

# Newsletter – September 2006

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## Appointments Group

*The Acorn Practice recently decided to set up a Study Group to seek ways of improving the service to patients; in particular to try and find ways of improving the current system of booking appointments to see a Doctor or Nurse. The Group, which met in July and will convene every two months comprises Dr Rowlands and four other members of the practice staff together with two patients, Mrs Preeti Aggarwal and Mr Lawrie Jones MBE. The latter has written the following report for this issue of our newsletter.*

“Since the Government imposed an obligation on all practices to ensure that patients see a doctor within 48 hours of making their request, a laudable aim, patients have often felt themselves to be more constrained rather than freed by the new system that was introduced. Except in the most dire emergency many have found themselves unable to make an appointment for the day on which they first telephone and are told to try again at 8.30 a.m. the following day. With the world and his wife all apparently ringing 8892 4519 at the same time it has usually taken me – and you, no doubt - 20 minutes or more to get through; occasionally it has taken so long that by the time the call has been answered, appointments for that day are all taken. It has also become more and more difficult to make an appointment for, say, a week ahead due in part to the heavy work-load of the six doctors of this practice, three of whom are part-time; and to the need to allocate time for patients who suffer from chronic illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes, as well as allowing for other possible emergencies.

To try and make booking appointments easier for the patient a new telephone system has just been installed. This will provide two additional lines to help cope with the morning rush. Three phones and three members of staff should be able to cope more effectively than one hard-pressed receptionist. With the aim of possibly learning from others the staff have organized a visit to

a practice at the other end of the Borough to see how they run their appointment system.

The practice aims to increase the number of 48 hour appointments to assist those who do want to see a doctor but are content to make a date for the following day rather than face the hassle of the 8.30 a.m. phone-in.

Another improvement is being made by bringing the operations of the Blood Clinic and the Blood Pressure Clinic closer together to enable patients to attend both on the one visit.

A Suggestion Box is to be placed in Reception so that you can, if you wish, let off steam should you feel let down when trying to make an appointment. However, I do hope you will offer possible solutions to your problem and thus make your criticism truly constructive. I hope, too, that you will make a point of writing words of praise when you feel they are due. An occasional pat on the back keeps all of us in the right mood to do even better.”

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## FLU CLINICS

There is a national shortage of vaccine this year, which is affecting all GP surgeries. This is due to a technical problem in manufacturing the vaccine needed to combat the strain of virus.

This will cause delay on our deliveries, which will be October and then not until December, as the companies cannot get them any sooner. Due to this reason we would like to vaccinate all our “over 65s” first, therefore patients over 65 should book now for the October clinics. If we have enough vaccines available we will certainly look to vaccinate as many “at risk” patients as possible, however these patients may be delayed until our December delivery arrives.

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## New “Choose & Book” Referral System

As some patients are already aware, the NHS has introduced a new, computerised system for making hospital referrals. This is being used alongside the old paper system of referral letters, until eventually the majority of hospital clinics should be available this way.

The system was designed to give more choice to patients, and is a computer network which will eventually link all GP practices with all NHS hospital appointment systems, making it possible for your GP to offer you a choice of consultant appointments during your surgery consultation.

Patient confidentiality is ensured by an extremely efficient encryption system which only allows access to registered users via a “Smartcard” system.

You may therefore find that when your GP decides to refer you for a specialist opinion, they produce 2/3 pieces of paper from their computer, offering you a choice of possible hospital appointments, a booking reference number and a unique password. You can then check your diary and ring to book the one which suits you best.

The system was devised to offer more choice to patients and it is hoped it will improve things for doctors and patients, with fewer appointments being wasted.

However, not all appointments can be made this way and this system will run alongside the previous referral letter system.

Private referrals are not affected and will continue to be printed for patients to collect from reception.

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## PATIENT QUESTIONNAIRES

We will be handing out annual patient questionnaires and would be grateful for your participation, as we have found these very useful and have certainly taken on board all your comments and made several changes to help improve our service. The questionnaires should be completed after you have seen the doctor or nurse, as some questions ask about the consultation you have just had.

Once you have completed the form, please post it in the box at Reception marked "Patient Questionnaires" or you may take the questionnaire home and return it via the freepost envelope which is attached.

Once we receive all the questionnaires back, they will be analysed and the results will be shared with you via the next practice newsletter.

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### Repeat Prescribing

We are piloting a repeat dispensing service with a local pharmacy. Patients who are on stable medication may receive up to six months prescriptions, supplied in monthly batches.

These will then either be held by the pharmacy or by you and the medication can be collected from the pharmacy when they are due.

This will save you from needing to request repeat prescriptions monthly, as is currently the case.

If you would like to take advantage of this service, please pick up a leaflet and fill in a consent form at the Reception counter.

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## Regular issues

### Home visits

Whilst it may seem a little hard sometimes, to be asked to attend the surgery when you have requested a home visit, please be assured that we have your best interests at heart.

The doctor on duty can see about four or five patients at the surgery in the time it takes to do one home visit, so it really does make more sense for everyone if the patient can be brought to us, if at all possible.

Of course **we will always visit where there is a genuine need**, but please forgive us for asking you to bring your sick child/relative to the surgery if you have transport and they are not seriously ill.

### Private referrals

We would like to remind patients that when they request a referral to a consultant on a private basis, the GP will prepare a referral letter, but the patient will then be responsible for collecting that letter from the surgery and arranging their own appointment.

As with all referrals, matters which are **medically urgent** will be dealt with appropriately and a letter prepared with the minimum delay, but for routine referrals, please allow a week for letters to be dictated and typed.

### Repeat Prescriptions (see also the article at the top of this page)

If you are on regular medication, you can order repeat prescriptions by writing or faxing a request.

The side slip on your prescription can be used for this or you can write a brief note. However, please always give 48 hours notice, as it is not always possible to guarantee having your prescription ready sooner. Also, please note that every few months the doctor will review your medication and may ask to see you before issuing another repeat. This is for your own protection, as: certain drugs need to be regularly monitored; the dose may need adjusting; they may cause side effects which can be avoided by altering your medication; they may be superseded by a new drug which is more effective, etc.

Repeat prescriptions available to you are normally shown on the side slip attached to your prescription. This list does NOT include medication which may have been issued to you previously on a one-off basis.

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### Staff news:

Our Practice Manager, Michele Hawksworth, will be going on maternity leave in October, returning in April 2007.

We have appointed a Practice Development Manager, Mrs Emma Nicholls, who will cover Michele's maternity leave and then resume her appointed role in April.

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**REMEMBER:** If you need a Doctor when the surgery is not open, ring 8891 0073/8892 4519, and you will be given a number to ring. Please listen carefully to the message and have a pen and paper handy.