



Your Frequently Asked Questions

We have noticed a number of negative comments on the local social media sites, and we would like to be able to answer some of your most frequently asked questions. We are doing this in various formats and media – paper/online/website.

We intend to have a social media presence going forwards, and we will be launching the South Leicestershire Medical Group Facebook page imminently. We will be posting timely informative communications on this moderated site, and hope that this will help with the misinformation that has previously been posted elsewhere.

We are also working with a new website provider, and the new website will be available shortly. The website address will remain the same
www.southleicesteshiremedicalgroup.co.uk

We are hugely grateful to our Patient Participation Group. This group is open to all patients who are registered with our Practice. We meet on the first Thursday of every month at 1pm, and due to Covid-19, this is currently via Microsoft Teams. If you would like to join the PPG, and help influence our future service delivery, please visit our website for further details, or email the PPG: ppggroup.kibworth@nhs.net



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Getting through on the telephone is almost impossible, what is going on?

We have a large team of receptionist constantly answering the phones from 8am through to 6.30pm. We need such a large team as we have to deal with an average of over 3,500-4,500 calls **per day**. We have 16 lines coming in, and your call is held in a queuing system. You will be advised what number you are in the queue. If there are more than 16 calls in the queue, you will hear an engaged tone. All calls go through to the same telephone system and are answered by the first available receptionist, regardless of what site they are working from, or which number you have called.

Unfortunately due to shielding, family sickness, and the need for staff at times to self-isolate, our team has not been at full strength since the lockdown. What's more, due to the lockdown, our new call centre hub had to be split into smaller units based at multiple sites. This was to safeguard 'pods' of staff members and prevent potential Covid-19 spread and protect our staff. This has been further compounded by high demand and people not being able to walk into our surgeries to book appointments face to face.

We are aware these unavoidable factors have made it difficult to get through at times. We apologise for this and have been looking into many ways to improve this situation. We are currently employing more receptionists and looking into many ways to improve this situation.

If you are able to contact us via our on-line services, this would help alleviate the long wait on the telephone system, and free up the lines for those patients who do not have internet access.

Online services

SystemOnline

SystemOnline allows you to request repeat medication and book appointments on line.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have suspended the requirement to provide photographic identity verification for registration. Please call us, download the form from our website or contact us via Engage Consult to request access and register for SystemOnline.

Engage Consult

Engage consult is a new online service that allows patients (once registered) to contact the practice with both medical and non-medical queries. Information and communication is all based within the service and you can send images and other attachments if required.

This service is not suitable for urgent request or emergencies.

To register for this service please go to this webpage:

<https://wsp.psf-live.co.uk/7364/#/welcome>



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How do I get to see someone with my problem if I can't book a face to face appointment?

Due to the massive demand for appointments through this crisis and the need to manage risk, all patients will have a telephone consultation prior to any face to face appointment. During the initial consultation the clinician will determine if the problem can be resolved over the phone, if not, they can convert the consultation into a video consultation during that same consultation – you will not need another appointment for this – so no time is wasted. If it is felt the problem cannot be dealt with via telephone or video consultation, the clinician will book a face to face appointment to resolve the issue. This will often be the same day.

Are the telephone lines open at lunchtime?

The phone lines are open all day (8-6:30pm) apart from Thursdays, when the phones lines are closed for staff training between 1-1:45pm. There is an emergency number to ring during this time and you will be advised of this if you call during this time.

Why can I no longer order my repeat medication via the telephone?

We are the only practice in the area (and probably nationally) that have allowed ordering of medications via the telephone. Patients often ring up requesting their 'little blue tablets' or 'heart pills', for example, and this takes a long time for the receptionist to work out exactly what is required. This also means there is a hold-up on the telephone lines. We recently did an audit and over one third of all calls relate to medication requests. To make sure your medications are ordered in a safe and timely way, please order via any of the following methods:

- Using your repeat slip – ticking the items you need to order and posting this slip through the letter box at any of our 6 sites
- Posting via Royal Mail to the Practice
- Order on-line – further details on our website
- Patients living in Kibworth/Fleckney/Great Glen/Market Harborough who do not have access to the internet and are housebound/vulnerable – Sign up to a repeat ordering service with your local pharmacy/chemist
- Dispensing patients (patients who live more than 1 mile from any of our sites) – Contact the dispensary at our main site on Smeeton Road Kibworth, if you are unable to access the internet and are housebound/vulnerable

Did you stop on-line appointments?

Yes - At the beginning of the Pandemic we were told by NHS England to stop all on-line appointments. This was because patients were arriving at the surgery with Covid-19 symptoms. The on-line appointments were re-instated in August for telephone consultations. The clinician can make this a virtual consultation if required (video) or arrange to see you face-to-face if necessary.



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When will you be offering services at Fleckney and Great Glen?

We recently re-opened Fleckney Medical Centre on a Tuesday morning for pre-booked blood tests appointments with one of our HCA's, and pre-booked telephone and face-to-face appointments with one of our Advanced Nurse Practitioners. We had hoped to expand this service going forwards, including clinics at Great Glen. However, we have been hampered by staff sickness and staff that are self-isolating. We will keep you updated via our website as we reintroduce further days and services at Fleckney and Great Glen.

Patients think you have gone into hibernation! What are you doing all day?

All of our team have been at work throughout the pandemic. The only staff members that have not been at the Practice are those that have been shielding (although all have worked from home) or those patients with Covid-19/self-isolating, or who have been off ill for other reasons. We have worked tirelessly under very difficult circumstances and feel saddened by many of the inaccurate comments on social media.

Have any of the staff at the South Leicestershire Medical Group had Covid-19?

Yes

How many doctors and staff do you have?

Our current workforce comprises:

- 10 GP Partners
- 2 Salaried GP's
- 2 GP Registrars
- 9 Advanced Nurse Practitioners
- 3 Emergency Care Practitioners/Paramedics
- 6 Pharmacists
- 2 Physiotherapists
- 5 Nurses
- 5 Health Care Assistants
- 1 Practice Director
- 4 Managers – HR/Finance/Operations/Comms & Engagement
- 4 Deputy Managers – Dispensary/Premises/Admin/Patient Services
- 5 Dispensers
- 31 Patients Services Receptionists
- 10 Administrators/Secretaries
- 2 Delivery Drivers

Our staff have been working extremely hard under very difficult circumstances. Due to Covid-19, all staff have been allocated a specific site, and they do not do any cross working where possible. This is so that we can shut sites down and deep clean when needed, whilst keeping other sites open and the patients and staff safe.



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Have you got enough staff?

We have enough staff if everyone is at work, but due to the pandemic we are constantly short of staff. Generally we have between 5-10 members of our team absent due to Covid symptoms/self-isolating each day. This has certainly been a lot worse in the last few weeks since the schools have re-opened, and unfortunately we cannot see this getting any better in the short term. NHS staff are not currently prioritised for a Covid-19 test, and this does affect how we are able to plan our services.

Why has my appointment been cancelled at short notice?

This is because of staff sickness and the lack of testing available.

Why are the doors closed?

We are following the recommended national guidance. Our doors are closed to walk-in patients to avoid the spread of Covid-19, but everyone who needs to be seen is given a face-to-face appointment. Nurse appointments for bloods tests, injections, vaccinations and smear tests are available to book face-to-face. These appointments have increased from 10 minute appointments to 15 minute appointments to give extra time for the staff to change PPE, wipe down/infection control procedures in-between patients and collect patients from their cars.

But we can all go to the pub, so why are the surgeries not returning to normal?

We have seen lots of comments like this on the local Facebook sites.

In a pub or restaurant you will be socially distanced, usually in larger spaces with people who are fit and well, feeling healthy and are out to socialise and have a good time. In a GP practice, most people attend because they are unwell, unfit, are suffering with underlying medical conditions or have undiagnosed symptoms; in short the very people who are high risk for catching or spreading Covid-19 and having poor outcomes if they do get it.

In the next few weeks we will be installing intercoms at all sites, and patients will be able to enter the surgery one at a time, in line with social distancing regulations. Our priority is to keep patients and staff safe at all times.

I think telephone consultations are a waste of time - I just want to see my GP face-to-face. When will you go back to the old way of working?

We are following Government guidelines.

NHS England and Matt Hancock, the Health Secretary state that:

...' All GP consultations should be carried out remotely going forwards unless there is a 'compelling clinical reason' to see patients face-to-face...' They also state that '... practices ask their patients to wait outside in their cars to reduce numbers in waiting rooms and avoid the spread of Covid-19 to patients and staff....'



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All of our GP/ANP appointments are triaged initially by telephone, and the same appointment can be turned into a virtual/video appointment. This is not a waste of time, and in-fact increases efficiency. It also keeps the patients safe. If the clinician feels that he/she needs to see you face-to-face they will arrange the appointment for you, which is usually on the same day.

How many patients are on your list, and why don't you close this list if you have too many patients?

We have approximately 27,000 patients registered with South Leicestershire Medical Group. We are contractually unable to close our list to any patient who resides within our practice boundary.

There have been a lot of housing developments, and therefore a lot more patients. However, I am sure that Section 106 funds have been made available to the Practice, so why don't you just employ more doctors and nurses?

We agree that there have been a lot of housing developments within our boundaries, and therefore an increase in patient numbers. Section 106 funds have been recommended for Health, but unfortunately the funds can only be used for infrastructure, and not for the employment of additional staff.

Do the GP's do home visits? And if not, why not?

Since the start of the Pandemic, all practices in Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland have been utilising the Acute Visiting Service that has been commissioned by our Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to carry out home visits to patients that are unable to attend the surgery.

South Leicestershire Medical Group has also been proactive in developing an internal 'Community Visiting Team' to deliver care for those patients that reside in a care home or who are housebound. This team comprises Senior Independent-Prescribing Nurse Practitioners/Community Matrons and Emergency Clinical Paramedics. The team deliver weekly ward rounds and continuity of care to all of our care home residents, and work closely with our partners such as the Palliative Care Team and District Nursing Team.

It is important to emphasise that a GP is available whenever a community situation requires GP in-put.

We have been commended on this approach by both our local clinical commissioning Group and Leicestershire Partnership Trust. This has freed up significant time to allow the GPs to review more patients with 'complex' needs in appointments that are longer in length. This



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model of care has been considered by many to be the future; ensuring continuity of care that is of high quality by clinicians who are experts in delivering care to those who cannot readily attend the GP Practice. We are proud to have been innovative in having developed our Community Visiting Team to offer a significantly more enhanced service to our 'vulnerable' group of patients.

So what about minor operations, steroid injections or even ear syringing?

National guidelines on Minor surgeries and steroid injections have been very clear up until this point. They both potentially place the patient at risk of infection and can also make infections with coronavirus more severe. Therefore up until now we have suspended these services as guidance has advised. However, the situation and guidance is constantly changing so this is constantly being revisited. We hope to restart these services as soon as possible.

Ear syringing is unfortunately one of the most risky of procedures to carry out during this pandemic. We use waterjets at high pressure to 'jet wash' the wax out of people's ears. This essentially atomises the wax secretions and bodily fluids of the patient into the air in a very fine particulate spray which contaminates the entire room and anyone in it. There is no way to protect the clinician doing this procedure (it would require a sealed ventilator rather than a simple mask to prevent inhalation of these very fine particles) or adequately decontaminate the room following it. Therefore until Covid-19 is no longer a risk we are unable to offer this service. However, there are private clinics which have suction wax clearing systems and are still offering this service, and if your symptoms are severe and have not responded to ear-drops, you may be referred to ENT to have your ears 'micro-suctioned' on the NHS.

What about smears, contraception and disease reviews like diabetes?

Following national guidelines, during the lockdown we had to suspend these services. However, we are now offering all these clinics again. Our nurses are taking bookings for smears – both online and via the telephone, and we are doing contraception reviews and clinics and restarting our chronic disease health checks. Please make sure you book appropriately into these clinics if you are using the on-line service... you will be surprised how many men have booked into the smear clinics ...!

I have been asked to monitor my own blood pressure at home, why should I do this, surely this is your job!

Bringing people into surgery for a blood pressure check obviously puts them at risk of exposure to coronavirus. Decontaminating a BP machine is also not straight forward. Many patients already have a blood pressure monitor at home so can use this.

Prior to coronavirus, if a blood pressure was increased in the surgery our protocol was to ask a patient to record a week's worth of BP recordings so that we can get an accurate, average record of your blood pressure at home when you are relaxed. Many patients suffer from



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'white coat syndrome', and therefore a home recording is much more accurate particularly an average taken over a number of days. Therefore not only does this policy keep patients and staff safe from coronavirus, it is also better practice than checking a one-off BP reading in a stressful environment in the surgery.

When will you be running the flu clinics?

We have had to plan things differently this year because of the pandemic. Our main priority is to keep patients safe. It is more important than ever this year that you arrive at your allocated time slot (not earlier or later) to enable the clinics to run smoothly,

Our flu clinics start on Saturday 12th September for patients 65 years and over. We are offering walk-in clinics at the branch sites and drive through clinics at Kibworth Medical Centre. Our clinics for the under 65's who are at risk* will start on Saturday 3rd October.

Organising and planning these clinics has been particularly difficult in order to try to maintain safety and social distancing. We would like to thank our patient services receptionists who have worked extra evening shifts on the phones for flu bookings to minimise extra calls during our normal opening hours.

We are organising gazebos and outdoor equipment to try to make things run as smoothly as possible, but please remember the weather can be unpredictable so it may be worth bringing a rain coat or umbrella if you are attending the walk-through service. Please also remember your face mask, and wear a short-sleeved loose fitting top to aid access to the upper arm for both the drive-through and walk-through service. A member of our team will be on hand to direct you on the day.

Clinics can be booked via our on-line services or via the telephone. *Please see our website for further information: www.southleicestershiremedicalgroup.co.uk