

Media Release

Maintaining access to healthcare and advice during COVID-19

1 April 2020

Across Surrey the local NHS recognises the importance of adapting and modifying the way patients access advice and support during the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) outbreak to ensure ongoing care. Wherever possible, all clinically urgent hospital operations, procedures and appointments will still go ahead during this time. At the same time, we know the importance of reducing footfall in our GP practices, hospitals and clinics for the safety of our patients and staff to minimise spread of the virus in our community.

As such, we have put a number of mechanisms in place to assist patients during this time including - where clinically appropriate - telephone or video consultations instead of face-to-face appointments.

For hospital consultations we will be using a secure web-based platform called 'Attend Anywhere', which is being rolled out across all acute hospitals within the Surrey Heartlands geography; this includes Royal Surrey County Hospital, Ashford and St Peter's Hospitals East Surrey Hospital and Epsom and St Helier Hospitals. We are also working to make this capability available through our community services as quickly as possible.

These appointments will be at the same date and time as previously booked outpatient appointments but instead of a face-to-face consultation on site, will be converted to either a telephone call or video consultation. Patients will be reminded of the scheduled call time ahead of the appointment.

We recognise that not everyone has access to a computer or smart phone so telephone appointments will also be available.

GP practices across Surrey are also taking action to protect patients, staff and the local community by introducing a telephone or online triage system for GP appointments. The aim is to significantly reduce the number of patients attending practices in person to reduce the risk of spreading the virus, in line with national guidance.

All GP appointments will initially be on the telephone or online. The GP will do all they can to help patients – in exceptional circumstances a face to face appointment may be offered following the appropriate remote triage to determine clinical need.

Practices are adopting an accelerated roll-out of a digital triage system. This enables patients to access the help they need online; whether they need self-care advice or an online consultation.

Over the course of the next few weeks if you are asked to attend an GP appointment in person you may have to go to a different surgery building to the one you are used to, and you might see a doctor or nurse who you are not familiar with. Your records will still be

accessible securely to you and to them. Whilst this may not be ideal, we think it is important to keep people safe, reduce the spread of Covid-19 and get the maximum benefit from the healthcare resources which will be available.

Surrey Heartlands CCG Clinical Chair Dr Charlotte Canniff adds: “Whilst it’s really important we try and offer as much care virtually as possible to prevent the spread of the virus and reduce anxiety amongst our patients, anyone who doesn’t have digital access can still use a telephone; we just want to expand options for all our community at this difficult time. We will continue to support our local communities however we can and ensure they can safely access the health advice and care they need.”

A reminder that the NHS 111 online coronavirus service should be used for urgent advice on COVID-19 and patients are encouraged to only call NHS111 if help cannot be obtained online.

-Ends-

Notes to Editor

Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership

Surrey Heartlands is a partnership of health and care organisations working together – with staff, patients, their carers, families and members of the public – to transform local services and support people to live healthier lives.

Together we are known as an ‘Integrated Care System’ – partnerships where health organisations, the local authorities and others take a *collective responsibility* for improving the health of the local population, managing resources (including money) and making sure services are high quality

Surrey Heartlands now covers the majority of Surrey; those areas currently looked after by East Surrey, Surrey Downs, North West Surrey and Guildford and Waverley Clinical Commissioning Groups but the partnership encompasses all local NHS organisations and Surrey County Council.

Attend Anywhere

Attend Anywhere video-consultations - patients will be advised of the appointment change via the phone.

Newly booked appointments will communicate the appointment type via letter.

Patient information has been developed to support patients to understand the reason for the video-consultation and guidance on how to use the Attend Anywhere system. There are also options for multiple dial-ins (so that a persons loved one can dial into the appointment) and other functionality, such as multiple clinicians, interpreters and group sessions (for between 4-6 people).

NHS 111

The Urgent advice: Use the NHS 111 online coronavirus service if:

- you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home
- your condition gets worse
- your symptoms do not get better after 7 days

[Use the 111 coronavirus service](#)

Please only call 111 if you cannot get help online.

For more information please contact the Surrey Heartlands Press Office on 07825 946551.