

## PATIENT ACCESS AT NETHERGREEN SURGERY

You will all have no doubt been reading in the press, and listening on tv, to the many comments about the accessibility of GP services to it's patients, and I thought I should let you know what we currently offer, and what we may be looking at in the future, after taking your views into account from the surveys some of you have completed during the year.

Access falls into four main categories, being:

Telephone access, opening hours, obtaining an appointment and the length of time taken to be seen once you have arrived at Nethergreen Surgery.



**TELEPHONE ACCESS:** This was an issue for some of you in the survey, undertaken in the Practice in June, and indeed we didn't score as highly as we have done in previous years. However, for those of you that completed the postal survey at the start of the 2007, you scored us higher than the Sheffield average of 82%!

I do understand your frustration when you can't get through to us because the lines are engaged, but the girls on the phone are doing their best. We receive a monthly report from our current telephone company, which shows the total number of calls taken and the number of engaged calls – I always check to make sure the engaged calls are less than the answered calls! and so far that's always happened.

I have been looking at more up to date alternatives, which would offer various options via your phone keypad, but they may cost you more in the long run. However, I've prepared a questionnaire that will be available in October for you to complete & put any relevant comments, and I'll be able to make a decision once I've gauged your thoughts.



**OPENING HOURS:** Again, in the survey in the Practice, you scored us lower than in previous years. Is this because we close at lunchtime, or on a Thursday afternoon? Is it because those of you that work have to take time off to come and see a Doctor or Nurse, and would prefer surgeries that run later in the evening?

We do feel we offer a good range of opening hours, especially as we open the doors at 8 in the morning on some days of the week for appointments, but appreciate that in general Doctors opening hours are not especially patient friendly: however, they are the hours agreed by the Department Of Health, and although it looks as if the Government are going to address that situation, I would appreciate your views, and again, I'll need to do a survey at some stage in the near future.

If you do want better access at the start and end of the day, though, it may come at the expense of less surgeries in, say, an afternoon, as we do have limited resources at the moment to provide additional surgeries – you never know, though, the Government may look at resources at the same time!

However, longer opening hours for patients also means longer working hours for staff and clinicians – we need to ensure that the balance is right for everyone..



**OBTAINING AN APPOINTMENT:** Again, the survey conducted in the Practice showed worse results than the postal survey, and also, interestingly, some patients commented that on the day appointments were difficult to obtain, but booking in advance was easy. Others commented that booking in advance was difficult, but on the day booking was easy! It just proves that whatever system we operate, we will never please all patients all of the time!

To clarify the position, you can:

- Ø ring up/call in and obtain an on the day appointment,
- Ø ring up/call in for an appointment in 48 hours, or
- Ø ring up/call in for an appointment up to 8 weeks in advance.

We also offer an Internet booking facility that is becoming more popular, and details of this can be obtained from Sue, our Assistant Manager.

However, we have to allocate the availability of these appointments to ensure all three options are available; consequently, you may find that if all available pre-bookable appointments have been taken for a day/time/Doctor that you want, then you will have to accept this and be prepared to accept a different appointment.

Again, I can understand your frustrations if you can't get the appointment time or date that you want, but the girls on the desk do try their best to accommodate your wishes, and again, I can only offer appointments that are manageable within our current resources.



**WAITING TO SEE THE DOCTOR:** It isn't always easy for Doctors, and the Nurses, to run on time.

All of the doctors at Nethergreen Surgery start their surgeries either on the allotted time or often before the usual start time if you happen to be in earlier.

However, whilst the appointment times are timed at 10 minute intervals, on occasions, this may overrun if a Doctor needs to spend a longer time with a patient than the allotted 10 minutes.

Please put yourself in that patient's shoes, and if it were you, I'm sure you would want the consultation to finish when the reason for the visit had been resolved, without worrying about any cut off time.

For our part, we will try and tell you, when you book in, if a Doctor is running late, so you can re-arrange the appointment if necessary.

**FINALLY:** I hope I have touched on some of the issues that concerned you in the last round of patient surveys.

We do want to try and ensure your journey from contacting us to arrange an appointment, through to walking out of the doctor's room is as painless and hassle free as possible, **but**, I need you to tell me if and when the systems aren't working. If you don't, then I can only assume that you are all happy with what we currently offer, and then the results and comments in the surveys come as a shock to me!

Both Sue and I are always available to talk to you and both listen to your concerns, and explain our systems in greater detail, so please talk to us!

Thank you  
Richard West, Manager, October 2007