Dear Patient

The aim of this letter is to improve understanding between the practice and patients in relation to obtaining an appointment with the doctor. I want to explain in a straightforward, honest and open manner some of the problems we face - and explain what we are doing and how significant improvement could be achieved with your help – for the benefit of patients, staff at the practice and the clinicians who help deliver your healthcare. I also want to hear from you about the problems you are experiencing.

To keep in touch, the Practice will continue to conduct satisfaction surveys – and issue a periodic Newsletter. These communications will be available in the surgery and on the practice website www.marfleetgrouppractice.nhs.uk You can make your feelings known by using the slip at the end of this letter, writing to me at the surgery, responding to surveys which we issue from time to time, contacting our Helpdesk – or joining our Patient Group who meet periodically to discuss how things can be improved. We also have suggestions boxes in the surgery and on-line. If things do not go as you would like you can also ask for a complaints pack so that your concern can be investigated.

PROBLEM GETTING AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE DOCTOR OR NURSE
It is sometimes difficult to get an appointment with the doctor or nurse. This can be especially the case after the weekend or if there is unexpected demand. In recent weeks, the practice has unexpectedly found itself without one of its regular doctors. Although we have used deputies when available, inevitably there has been some loss of appointments. Even in normal times, getting an appointment can be difficult, not just at this surgery – but throughout the country. This fact has been recognised by the Health Minister. Sometimes patients make appointments for common ailments when self-treatment or a visit to the pharmacist might have saved the appointment. Most patients keep their appointments. However many surgeries suffer from lost appointments when a minority of patients make appointments but do not attend – thereby wasting a slot for someone else!

WHAT IS THE SURGERY DOING TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION?
1. Following training, we are to introduce a nurse practitioner, so that patients can get a faster access to advice and treatment on minor ailments.
2. We are going to offer more telephone consultations with the doctor when an appointment in surgery may not be necessary.
3. When patients call for an appointment or visit, our staff will discuss a wide range of options so that callers can have the opportunity to consider possible quicker and more effective answers to their problem.
4. We are looking at ways that we can offer more flexible appointments for people who have difficulties attending 9am-5pm because of their jobs.
5. We will continue with our efforts to advise patients about appropriate alternatives to GP appointments – including the pharmacy scheme for dealing with minor ailments.
6. Calls will be logged so that non-urgent cases who were not immediately able to get an appointment will be given appropriate priority when they ring back.
7. We are already monitoring patients who book appointments but who do not attend. If this happens repeatedly, those patients receive a letter explaining the problem. If the situation continues, then consideration is given to removing offenders from the list.

8. A campaign will be launched to thank patients who do attend for their booked appointments and to ask that we be contacted in advance if it is not possible for any appointment to be kept.

9. The practice has discussed with the Hull Clinical Commissioning Group new ideas on how new access to GPs can be improved. We have suggested a rapid access coughs and colds clinic involving a pharmacist with practice nurse support.

10. We are also looking at ways to introduce a more sophisticated triage when taking calls for service. This is to advise on appropriate options for assessment and treatment, to help prioritise calls and to ensure that there is no build-up of patients who do not initially have serious problems - but who have had to call repeatedly over time. A debate is going on as to how this can be brought to fruition.

11. We have made some appointments available to book on-line. To use this service, which is available via our website, please contact our reception team so that they can generate a username and password.

12. We want to help patients experiencing problems and we really do want to hear about and sort out difficulties. Please use the form at the end of this letter to get in touch or speak to the Helpdesk at the Preston Road surgery.

13. We are constantly monitoring and discussing alternatives to the way we work. Our appointments system is fair in all the circumstances (see later in this letter) but we are open to alternatives if they can be shown to be better.

WHAT CAN PATIENTS DO TO HELP?

1. Before ringing for an appointment with the doctor, if it is a minor self-limiting ailment (like the common cold) consider whether you can use simple remedies to self-treat. If in doubt, you can contact your local pharmacist (ask for details of the Pharmacy Scheme or see our website), ring NHS 111 (available 24/7 for advice if it is less than an emergency). Our website and the NHS Choices website contains a lot of useful health information.

2. If you make an appointment, please attend on time. If you need to cancel, please let us know as soon as possible.

3. If an appointment with the doctor is required, please understand that the practice is under pressure not through its fault, but because there is a high demand. If your case is urgent, if possible, please be willing to explain the symptoms and circumstances so that proper priority can be given. We aim to see all urgent cases on the same day – or signpost patients to alternative services which are available – eg NHS Walk-in Centre, Minor Injury Unit. In cases of medical emergency we may advise transfer to hospital Accident & Emergency. Where cases are not urgent and you are asked to ring back another day, please understand we will note your call and do what we can to recognise you have already been waiting.

4. Please do not take up a GP appointment when a nurse or phlebotomist may be the more appropriate option.

5. Be prepared for your appointment and try to summarise the problem when you go into the room. If you have many problems, some of which are non-urgent, please let the receptionists know when you book so that the correct time can be allowed. This might mean a second appointment.

6. Remember each appointment is for one person. If another person comes with you, they will need their own appointment, Please mention this to the receptionist when you book.
7. If you have a long-term condition such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease, please consider how you might self-manage your care in conjunction with our specialist practice nurses or long term conditions team. A huge amount of information is available on our website or on NHS Choices – for example about the Expert Patient Programme. Taking control of your long-term condition may mean you need to see the doctor or nurse less often.

8. If you are worried that your case should be given a higher priority, please keep calm and avoid anger, confrontation and stress. Simply bring your situation to the attention of our Helpdesk in person at the Preston Road surgery, by ringing 01482 344340 or by emailing them at HULLCCG.B81040-helpdesk@nhs.net If your issue isn’t resolved you can raise the matter with Nicky, Assistant Practice Manager, or myself. We really will listen and do our best to make sure you get the best advice and service.

9. Remember, if you have a medical emergency you should ring 999. Medical emergencies are critical or life threatening conditions.

10. If your condition is less than an emergency you can ring 111 (NHS 111) for health advice 24/7.

11. NHS Walk-in Centres are available if your doctors surgery has reached capacity. (Ring 111 for more details).

OUR APPOINTMENTS SYSTEM
Routine Appointments Advance Booking with the doctor of choice if possible— Can be booked a week in advance, on line, by phone or by personal visit. Not all appointments are available a week in advance because if we allowed this, there would be nothing available on the day.
Routine appointments – Next Session with the doctor of choice, if possible— These can be booked at 8am or 1pm each weekday. Bookings are for the next session. If you ring at 8am, the booking is for pm that day. One o’clock calls are for the next mornings sessions.
Urgent Cases - Sit & Waits. Some appointments are reserved for each session. These are not timed slots but fitted in at times notified on booking. These appointments are for urgent cases.

SUPPLY & DEMAND MANAGEMENT
Appointments are limited to the number of slots available. Time is a finite resource. These facts are obvious, but the Practice still gets blamed if there are no appointments. We do take responsibility for making sure patients have the facts and we are constantly looking for ways to do things better. This letter sets out what we are doing. It also advises patients what they can do to help us to help them.

PRIORITISING CALLS FOR SERVICE
Patients have a right to request to see their GP. They do not have to tell the receptionist why they need to see the doctor. However, if patients are able to disclose some information about their problem, it helps us to prioritise the call for service and give better advice. We do understand that if patients have non-urgent medical conditions, they should not be kept waiting an unreasonable time. It is important to identify urgent cases. Please be prepared to give as much information as possible when you ring the surgery. Eg: What are the symptoms? How severe are they? When did they start? Does the patient have a temperature?

BEFORE YOU ASK FOR AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE DOCTOR
If the problem is a minor ailment, have you considered self-treatment or asking advice from your local pharmacist? Our website contains extensive information about alternatives to a GP appointment.
http://www.marfleetgrouppractice.nhs.uk You can also visit http://www.nhs.uk
WHAT TO DO IF YOU CAN'T GET AN APPOINTMENT?
Reception staff will log your call for service so that if you call back, we know you have been kept waiting already. If you feel that your case must be seen more urgently than is happening, you should speak to our HELPDESK on 01482 344340 or email HULLCCG.B81040-helpdesk@nhs.net and if still not happy bring the matter to the attention of our management team, (See this letter). Consider speaking to a pharmacist or ring NHS 111 (Dial 111) for advice 24/7. You could attend one of the NHS Walk-in Centres or Minor Injuries Units as appropriate. NHS 111 can advise opening times locations for both of these services.

Thank-you for reading this letter. Please let me know your views using the attached form.

 undersigned 

John Maffin
Practice Manager

MARFLEET GROUP PRACTICE
WEBSITE

In addition to providing a wide range of information about the practice, our website links to a wide range of national and local support services

http://www.marfleetgrouppractice.nhs.uk

MARFLEET GROUP PRACTICE
HELPLINE
If you are having problems ring the surgery
Helpline 01482 344340
MARFLEET GROUP PRACTICE

APPOINTMENTS – YOUR VIEW

This is a feedback form accompanying an open letter from the Practice Manager on appointments.

Please use this form to let us know what you think. Tell us what your experiences have been – good or bad. What do you think are the problems? Do you have any ideas that might help? Are we doing enough? What more can be done?

You do not have to give your name but if you do we may contact you to discuss your ideas or the problems you have identified.

Thankyou for your help

Your Name
Your Address
Contact Number/s

Please return this to the surgery:
Marfleet Group Practice  Marfleet Primary Healthcare Centre  Preston Road  Hull HU9 5HH
IF POSSIBLE PLEASE UPDATE YOUR CONTACT DETAILS OVERLEAF & RETURN TO THE SURGERY
CONTACT DETAILS UPDATE

SURNAME
FORENAME
DATE OF BIRTH
HOME TELEPHONE
MOBILE TELEPHONE
PRESENT ADDRESS
POSTCODE

PREVIOUS ADDRESS
PREVIOUS POSTCODE

EMAIL ADDRESS:
ARE YOU HAPPY FOR US TO SEND YOU NEWSLETTERS AND NON-CLINICAL LETTERS BY EMAIL?
YES/ NO (circle as appropriate)

(Continue on a separate sheet if necessary)