

**Winchcombe Medical Centre**  
**Greet Road, Winchcombe**  
**Cheltenham, GL54 5GZ**

*Proud to be a Research & Training Practice*

Dear Patient,

We are writing to inform you that we are having to make some important changes at Winchcombe Medical Centre. These are to help us manage the period of unsustainable demand that we are currently experiencing. There is an unprecedented level of requests for appointments, coupled with a significant shortage of staff. This means that more and more work rests on the shoulders of fewer and fewer staff.

The pressure on appointments is due to us managing our usual demand, catching up with chronic disease reviews interrupted by Covid, a large increase in mental health problems and managing patients waiting for input from the hospital. The hospital is also under great pressure which is resulting in longer waits for outpatient appointments and treatments, which is having a knock on effect as patients turn to us to help.

The staff shortages are due to a combination of the workload, job satisfaction decreasing and the cost of living crisis. A working day for a GP now is routinely 12 hours long, often without the chance of meaningful breaks. There are similar pressures on all the other members of the medical centre team. This is not good for patient care and is not sustainable. Our patient numbers have increased and despite employing new clinical, reception and administrative staff, as well as pharmacists, Social Prescribers & Physician Associates, it is not sufficient to meet current demands.

We are sad to announce that Dr Georgina Charlwood is retiring from the partnership in September, although we are glad that she will continue to work with the surgery. Dr Mark Pearce is also leaving our GP team, but happily, Dr Molly Byham is taking up a permanent role. We have recently been advertising for GP, management, reception, dispensing and nursing staff to fill vacancies but have had very few expressions of interest. In line with national trends, it has been very difficult to find locum GPs and nurses to provide additional appointments. Not being able to fill these vacancies has an impact on everything from answering phones and processing prescriptions to appointment waiting times and the vaccination programme.

We would like to emphasise that if you are acutely unwell and require our help, we will assess you on the same day. Our reception staff are trained in Care Navigation and will aim to ensure that you are seen by the most appropriate person as soon as practical. This will not always be a GP and we may ask you to use other services, for instance, our local pharmacy colleagues if this is appropriate, or offer you an appointment with a nurse or Physician Associate, who sees many of our acutely unwell patients or in-house pharmacist. If you have multiple problems that you need help with, we ask that you do not bring them all to a single appointment or ask, 'whilst I am here Dr...?'. It is not possible to deal safely with multiple issues in a ten minute slot. If you have two or more issues, please tell your clinician who can then arrange follow up appointments, as appropriate.

Our surgery phonedlines will continue to be open from 8.00am to 6.30pm to accept calls but due to a lack of reception staff, from 26th September 2022 the surgery building will close at 5.30pm and the reception desk will not be available unless you have an emergency or pre-booked appointment. This will give our reception team time to scan hospital letters, process results, contact patients and help organise chronic health condition reviews.

The dispensary window opening times will also change due to staff shortages. The dispensary will now open from 9.30am to 12.30pm and 2.30pm to 6.30pm. You will still be able to drop your prescription requests into the box outside the medical centre or request prescriptions online.

We understand that these changes may cause some patients frustration, but we are trying to manage a very challenging situation. We have seen an increase in levels of hostility against staff and as with many other surgeries, we have also faced an increase in levels of complaints. We need the support of the community we care for to get through this. The changes are not the fault of our reception team or the surgery, and we would ask that you do not take out any frustration on them. Please work with us to help you access the right appointment with the right person at the right time.

We pride ourselves on providing a high level of care to our patients with access to the services we offer, when needed. We do not want to make these changes but with staff already leaving because of burn out and many that are left struggling with the workload, we must acknowledge that our resources are limited. We need to take steps to preserve the wellbeing of staff and patients whilst we continue to try to recruit.

Across the country, GPs are delivering more appointments than ever before but a longstanding workforce crisis, coupled with growing demand, is creating an unsafe and unmanageable situation for Primary Care. We are seeing this now, more than ever before, at Winchcombe Medical Centre.

If you feel strongly about the NHS, Primary Care and your local surgery, you can find out more at [www.rebuildgp.co.uk](http://www.rebuildgp.co.uk) or write to your local MP to express your concerns.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely

The Partners at Winchcombe Medical Centre