

## **ONLINE CONSULTATIONS TO CONTACT THE SURGERY – WHY THE CHANGE?**

We are encouraging all our patients to use an online consultation to contact the surgery. This will apply to anything you would normally call the practice about; to book a routine or urgent appointment, request a prescription, and let us know about changes to your treatment or medication, to follow up results and all other administrative and clinical queries.

Whilst our phone lines will still be open, if you do call the practice, we will politely request you complete an online form. If your personal circumstances mean that it is impossible for you to do this, or for someone you know to complete the form on your behalf, our patient access team will assist you with this. This will be assigned to the most appropriate clinician by our GP led triage team and you will be informed of the outcome no later than the next working day after submitting your online consultation. Our triage team usually process the submissions within hours, and you usually get a response well before the next working day. Please turn on email and SMS notifications on your mobile phone and be ready to receive a call from a private number or 'No Caller ID' that could be from the practice. Please put as much information on the online consultation as possible as this will help the GP led triage team to find the right help for you. We will be asking feedback monthly from our patients as we expand this new model. You can check your investigation results, progress of your referrals and track your prescriptions on the [NHS App](#) so make sure you have this set up. If you need help, come, and ask one of our patient access team.

You will be able to submit a form between 8am- 5pm (Monday to Thursday) and 8am – 1pm on Friday. Using this link: <https://shephallhealthcentre.webgp.com>

While we are closed for lunch between 1-2pm daily, we will still be accepting online consultations, and our emergency phone line will still be available.

If you have more than one query, please kindly complete a separate online consultation. We request that you do not resubmit another online consultation about the same problem before the next working day or phone the practice to chase it as it only causes further delays for yourself and others as all online consultations will be processed by the GP led triage team on the same day.

You can watch a very useful video about how to navigate and submit your online consultation via a demo site here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBPAYHlpoaQ>

### **FAQS**

#### **Why has Shephall Health Centre decided to change to this system?**

Since the pandemic, primary care has faced an unprecedented level of patient need in the context of a national recruitment crisis for both clinical and non-clinical staff. Whilst we have worked very hard to maintain our staffing levels, it is more important than ever that the right problem is dealt with by the right person to ensure we can provide our patients with the safest and most efficient service.

We hope that by making better use of appointments we will be able to increase capacity and reduce waiting times.

We also hope that it will be easier for vulnerable patients who really need to get through on the phone.

Experience from other practices already using online consultation systems has shown that overall patient satisfaction and workforce resilience is generally greatly improved.

For your assurance, the adoption of this way of working with online consultations has been developed in conjunction with the following:

**Shephall Health Centre Patient Participation Group** have supported the use of online consultations for over 5 years, before and after the COVID pandemic. They have attended the workshop briefing on the expansion of the online consultation on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and have provided very positive feedback.

**Royal College of General Practitioners** Future role remote consultation and patient triage, a General Practice COVID-19 Recovery document highlighting recommendations and actions for UK governments and health systems to support effective and safe use of remote consultations and different patient triage models in general practice beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

**British Medical Association** guidance on care navigation and triage in general practice designed to support GP practices in implementing triage systems that can be adapted to their individual practice's circumstances.

**NHS England** General Practice Improvement Programme that provides tailored support for practices and primary care networks (PCNs) to make changes and improvements to how they work and transform their operating models to those fit for modern general practice. As a result of this online consultation expansion in Shephall Health Centre, our work has been recognised as a case study for the General Practice Improvement Programme.

### **What happens after my form is submitted?**

- Administrative tasks will be dealt with by our patient access team in the usual way.
- Clinical queries are screened by the GP led triage team and categorised according to urgency of need (urgent, soon, routine). We have appointments available within different time frames, including on the same day. You may be offered a telephone or face-to-face appointment depending on the responses in your online consultation. The location of the face-to-face appointment may vary depending on the available local capacity in Shephall Health Centre and within our local hub-based services. Our patient access team will contact you to arrange an appointment by SMS, email, or phone.
- The GP led triage team may offer you an appointment with the most suitable clinician to make sure the right patient is seen at the right time by the right person. This may be a musculoskeletal specialist, clinical pharmacist, healthcare assistant, practice nurse, advanced nurse practitioner, paramedic, physician's associate, junior doctor, or GP. These professionals are all experts in their clinical areas and work closely with the GP to provide you with the best possible healthcare.
- We may organise some investigations for you while you are waiting to be seen. It may be possible to deal with your problem directly without the need to see a clinician. Alternatively, you receive advice about self-care or other services you can refer yourself to.

### **What if my problem is urgent?**

You should still submit an online consultation. Please do so as early as possible on the day to ensure your problem can be dealt with by GP led triage team, as there are early warning systems built in that allow us respond swiftly to your clinical need.

### **Can I request a prescription using the online form?**

Yes, though for simple repeat prescriptions please use the usual prescription email [admi.shephall@nhs.net](mailto:admi.shephall@nhs.net) or your NHS app.

### **What if I don't have access to the internet?**

We have installed a kiosk in reception with free Wi-Fi. You are also welcome to use our Wi-Fi with your own device. You can access the link using any public internet or Wi-Fi that is widely available and you can use your local library or other free internet facilities.

### **What if a patient does not speak English?**

We understand that it can be difficult for non-English speaking patients to access care, and we have no wish to make this harder. If possible, consider using an online translation tool such as google translate. If these options are not possible our patient access team will assist you with an interpreter if necessary.

### **What if a patient is housebound, elderly, or not able to use online systems?**

We are working hard to recognise vulnerable patients who cannot be expected to use the online consultation (though we would still encourage family members and carers to submit on the patient's behalf as it is a very useful way of communicating with the practice). These patients will still be able to speak to our patient access team who will complete an online consultation on their behalf or help them with their clinical need in the most appropriate way.

### **Other useful resources**

**Primary Care Network (PCN)** hub-based services are provided through a collaboration of the 4 practices in Stevenage South: COVID Vaccination, Same Day Acute Hub, Home Access Service and Enhanced Service. Your practice will prebook an appointment with them if appropriate.

**Urgent and Emergency services:** Urgent Treatment Centre at QE2 Hospital in Welwyn Garden City and Lister Hospital Stevenage deal with minor illness and injuries, while the Accident and Emergency Department at Lister Hospital Stevenage deals with severe illness and serious accidents that are life threatening.

**Self-management and self-care:** You can visit <https://www.nhs.uk/> and <https://patient.info/health> for health and medicine related information. If you are a parent, young person, pregnant woman, or healthcare professional you can check out <https://www.hwehealthiertogether.nhs.uk/> for clinical resources to support you locally in Hertfordshire.

**Self-Referral:** You may be given telephone numbers, websites or addresses of services that do not need a GP referral for access such as antenatal care, vasectomy, health visitor, children's wellbeing practitioners, low level psychological therapies, smoking cessation, alcohol or drug addiction and other services that may be offered without need for an appointment.

**Community pharmacy:** This provides patients a same day appointment with their community pharmacist for minor illness or an urgent supply of a regular medicine. There are now conditions that allow some pharmacies locally to prescribe for conditions if certain criteria are present without the need to contact your GP. Amongst the 7 common health conditions treated are:

- sinusitis
- sore throat
- earache
- infected insect bites
- impetigo
- shingles
- uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women

**NHS App:** The NHS App gives you a simple and secure way to access a range of NHS services. Download the NHS App on your smartphone or tablet via the [Google play](#) or [App store](#). You can also access the same services in a web browser by [logging in through the NHS website](#). You can

- order repeat prescriptions and nominate a pharmacy where you would like to collect them.
- submit and online consultation, book and manage appointments.
- view your GP health record to see information like your allergies and medicines (if your GP has given you access to your detailed medical record, you can also see information like test results)
- book and manage COVID-19 vaccinations.
- register your organ donation decision.
- choose how the NHS uses your data.
- view your NHS number ([find out what your NHS number is](#))
- use NHS 111 online to answer questions and get instant advice or medical help near you.