

Dear Patients,

Haverhill Primary Care Network (PCN) is a collaboration between the two local practices:

Unity Healthcare

Haverhill Family Practice

Our purpose is to work together to try to develop primary care services in Haverhill, for the practices to support one another, and to advocate for the people of Haverhill in negotiations with the local health authority (CCG) for the provision of additional services.

Whilst in its infancy, we have already made progress on coronavirus vaccination, medical education, securing forthcoming extra support for phlebotomy (blood tests) services, as well as the recruitment of several support staff for both practices.

The last few years has been a period of great change in General Practice services in Haverhill. We appreciate that this has caused you great frustration over the years, but are hopeful that you have noticed and have appreciated our efforts and the improvements we have made.

However, this is now a **uniquely challenging time**, and both practices are currently seeing levels of demand that have never before been seen, as well as dealing with the effect of pressures and backlogs throughout every aspect of the health service. We are dealing with **nearly double** the amount of workload that would be considered normal for what were already extremely busy practices.

This effect has been seen across the UK, and is not a problem unique to Haverhill.

We thank you for your patience with us, and beg of you to be kind and understanding.

Staff at both practices are quite routinely working over 12 hour days, and it is not unusual for an individual senior clinician to face nearly 100 patient contacts in a single day. This does mean that staff are fatigued and are at **serious risk of burnout**. We are sorry that this means that we are not able to give each and every one of you the time that you would like, and are forced to prioritise and work in ways that may not always seem as caring and as personal as we would like.

Both practices have therefore decided **to disable the facility to eConsult with the practice whilst the practices are closed** for the time being. We appreciate that this will be a cause of some frustration, but there is simply not the capacity to cope and maintain patient safety. We would therefore encourage you to make use of the out-of-hours service (accessed via 111), if you need medical attention whilst the practices are closed.

Both practices are working hard on **recruitment, retention and training** of additional staff. There are now a considerably larger number of GPs working in Haverhill than was the case a few years ago, but in order to build on this we **must stop the cycle of GP practice staff burnout and departure** that has previously blighted this town.

We want our patients to continue to feel secure in the knowledge that we are here to help them when they most need us, and would like to reassure you that this is an **utmost priority** for us. **Please do not be put off consulting if you have serious or worrying health concerns.**

So... what can you do to help? Help us to help you.

- 1) **Be kind, and be patient** with practice staff who are all working obscenely hard, and have done so throughout the pandemic. Many of them have been through great personal stress themselves, are tired, and have faced their own personal and family pressures in this time. Repeatedly hearing (in person and/or online) about how useless we all are is hardly inspiring for staff, many of whom are nearing the end of their tether.
- 2) **Make good use of community pharmacists for help with minor illness.** They have a lot of experience and expertise and are keen to help you.

3) Familiarise yourself with self-referral facilities

We spend a lot of our time pointing people towards other services that are specifically designed to help them with their sorts of problems. These services do not hesitate to flag up concerns with us that may require a different health intervention.

- a) **Musculoskeletal Conditions** AHP physio are experts in the assessment of musculoskeletal problems, and can refer directly to specialists and arrange investigations where indicated.
<https://ahpsuffolk.co.uk/>
- b) **Mental Health problems** like anxiety, depression or stress; Suffolk Wellbeing provide talking therapies for these problems, and do not need doctor referral.
<https://www.wellbeingnands.co.uk/>
- c) Support with mental health problems like anxiety in **11-25 year olds** can also be accessed online with Kooth
<https://www.thesource.me.uk/health/kooth/>
Support for parents struggling to help their child/teenager with mental health or behavioural problems can be accessed here:
<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/childcare-information-and-support-for-parents-and-providers/parent-hub/>
- d) **Foot problems** are treated by Suffolk Podiatry
<https://www.podiatryreferrals.co.uk/>
- e) **Sexual Health** and Contraception are provided by iCash
<https://www.icash.nhs.uk/where-to-go/icash-suffolk>

4) Consider the impact of hospital pressures on us

We have no influence over hospital waiting lists. We appreciate that it is miserable waiting for essential procedures, investigations and operations.

We have also had a considerable amount of work transfer itself our way from hospitals, without any additional funding or support to manage this.

- a) If a letter is sent to us asking us to prescribe medication, **please be patient**. It can take up to 2 weeks to fully process correspondence (when received). If a medication is urgent, the hospital is contractually obliged to provide it for you.
- b) If we are asked to prescribe high risk medication, and the terms of the **“Shared care agreement”** are not already completed by the hospital, we are unable to do so and will pass this request back to the hospital. We are not allowed by our CQC regulator to take over the prescribing without fully completed safety checks. Please be patient if this problem occurs.
- c) If the hospital did the test, **they are responsible** for the communication and explanation of the outcome to you. Most hospital letters include telephone numbers for the various departments/secretaries involved.

5) **Try out the section of eConsult “I want to help myself”**

This is an absolute treasure trove of information, videos and useful advice about a wide range of problems. We can see that there is VERY little use of this service, and is a resource which people are really missing out on.

If you are a parent of young children, take a look at this fantastic resource:

www.whenshouldiworry.com

Of course, if you are worried about your child we are always happy to help, but you might find this resource very empowering as to what to expect with common childhood illnesses.

6) **Use the NHS App to manage your repeat prescriptions**

We appreciate that not all of you are digitally enabled, but those of you that are can help the less able by reducing pressure on services shared by all.

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-app/>

7) **Remember – you can self-certify for the first 7 days of illness** and do not need a doctors note.

8) And finally... **Please don't use Lateral Flow Tests if you have symptoms of Coronavirus!**

If you have symptoms, you need a PCR test, which is accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>

We all share a united vision of driving forward positive change in Haverhill, for better health and wellbeing, and for modern and high quality health services.

Please work with us on this journey, and support your Doctors in their mission to help you.

Your Doctors (and all the fantastic people that support them)

Haverhill Primary Care Network