

Dear Patients,

We are aware of increasing concerns about the length of time patients are having to wait on the phone before it is answered by reception and some problems with calls being cut off or lost in the system completely. We apologise for these ongoing problems and are doing our best to fix them. The following is a summary of what we think are the main causes and the action that we have taken and are planning to take and what you may be able to do to help.

There are 3 main reasons for the delays:

- 1) Unprecedented demand for GP services
- 2) Technical problems with the phone system
- 3) Shortage of fully trained reception staff

The demand for our services has gone up dramatically in the last couple of months for a variety of reasons including the following

- A spike in infectious illnesses that are normally seen in winter but have appeared and are spreading after the end of lockdown including tonsillitis, 'flu like illnesses and diarrhoea and vomiting bugs.
- A large increase in requests from patients whose hospital appointments have been delayed by COVID to be seen again by us and re-referred or have letters sent to expedite their appointments.
- A large number of review requests from people with more chronic and complex problems which they have had to put 'on hold' during the pandemic whilst they were shielding but which now need to be addressed.
- A large number of people whose mental health has deteriorated as a result of the pandemic either as a new problem or a recurrent of previous illness and now need help.
- A larger than usual number of visitors to the area, some of whom become acutely ill when visiting, some of whom have simply forgotten to bring their medication and need us to provide it to them.
- Ongoing cases of coronavirus – we have positive results are still coming through daily

Technical problems with the phone system

- The system is part of the infrastructure provided to us as tenants of the Cardigan Integrated Care system but is not under our control. We cannot fix problems ourselves but report them to the technicians when they arise. This process can take weeks or months to work through.
- We have reported hundreds of problems with the system over the last 18 months to the engineers who have worked hard to address these. However, there are still problems with a minority of calls being unanswered, disconnected or connected with very low call quality which we are hoping will be resolved soon.

Staff Shortage

- We are actively recruiting for more receptionists to expand our team.
- We are between Practice Managers at the moment, with the new manager scheduled to start in the Autumn.
- Our staff are also rather exhausted, having worked right through the pandemic and they are now stretched with this unprecedented demand.

Our plans

We are committed to addressing the problems with the phone system. We are working with the engineers to fix the faults with the system. We are recruiting more staff to ease pressure but it will take time to train them up. We have also set up the e-consult service so that patients can use this instead of the telephone to contact us.

What can you do to help?

- We ask that you try to be patient with the reception staff as they are working as hard as they can.
- Please consider using the online e-consult service instead of calling by phone. This is likely to be more convenient and faster for most people. Available via our website at www.cardiganhealthcentre.com – you provide the details of your request and we call you back.
- Please ensure you are calling the correct number for our services as we receive a lot of calls for the other services in the hospital such as physiotherapy, minor injuries and x-ray which should be accessed via their number instead - 01239 801560
- Please don't call us about COVID immunisation as we are no longer providing this service. Please phone 119 instead.
- Please don't call us to request prescriptions, this can be done online (reception can help you set this up) or via your pharmacy instead. Alternatively you can drop the request into the box as usual, 3 days in advance of when you need the medication.