

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**30 September 2021**

**NHS leaders in Sussex ask for public support as reports of abuse against GP practice staff rise**

Sussex health leaders are asking for the public's continued support of GP practices – whilst sending a strong message that abuse of any kind will not be tolerated.

It comes after an increase in reports from GP practices across our communities of the abuse and threats being experienced by their teams.

Examples include reception teams receiving death threats, online abuse against individual members of staff, and vandalism and broken property at surgeries.

**Dr Andy Hodson, GP and Clinical Chair at NHS Brighton and Hove Clinical Commissioning Group said:**

“We would like to thank the vast majority of patients for their kindness, patience and understanding for our GP practice teams.

“Local GPs and their practice teams are working incredibly hard to provide care and support for their patients, provide appointments on a day to day basis that works best for the needs of the patient and keeps everyone safe, address the health checks and reviews that are due as a result of the pandemic, and right now lead the roll out for the COVID-19 vaccination programme and the seasonal flu vaccinations.

“The abuse that some GP practices are experiencing as they work tirelessly to care for their patients is not acceptable. No-one should be made to feel intimidated or abused simply for doing their job. We are challenging these behaviours and they will not be tolerated.”

Demand for NHS services is high but in data released yesterday, in August alone, more than 717,725 appointments took place in GP practices in Sussex – 58.5% of which were face to face and that rate is increasing (57% in July).

As well as face to face appointments, GP practices are also offering phone and video appointments – options to keep patients safe and provide more flexibility for those who don't need to be seen on site.

All patients who contact their surgery, either on-line or by phone, are assessed to decide whether they need to be seen in person, via a phone or video consultation or if they would benefit from a visit to a community pharmacy. By working in this way, GP practices can make sure those with the greatest need are seen first and also that patients see the person who is best placed to help them.

**Dr Laura Hill, GP and Clinical Chair of NHS West Sussex said:**

“Our GP practices have always been open and face to face consultations have always been available for those who need to be seen.

“The majority of appointments in our GP practices are face to face – and this number is still continuing to rise.

“It is important however that we keep a range of ways you can have an appointment as we move forward so that we can meet the increasing demand and make sure we can support our patients in the best possible way.

“Many patients have also found that telephone and video appointments, where appropriate, suit their lifestyle and working patterns, and they have benefited from shorter waiting times for appointments and protection from sharing waiting room environments.

They can also benefit from the expertise of the range of professionals within surgery teams, such as nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists and social prescribers.”

**Dr David Warden, GP and Clinical Chair of NHS East Sussex said:**

“With more than 30,000 appointments happening in GP practices in Sussex every day, it is important to understand the experience of patients.

“The latest GP Patient Survey shows that more than 85% of patients in Sussex said that they have a good overall experience from their GP practice.

“Further to this 70% of patients say it is easy to get through on the phone, and 85% of patients say they were satisfied with the type of appointment they were offered.

“GP practices are working incredibly hard to support their patients in this way and keep the level of care high. We ask that you to continue to show them kindness, and help them help you at this time.”

**Advice for patients**

- If your illness is minor, try to manage your symptoms yourself for a day or two. Visit [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk) for helpful information and your local pharmacy is a great first port of call.
- If your illness is not going away, or you are worried about your symptoms, contact your GP surgery.
- If you're ill or injured and are unsure where to turn, click [www.111.nhs.uk](https://www.111.nhs.uk) or call 111. The 111 phone service can book you into local NHS services if needed

**Data source: [Appointments in General Practice August 2021 - NHS Digital](#)**