

Dear Patient,

At the beginning of the financial year NHS England imposed a new GP contract with updated specifications regarding access to primary care services. The contract stipulates that GP practices have to “offer patients an assessment of need or signposting to an appropriate service at first contact with the practice”. We are no longer able to ask patients to contact us at another time if all appointments are full.

Historically it's been a race against time for patients to get through on the telephone to secure an appointment the same day. Patients were often queueing on the telephone at 8am, sometimes for extended periods of time, only to be told the appointments had all been taken. Those wanting a routine appointment were often waiting in excess of 3 weeks to be seen.

It's vitally important to us we enable equity of access for all, and that patients are seen according to clinical need, with the most appropriate clinician, at the right time.

In order to fulfil our new contractual obligations we had to make an immediate change to the way in which we work. The only mechanism by which we could do this was by introducing a triage first/ total triage model of care. With many different clinicians and allied health professionals at the practice it is crucial that patients see the most appropriate person; whether that be a Doctor, Advanced Nurse Practitioner, Mental Health Practitioner, Physician Associate, Physio or otherwise. As you know, the software we chose to support this move was Anima.

The Anima triage tool allows our clinical team to triage all incoming requests, whether they be medical or administrative, and all requests that come through are dealt with within 24 hours by your usual Doctors and Nurse Practitioners. These are the same team members you would ordinarily see in practice, and for the most part they work on site, supporting one another. We have absolutely not outsourced this function and nor would we.

Understandably our triage team are only able to safely deal with a set number of patient requests each day. They start processing requests at 8am and work a full day. All requests are prioritised:-

- Patients needing to be seen urgently on the day are either sent self-book links or contacted by reception.
- The triagers may complete requests themselves, such as by telephoning a patient, issuing medication or fit notes.
- For routine problems the triagers will send a self-book link or ask reception to contact patients direct in order to secure an appointment.

As with any new system or process there is always time needed for embedding. Since the introduction of Anima we have already increased the number of triagers, and tweaked the rota according to access requirements.

The immediate benefits we have seen as practices are as follows:-

- **We have increased the number of bookable GP appointments by a third**
- **Our missed appointment rate has reduced to 0.5%**
- We are now able to offer **routine appointments within 1 week** as opposed to 3 or 4 weeks
- Patients are **not waiting as long to get through on the telephone**
- **Reception staff have more time** to spend with those of you who telephone into the practice as call volume has decreased

Many practices in the borough will be moving over to a similar system in the months to come. We all face the same challenges which are well publicised. Whilst we try to continually recruit and retain doctors, there is a national shortage. Our team are extremely diligent and work as hard as they possibly can. We continue to strive to provide exacting standards of care despite the pressures and thank you all for your support.

FAQs

What Times Can I Submit Anima Requests?

Anima is open for submissions from 8:00am each weekday. We would ideally allow submissions throughout the entire working day, however there is a limit to the number of submissions the triaging team can safely deal with. Many triagers work ten hour shifts, but every response takes time to read, consider and action. At the point where the maximum number of queries the team can deal with in a day has been received, we unfortunately have to prevent new requests from being submitted. This does not mean that work stops! Once the system has reached capacity, the triage team continues to work on requests already received, ensuring that every request gets a quality, considered response. Routine requests thereafter need to be submitted at an alternative time, usually first thing the next working day.

What If I have an Urgent Problem Once Anima Has Reached Capacity?

Once Anima has reached capacity you may not be able to submit a request until the following day. If you deem that your request is urgent and cannot wait until the following day, then please telephone the practice and speak to a member of reception who will consult with the duty doctor. Upon assessment you may be signposted to an alternative service, asked to visit the Urgent Care Centre or phone 111.

What If I don't have Access to a Computer?

We appreciate that there are some of you who may not have access to a computer or who are not quite as IT savvy. If you feel unable to submit an Anima request digitally then please telephone the practice and a member of our friendly reception team will submit a request on your behalf. They will run through some questions with you to make sure the triage team has as much information as possible before they handle your request.

How Do I Submit Repeat Prescription Requests?

Anima does not have to be used for repeat prescription requests as these tend to be dealt with by the administrative and pharmacy teams. Instead please order your requests via the NHS App or Patient Access allowing 48 hours. If you do not have access to either of these digital platforms then you may leave your request at reception.

How Do I Make Routine Nurse or Healthcare Assistant Appointments?

These may be booked by telephoning reception during ordinary opening hours.

Introducing 'Pharmacy First'

The new Pharmacy First service enables participating community pharmacists to complete episodes of care for patients without the need to visit your GP practice!

Patients suffering with any of these conditions can be treated with an appropriate antibiotic/antiviral medicine:-

- sinusitis
- sore throat
- earache
- infected insect bites
- impetigo
- shingles
- uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women

Should you be suffering with any of these conditions then you may visit a participating pharmacy without the need to submit an Anima request.

Local pharmacies in Beckenham offer this service.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

The Partners / Directors

Elm House Surgery & Cator Medical Centre