

FORRES GP PRACTICES

ACCESS TO SERVICES

The GP Partnerships of Culbin & Varis Medical Practices would like to thank patients for their understanding and support during this time of ongoing Covid restrictions. We have had many expressions and letters of thanks provided to us, and this means a lot to our GPs and our dedicated staff.

That said, we have become aware of local Social Media forums where there have been some frustrations raised, and we would like to provide some answers to these:

- ***Why can't I have open access to the Health Centre like before?***
 - *The current advice by NHS Grampian and Grampian LMC (Local Medical Committee) is that even with vaccination and Test & Protect in place, contact with the Covid virus means that our most vulnerable patients and our staff are still at significant risk. We must therefore screen everyone before allowing access to the Health Centre (ask Covid questions, ensure face covering / use of hand gel / physical distancing) – this is the reason why patients are being asked to contact us by telephone at the current time and why we therefore currently continue to use Intercom access.*
 - *The Health Centre has remained open and providing services throughout the Covid pandemic.*
- ***Why can't I be given a face-to-face appointment if I want one?***
 - *The current advice for GP Practices is that we should manage patients digitally where possible (i.e. by telephone or video) and only see those who require a face-to-face clinical assessment. For this reason, you will normally be offered a telephone or video appointment in the first instance, and the GP will bring you in for a face-to-face appointment if they need to examine you.*
 - *Although we benefit from having modern premises, with the ongoing physical distancing restrictions we have room for only 13 patients in the Waiting Room (allowing a further 13 seats for patients waiting for NHS clinics/services).*
 - *Vaccination does not provide 100% protection against the virus, and you can still be a carrier or spreader of the virus even with the vaccine. There are likely to be vulnerable patients in the waiting room (e.g. chemotherapy patients or frail/elderly who are immunocompromised) who are at high risk from the virus.*
- ***Why do staff need to ask what is wrong with me when I call?***
 - *Our administration team have been trained in Care Navigation, having received training from both the RCGP (Royal College of General Practitioners) and the Culbin & Varis GPs.*
 - *It is a requirement of their job to find out further information and the questions they ask are to help you get the right treatment - the GPs fully support them in this respect. They work to signpost you to the correct service (sometimes this may be the Community Pharmacy, Dentist, Optician, Access Team, etc). They have also been provided with protocols and guidance from the GPs on appointment booking, to*

ensure that you receive the most appropriate appointment according to your symptoms.

- Signposting and Care Navigation is now normal practice across the whole of Scotland.
- Our administration team are an integral part of the Practice team who will treat your call with confidentiality and respect. They are bound by the same rules of confidentiality as all staff. It is really important that you work with them to ensure they have all the necessary details to help you get the most appropriate advice.
- **Why do I have to wait for a routine appointment?**
 - Demand on our services is now higher than it ever was pre-Covid, due to higher numbers of patient contacts and the impact from increased waiting times in other services (e.g. hospital and support services).
 - As a result, waiting times for routine and non-serious problems might be a couple of weeks in order that we can continue to have the capacity to deal with more serious conditions which need to be seen on the day or in a shorter timescale.
 - We also continue to provide home visits for those who are housebound and for palliative patients, as well as care home provision to both Cathay and Meadowlark Care Homes.
- **What about emergencies?**
 - If it is a genuine medical emergency then you should call 999 and ask for an ambulance. If you need emergency care but are not in imminent danger then you should call 111.
 - If your symptoms mean that you need on-the-day advice then a member of our Duty Team will look at all the information available and make an assessment based on:
 - Hear It – phone consultation in the first instance
 - See It – video consultation if the GP needs to see you
 - Feel It – face-to-face appointment if the GP needs to examine you

Our staff have all worked tirelessly and in very challenging conditions to continue to provide care for you and your families throughout the pandemic. In addition to working at the Health Centre, a lot of our team members have used their own time to provide help at the local Covid Hub in Elgin, as well as helping to deliver the hugely successful vaccination programme across Moray.

It is very disappointing that our staff have been subject to increasing levels of unpleasant behaviour and verbal abuse recently, including some very cruel online remarks on public forums. This sort of behaviour is damaging to our team morale.

We understand that people are finding the situation frustrating and we too would love to see a return to normal as soon as possible, but for now we ask that you continue to be patient and understanding of the fact that we must work within the current guidelines set out by the NHS and Scottish Government. Please work with us and most importantly, be kind.

Yours sincerely,

Varis GP Partners:

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Culbin GP Partners:

Dr Joanne Inkson, Dr Eric Janousek, Dr Douglas Jarvie, Dr Malcolm Simmons, Dr Alex Flett