

**DUE TO THE PANDEMIC, OUR SERVICE HAS HAD TO ADAPT TO KEEP BOTH PATIENTS AND STAFF SAFE, AND TO MANAGE YOUR MEDICAL CARE WITH RESPONSIVENESS, PROFESSIONALISM AND COMPASSION**

Dear Patients of The Peninsula Practice

We are very aware that just 2 months into taking over Aldeburgh Practice, with all the changes and new processes that patients and staff were having to adjust to, COVID19 came along and wiped any residual sense of 'normal' from under everyone's feet.

We, like everybody else, have had to make rapid and radical changes to the way we work because the coronavirus is so highly infectious and we have a particularly vulnerable population. We have many patients of Peninsula Practice suffering with the virus, some have sadly died, and we know that many people are carriers without symptoms. That is why our decisions were, and continue to be, made with full risk assessments and in line with NHS England instructions to all practices nationally to work out 'hub' areas/sites to minimise the risk of transmission. We are lucky in that we have several sites to enable these infection control measures.

We work extremely closely with the Ipswich and East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), keeping well abreast of the updates, guidance and information both locally and centrally (from government) as it comes in constantly. The CCG are fully supportive of our arrangements and we are working flat out with a devoted staff who are patients themselves and like us all, scared.

Here is the rationale for our current service.

We are concentrating our resources for all face-to-face patient contact to happen at a single site - Orford - that is equidistant between Aldeburgh and Alderton, providing a consistently managed service with minimal footfall so as to protect both patients and staff. This enables us to run our service with full infection control measures, and to optimise the safety of all our patients and staff.

Other practices are sharing sites to work in similar ways. We are very lucky that we can manage this as a single Peninsula Practice and as such, minimise rotation of staff, which would also be a major infection risk.

We are also asking patients who have transport to go to Landseer Road for blood tests. Many local practices, and practices across Suffolk, are supported by the Landseer Road blood test service which has been a long-standing blood test service to provide for all primary care (GP) patients. (This is not a walk in service but bookable appointments are available online and by phone.)

Single-site practices are having to manage their hot/cold hubs by either separating areas within the surgery, and/or extending outside for some services. We are reviewing our services constantly but currently are reluctant to do a drive by/car park blood test service, as it is important to us that the patient is unhurried, that the patient is well before and after the test. It is also important that evidence based infection control measures are in place - not to mention issues with car park practicalities and safety, the weather and managing equipment.

We think it is reasonable to ask patients to go to Landseer Road if they are able to, and the overwhelming majority are happy to do so. We have had excellent feedback from patients having used the service, importantly that they felt the service was efficient and safely managed. There are also arrangements there to provide specific infection control measures to very high-risk patients who are shielding. This releases capacity for other services to be provided in a timely manner by staff at the Orford branch, such as dressings, baby immunisations, vaccinations, cancer screening etc.

If, however, a patient needing a blood test is unable to get to Landseer Road, or has a particular individual medical reason why they can't travel to Ipswich, we are seeing them at Orford.

We respect that sometimes patients might have transport difficulties and we urge them to let us know if this is the case. So far we have not had any individual patients tell us that they cannot get to Orford if they are not housebound.

We have also had to consider staff capacity, which has been significantly reduced at different times; and of course we must also protect those staff that might be considered more vulnerable than others, yet are able to work.

Therefore much of the non face-to-face work continues at Aldeburgh and Alderton, including telephone consultations, processing of medications, chronic disease clinics, and by using the most helpful video consultations that we want to encourage our patients to use where clinically indicated.

We also have to consider the limited supply of PPE which is needed almost exclusively only at Orford, and with constant monitoring.

The fear and vulnerability that any change brings has been amplified by this pandemic and we are doing everything in our power to provide a safe and responsive service. We are constantly reassessing what we are doing, why we are doing it, and what all the impacts are - both positive and negative.

We are currently looking at a phased recovery plan, considering all sites, and are taking action towards improved access by prioritising the most vulnerable first.

If you have any concerns about the clinical service being provided by us please let us know directly, rather than using or indeed believing social media posts, which can cause inadvertent but significant risk to patient care.

We appeal to our patients for kindness and understanding. There is no normal. We treat every patient as equally precious with great respect, professionalism and care.

With very best wishes,

Dr Lindsey Crockett, Mrs Linda Deabill and all the Peninsula Team