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Dear Patient

Before the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic a new GP contract for 2020-2021 was introduced. It stated that, from the 1st April 2020 it would be a contractual obligation for GP practices to provide online consultations for their patients and also outlined that practices should provide video consultations by 1st April 2021.

After lengthy discussions with Wigan Borough CCG, AskMyGP was chosen as the online consulting platform of choice. We felt that this platform would work best with our clinical system and it was already being championed by other practices in the Wigan Borough.

The Covid 19 pandemic has accelerated the implementation of the system across the country and AskMyGP has hit a few bumps along the way, as its client base grew at such a rapid rate. There has been significant investment from NHS England to get online consultations off the ground and to support practices in delivering this service to patients. On the whole it has been gratefully received.

The practice has worked closely with the AskMyGP supplier to ensure swift fixes with technical issues and we have made internal changes along the way to evolve and improve practice systems and procedures.

In addition to the implementation of online & video consulting, and in response to the pandemic, the British Medical Association issued RAG (Red Amber Green) rating guidance, providing practices with information for when patients should and shouldn't be seen in practice, which services would continue and which would be postponed to maintain the safety of staff and patients alike. This has been regularly reviewed throughout the pandemic and many services which were postponed have now been reinstated.

Thankfully the systems put in place have enabled us to continue to provide safe consultations and maintain services during the pandemic, despite many of our staff members having to work from home due to either shielding requirements, illness/isolation due to Covid 19 infection or isolating due to family contacts via the test and trace programme.

During the first six months of use there have been 31476 AskMyGP contacts in total. Looking at the statistics in more detail we found that 16251 of these contacts were dealt with via online messages, 11915 required telephone consultations, 99 required video consultations, 2601 needed a face to face

appointment and 141 contacts, required home visits. The practice issued a total of 10564 prescriptions during this time and has made 227 two week wait suspected cancer referrals and 1497 general referrals. So, contrary to popular belief, this practice has always been open to our patients since March and we have always had face to face appointments with those patients for which this was necessary.

Although we encourage patients to sign up to AskMyGP we are still available to speak to via telephone and we will help patients who are unable to submit the requests themselves due to vulnerability, lack of IT equipment, knowledge or matters out of their control.

The practice has implemented a number of precautions to protect both staff and patients. We have moved desks in offices to ensure staff are in safe working distances, asked staff to wear masks at all times and implemented a regular wipe down plan to ensure that IT equipment, doors, waiting areas and chairs are cleaned regularly. All Clinical staff wear the correct PPE whilst seeing patients and are following the guidance in changing their PPE. As a result of these systems and procedures we are minimising risk and feel these precautions have been effective as out of 54 staff members only 6 of our staff have tested positive for Covid 19 and these cases are all believed to have been contracted out of the Practice.

Although we cannot allow patients to enter the building without prior clinical triage and/or screening at the door, the surgery is still open and we are still seeing patients when there is a clinical need for a face to face appointment. We have followed government and NHS guidance throughout the pandemic to keep people safe.

As a practice we are grateful to all our staff for their resilience, team work and commitment to continue to serve our patient population throughout the pandemic and to our patients that have supported us during these testing times.

Kind regards

The Partners & Management of Pennygate Medical Centre