

DATCHET HEALTH CENTRE

- NEWSLETTER SEPT 09

 The Datchet
Health Centre
Patient Participation Group

Seasonal flu vaccination dates

Following the success of the flu clinics held in both Datchet and Wraysbury last year we have arranged more clinics for October this year. Please see below for locations and times. If you haven't already booked an appointment and are in one of the "at risk" groups, then please do so.

This relates to the seasonal flu vaccine. We are awaiting local guidance from Berkshire East PCT around the vaccination programme for swine flu. We will provide further information as soon as we have it.

Those people who are entitled to a seasonal flu vaccine include:

- those with a heart problem
- a chest complaint or breathing difficulties, including bronchitis
- emphysema
- kidney disease
- lowered immunity due to disease or treatment (such as steroid medication or cancer treatment)
- liver disease
- had a stroke or a transient ischaemic attack (TIA)
- diabetes

Datchet clinics (held in the Datchet Hall) on:

Thursday 8 th October	afternoon
Thursday 15 th October	afternoon

Wraysbury (held in the Colne Room, Wraysbury Village Hall) on:

Wednesday 7 th October	morning
Tuesday 13 th October	morning
Thursday 22 nd October	afternoon

All clinics are appointment only. Please telephone the practice on 01753 541268 or 546088 to book your appointment.

Additional clinics will be held at the surgery – please telephone the practice for further information. For the first time we will be holding a **Saturday morning flu clinic** for those patients that work or who are unable to attend during the week. This will be held at the surgery on **Saturday 7th November 2009**.

Practice closure dates this year

The practice will be closed on the following dates for staff training:

Weds 14 th October 2009	12.30 - 6.30pm
Tues 24 th November 2009	1.30 - 4.30pm

If you need a doctor during these times please call the surgery on **01753 541268** or **546088** and you will be directed to the out of hours service.

Access to the Health Centre

There were a number of questions raised around access to the health centre in our most recent patient questionnaires. We thought it would be helpful to select the most frequently asked questions and to offer a response.

Why does the practice not employ more than one receptionist?

The practice currently employs 10 part-time receptionists. We endeavour to have 4 Receptionists working during each morning and afternoon shift. Three of these receptionists are on duty upstairs in the reception office and one downstairs at the front desk. Sometimes, due to sickness or annual leave, a total of only three receptionists are on duty and additional support is provided by other members of the administration team.

Why does the receptionist at the front desk not pick up the phone?

The building has been designed to separate the reception office, which is upstairs and where most of the incoming phone calls are answered, from the downstairs reception. This ensures that phone conversations are not overheard by people standing at reception or sitting in the waiting room. Patient confidentiality is really important. Occasionally when it's busy, the downstairs receptionist does answer an incoming phone call, but on the whole we discourage this. Internal calls may also be taken at reception. The main role of the receptionist downstairs is to receive people as they arrive at the health centre and to answer enquiries face-to-face.

Why does it take so long to get through on the phone in the morning?

The phones are busiest in the mornings and we recognise that this is a problem. It is an inevitable consequence of our appointments system, which is designed to release the majority of GP appointments for the same day or the day after - a method of meeting the demand as it arises. Patients are asked to contact us first thing in the morning when the appointments are released. The appointment slots fill quickly. We appreciate that this can cause inconvenience. Often, there is difficulty in getting through when the phones are so busy.

To address this,

- we encourage people to use the "call back" facility on their phone if available to them.
- we ask that routine enquiries should be made **after 2pm** to protect the busy morning spell.
- we plan over the next year or so to allow some appointments to be booked on-line.
- when, and if, we become a training practice, some more doctor appointments will become available. This will help reduce the pressure of demand in the mornings.
- eventually, we shall invest in a more advanced telephone system that will allow us to manage incoming calls more effectively.

Why am I asked to phone back the next morning to make an appointment?

We aim to offer sufficient appointments to meet demand each day. However, demand is, of course, variable and difficult to predict. Once the appointments for the day are filled, our staff are instructed not to open any new appointments until 08.30 hrs on the next working day. For this reason, if there are no more appointments available, patients are asked to contact the health centre the next working day. If there is a genuine clinical reason for an urgent same-day appointment, then we arrange for the patient to be seen at the end of a doctor's surgery or nurse's clinic.

Why am I asked to call back after 2pm to order my repeat prescription items?

As the phones are so busy in the mornings, we encourage people who have routine enquiries, including repeat prescription requests and test results to call in the afternoon after 2pm. In fact, we prefer that patients do not phone to request repeat prescriptions unless absolutely necessary. It is better to use the printed repeat prescription request slips, or to ask for repeat prescriptions on-line via the practice website (www.datchetdoctor.co.uk).

Why can't I book an appointment in advance?

When all doctors are working, the health centre offers about 600 GP appointments each week. The system we currently use releases 80% of these appointments for use on the same day or the next day. The remaining 20% are "pre-bookable": half of these are released a week in advance and half are released two weeks in advance. We do not allow GP appointments to be booked further than a fortnight in advance, except for some clinics e.g. diabetes, as a method to reduce the DNA rate (Did Not Arrive). Even so, around 60 GP appointments a month are wasted by DNAs (equivalent to 4 surgeries) and a similar amount of nurse appointments. Most of the nurse appointments are pre-bookable and only a few are reserved for same-day release. This reflects the difference in nature of GP and practice nurse workload. We are aware of the inconvenience this system can cause people who wish to book ahead to see a GP. We have therefore agreed to increase the number of pre-bookable GP appointments by 5% (approximately 30 appointments a week). This will, however, reduce the available number of same-day and next-day appointments by the same amount.

How do I speak to a doctor if I need to?

There are two telephone appointments at the end of every GP surgery and most nurse clinics. This means that a patient can ask the receptionist to book a phone call from the doctor or nurse and the time of the call can be arranged. The Receptionist will ask for a brief reason for the phone call so that the clinician can access any test results or a prescription list before making the call. She will also confirm that we hold the correct contact telephone numbers for you.

I work full-time – why does the practice not offer early or late appointments?

The health centre is open on weekdays between 08.30 and 18.00 hrs. Most of the morning GP surgeries start when the surgery opens, but some start and end later in the morning to offer a variety of appointment times. The afternoon surgeries start at 14.30 or 15.00 hrs. Each surgery lasts 2½ to 3 hours. In addition, the health centre provides GP appointments during "extended hours" at certain times during the week as follows:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday	07.10 to 08.00 hrs
Thursday	18.30 to 20.00 hrs

These appointments can only be booked in advance. They are designed for people who have difficulty in getting to the health centre during normal surgery times. The practice has no immediate plans to open at weekends.

Comment

As a practice, we have tried a number of different appointment systems over the years and none have been perfect. The present system is based on the results of a study of GP appointment requests that was performed in 2004. It has been designed to cater for the pattern of demand identified in that study. To some people it may seem over complicated and difficult to use. However, we have generally had positive feedback from patients who appreciate our efforts to ensure that the vast majority of patients who need to be seen the same day are offered an appointment. The addition of telephone appointments has been a great success. However, there is always room for improvement. We aim to provide a really good service to our patients and we listen to the feedback that we receive from them. We are always looking for ways to improve and we shall continue to adapt when change is considered to be necessary.

Dr Adrian Dalton

