is not readily available an appointment with the duty doctor is normally offered after 5PM.

I do not necessarily agree with booking an appointment a week in advance as I would have to predict when I was going to be ill.

David has said it all, I would like to say he has said just what I was going to say so no need for me to clog up this page.

Incredibly difficult as the number of such appointments set aside for same day use is obviously quite restricted

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Difficulty getting an Appointment with own GP? (copied and pasted from our website)

Although I can see some merit in having an open access walk in centre, I am concerned that this would soon become overloaded and perhaps abused by some patients, leading to extra stress for staff.

I also struggle to see how this would really help with getting an appointment with ones own GP as there are those who would still insist on seeing their own GP whatever alternatives are provided

Again I agree with David's comments completely. I am sure staff pressure would be enormous.

Perhaps a complete revolution of no one seeing their own doctors unless booked 7 days ahead might be an alternative - and you just get who you get for an emergency??

Perhaps an afternoon older person plus severe illness clinic each day for those with conditions where continuity is essential?? A bit outside the box I know.

The problem is that my GP (who I see at Pathfinder when possible) is booked up well in advance leaving no provision for appointments made on the day which is when I usually need to see him. The alternative is to ring for an appointment at St Thomas when but congested telephone lines make it most unlikely that I will get an appointment on the day and no prebooking is required.

Absolutely not. This system was used by my old GP some 30+ years ago.

The waiting room was packed. Standing room only. Is this the way you are proposing to treat your old, infirm, disable, pregnant & patients?

One had to wait for over an hour quite frequently

How does one know whether one will be seen? At what time do you propose to start the queue?. Queue jumping will be another aggravation.

Who is going to get the abuse?, because people will lose their cool. The juniest clerk, I bet. Then patients are going to be removed from the list, because any type of abuse is not tolerated. And no one else will want them in their list. So these people will appear in A&E, and will be told to go away. But where?

I find it frightening that my GP's surgery is even contemplating it. Have you forgotten the chaos you had in your hands the first time you offered flu vaccine? I wrote to my GP complaining. The reply stated that at 11.30am you had to close the door. A fire office would have closed it before I arrived.

Please, please think again.

I feel an open access walk in centre would be a benefit for patients. Maybe it needs to be tried to find out whether it is manageable. Anyone using it would obviously be accepting that they would not see their own GP.

I am not opposed to the idea of an open session, but feel timing is difficult to ensure that they are accessible to those who work, take their children to school etc and agree with the comment about issues that may arise if you cannot see everyone, have long delays.

I would prefer a system where you are asked if you need an emergency same day appointment when you ring and the doctors are on a rota to cover for these appointments. A bit like drop in, but easier to manage and much easier for patients to understand than the current system.

Whilst not relieving pressure on the system in terms of numbers of calls, it may reduce the time spent on each call.

Knowing what you want and knowing how to get it are two very distinct items. A personal Health Service is a no no. The number of people and the sheer scale of it means that a whole series of compromises are needed. I can see by the replies that no one accepts responsibility for accepting this fact. As patients we collectively should use this most valuable service in an acceptable manner. Doctors appointments should be booked in advance, if the need is more urgent and you cannot, as opposed to will not, make it to the surgery use the phone, making a distinction of requirement between needing a Doctor or an Ambulance. If it is not an emergency and your need to use a phone only covering enquiries then ring at a time set up by the surgery. Similar to those times when you would ring for blood test results. We should all remember that pushing our way to the front of the queue means that all others take a backward step. Anarchy is then only one step away. Your need will usually be no more acute than the next persons, so recognise and respect that. This raises the question of phone answering at the surgery. Many, myself included have waited patiently in the queue whilst an ever ending stream of phone calls take precedence. I have no doubt many of these calls are far from being an emergency and are consequently queue jumping in front of those people who have made the effort! The solving of this problem could quite easily be dealt with. I offer a suggestion. A dedicated member of staff should man a phone during busy periods, staff will know when these occur. This phone should not be sited on the counter, it should be out of sight for obvious reasons.

A walk in arrangement sounds good but I envisage a situation where the many will have to compromise for the few. Resources are limited, the concept is nice but I fear it will not work . There is nothing wrong with the present system, except with those involved in it. There are other departments within the service that cover serious cases or old age and infirm patients, What we are talking about here is doing our bit to make it work.

I find it very difficult these days to see my own GP, though I don't care who I see if it is an emergency. The main problem is that you are offered the next available appointment when you ring up, even if it is merely routine, without being asked your needs. I suppose they are not allowed to ask too much for fear of intruding on patient privacy. I like Patsy's idea that you only see your own GP if booked 7 days ahead - but that means GPs and nurses must be prepared to make appointments up to, say, 2 months ahead to make this system work.

I've never had problems in seeing a doctor quickly in an emergency, so I can't see any advantage in having a separate walk-in system. Who is it designed to benefit?

I also fail to understand how running an additional walk-in centre would make my own GP more accessible to me, unless the surgery is planning to increase the number of GPs available to see patients.

Whilst I would always prefer to see my own doctor, I do recognise the limits to his time.

I sometimes experience difficulty getting an appointment with my own GP as he is not always available but normally an appointment is offered with an alternative doctor.

If the proposed walk in centre would provide quick and easy access to see a doctor then it may be a good idea if not then it possibly may become a free for all.

I don't like the idea of the walk in system, you would need more staff for that. The idea of a separate area where incoming calls are taken, thus relieving pressure at the counter sounds good. Perhaps a routing of calls, i.e. option 1 for appointments etc would be worth trying?

No great problem but it can mean a longer wait and sometimes Reception seem unwilling to make an appointment very far ahead

I have to say that I have never had a problem getting to see my Doctor, unless she is away on holiday. I do take the point being made about booking 7 days in advance, but as of yet, I have not had this issue in fact the staff have somehow always managed to get me in.

I do not generally have much problem getting an appointment with my own GP, but it is more of a problem when I have to bring my 92 year old mother down, as she needs me to bring her, and some notice to be able to get herself ready. She certainly could not wait in a roomful of people by just turning up on the day. I don't think that is a good arrangement. I am sorry to be late making these comments but recent problems with looking after my mother have made things a bit difficult recently. I still hope this helps.

COMMENTS/IDEAS/SUGGESTIONS

Received from our Postal PRG Members

I think it would be a good idea. It would give the Doctors more time with the patients that really need the advice of their Doctor, rather than people who do waste doctor's time with the smallest of things. I don't mean to be rude but it will take the pressure off.

Will the Walk-in-Centre have their own phone line, because I think you will still get people ring for the Walk-in-Centre, although it is non appointment?

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A Walk-In Centre would relieve some of the problems on both counts, especially if the chief Nurse could either make out prescriptions of non lethal type.

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In theory this seems a very good idea - my only concern is will the Walk-in-Centre be manned by a locum or one of the already stretched Drs?

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There is some merit within the suggestion, but also the suggestion raises several queries, run a pilot scheme for 3-6 months then review?

1. Would the names of the GP/GPs (on duty) be known beforehand?
2. Could be that everyone who visits at that time wishes to see the same Doctor!!
3. The timing of the open access, and would this be available every weekday?

Analysis of Survey 2 - a good number of responses. One area that did not feature is the important area of giving and receiving information where the issues of sight and hearing and the provision of written information which can be referred back to.

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Yes it's difficulty getting an appointment, people should be able to make an appointment in advance.

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Yes it is a good idea as long as you can see your own Doctor and not be sent to see another Doctor. How about 10 til mid-day or 4-6pm which would allow the working people able to see their Doctor.

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Very good idea, parking may be a problem?

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I think providing an open access walk in centre is a very good idea.

Maybe having access, in both the morning and the afternoon, to cater and give an all round service so no-one misses out because the "Centre" is only open in the morning for example - some people wouldn't be able to make it in the morning, for whatever reason. The same thing, if it was open just in the afternoon. I think a good balance of am and pm hours would and could work.

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On 1st point is very frustrating; Average 3 weeks means you can hardly see him when you need. There are sometimes you can wait for it but other times not.

On the 2nd point, I agree, something like the Walk in Centre might help, particularly if the number of appointments are not too limited (i.e. very few) as if you are in the queue as it happens now in the early mornings and say for instance you are 8th in the queue it can still go in front of your very eyes that last said appointment with the frustration of having gone there early enough you still can't see your own Doctor on the day. This has happened to me more than once.

Finally if such idea came really off, a review and 2nd opinion be sought of the patients and another analysis of responses in due course.

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I think your idea is good and I think of the Walk in Centre in Sidwell Street this provides good advice and help and support when necessary for me.

Anything of a similar nature which gave me access to my own GP and the Nurses at St. Thomas Health Centre for a regular period of time would be helpful, without the hassle and long periods of waiting time.

Hopefully this will assist the pressure on the telephone service. Appointments will be freed given time and the Walk in Service just needs to be advertised well enough and in the right place, this then comes down to the individual's to use the whole St. Thomas Health Centre appropriately and to be made aware what this is.

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I do think a Walk in Centre is an excellent idea. We have just come to live in Pathfinder Village after 18 years in France and before that Jersey so I am not yet familiar with the English system but I am used to having a Walk in and wait facility. So far I haven't needed a same day appointment and am used to thinking ahead because Dr Rutter is only here one afternoon a week.

The other point I would like to say - the Reception desk doesn't seem to be as well organised as I would like. I don't go very often but I have noticed patients get a little frustrated sometimes.

One morning there were 3 of us at 8.30am waiting for them to open and of course we could see them doing whatever they were doing but it took nearly 10 mins before they opened up. They could at least have apologised or said to us we won't be long. It's a rather old fashioned attitude that this is THE DOCTORS and we must just put up with it as they are so busy.

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I agree that such a move would be bound to relieve pressure both on phone call and on appointments. It would give the medical staff be it Nurse or Doctor to deal with minor problems and referring more serious to GPs. Many problems taken to a Doctor would, prior to the NHS being formed, have been dealt with at home.

As I see it this proposal would have a direct effect on all three areas receiving negative report.