“I need to see a doctor!”

Top Tips for Accessing Your GP Practice

healthwatch Gloucestershire

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Introduction

Healthwatch Gloucestershire published a report on Accessing GP Services in Gloucestershire in 2024. One recurring theme was that people are unaware of the different staff roles and services provided by their GP practice. Most GP practices in Gloucestershire offer a wide range, and this booklet aims to provide information on these, although you should visit your practice website to see exactly what they offer. We also hope to answer some of the questions raised during our project on GP Access.

What is Primary Care?

Primary Care Services provide the first point of contact in the healthcare system, acting as the 'front door' of the NHS. Primary Care includes general practice, community pharmacy, dental and optometry (eye health) services. This booklet is intended as a useful guide to Primary Care for you to refer to as and when required, together with useful links and telephone numbers to additional services. This information is also available through the following QR Code.

Is there anything else you would like to include? If so, contact us using the details at the back of this booklet and we will try to include it in the next edition.

What is a QR Code? How to scan and use one

A QR (Quick Response) Code is a scannable image that can be instantly read by using a Smartphone camera and is the same as a barcode used in supermarkets.

By hovering your phone camera over the QR Code, with the click of a button you can immediately be taken to the specific website.

Primary Care Networks

Primary Care Networks (PCNs) are groups of practices working together with community, mental health, social care, pharmacy, hospital and voluntary services to provide more integrated services to their community.

GP Practice services have changed to meet increasing demand and respond to local health care needs. They have done this by expanding the workforce, to include more specialist roles that work alongside GPs in general practice and improve the range for patients.

Who might I see at the GP Practice?

Groups of GP practices decide what additional roles will benefit their patients and these are shared between GP practices, but not all roles will be available. This means there will be more choice of health care professionals that you can access, and your appointment may be offered at a different location from your usual surgery.

Triage Services

'Triage' is a term used to describe an assessment of needs to help direct a patient to the right health care professional within primary care.

The triage service ensures that as many patients as possible have access to a health care practitioner at the appropriate time. The triage team are trained and able to provide support and advice as appropriate. They have direct access to a GP to support with this.

The triage team could also be using AI/intelligent questions/online consultation forms to help GPs prioritise appointments and decide on the most appropriate clinician.

Practice Team

GP Partner

A GP Partner is a self-employed general practitioner who, alongside other GPs, is responsible for running their own practice as well as playing an active role in the administrative and business side of the practice. They are partners in a business and have a contract with the NHS and are not employed by the NHS.

Salaried GP

A Salaried GP is employed by a medical practice and works contracted hours each week. This provides them with a structured working week alongside a consistent team. It is often the first step for a newly qualified GP.

Locum GP

A Locum GP is fully qualified and is used to fill temporary clinical positions to cover illness, maternity leave, staff shortages etc.

GP Registrar

Doctors training to become GPs are called GP Registrars and are normally attached to one of the doctors in the practice as their trainer. GP Registrars are fully qualified doctors who are likely to have a lot of experience of hospital medicine.

Physician Associate

Physician Associates support the GP in the diagnosis and management of patients. They are not GPs, but do take medical histories, perform examinations, analyse test results and refer patients as required.

Receptionist/Care Navigator/Patient Adviser

The role of the receptionist has evolved and expanded over the past few years to include more responsibilities, and many have had their job title changed to reflect this. You can look at their job title by checking your individual GP website.

They provide an important link for patients with the practice and are your initial contact point for general enquiries, either by phone or in person. They can provide information on services and test results and direct you to the right person depending on your health issue or query. They make most of the patient appointments with the GPs and nurses and are trained to ensure you are directed to the most appropriate clinician.

Advanced Practitioner

Advanced Practitioners can be nurses, pharmacists, paramedics, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dietitians, or podiatrists. They have a wide range of skills and knowledge that increases the offer of support to patients registered with GP the practice

Care Coordinator

Care Coordinators are personalised care professionals who help to provide capacity, and expertise to support patients. They work closely with the practice team to make sure that appropriate support is made available to the patient and their carers and ensure that their changing needs are addressed.

Practice Manager

The Practice Manager manages all the practice's business aspects, such as ensuring that the right systems are in place to provide high quality patient care. This includes human resources, finance, patient safety, premises and equipment and information technology.

Practice Nurse

Practice Nurses are qualified and registered nurses. They can help with health issues such as family planning, healthy living advice, blood pressure checks, dressings and more.

Healthcare Assistant (HCA)

HCAs undertake new patient health checks and support the practice nurse with health promotion programmes. They carry out baseline observations such as pulse oximetry (oxygen levels), blood pressure, temperature, pulse rate and record the findings accurately.

Wider Team

Paramedic

Paramedics can help people with less complicated medical needs by offering home visits during the day to those unable to attend the practice. They offer specialist skills and knowledge to support patients who might require an urgent home visit. They can also support patients in the practice or provide advice over the phone.

Pharmacy Team

The Pharmacy Team supports the safe administration and prescribing of medicines for patients. They complete medication reviews, either on the phone or through face-to-face appointments and help the clinical staff and patients understand good prescribing practice.

For further information about these roles please scan the QR code

Clinical Pharmacist

Clinical Pharmacists work in primary care in a patient facing role to clinically assess and treat patients using their expert knowledge of medicines. They work with, and alongside, the general practice team, taking responsibility for patients with chronic diseases and undertaking structured medication reviews.

Pharmacy Technician

Pharmacy technicians complement the work of Clinical Pharmacists in tasks such as medicines reconciliation, audits, prescription management support etc.

Phlebotomist

The Phlebotomist takes blood samples from patients and sends them off for analysis and testing.

Diabetic Nurse

A Diabetic Nurse has specialist knowledge of diabetes and will give support and advice including information on blood sugar checks and adjusting medications. They often help run patient clinics.

Community/District Nurse

The Community/District Nursing Team provides skilled nursing care and support to people at home and in other community settings. The team works with GPs, community and adult care services, private care agencies and many other healthcare professionals.

Mental Health Nurse

Many Practices have direct access to a Mental Health Nurse who can provide further advice and support.

Frailty Team

The Frailty Team works closely with the Advanced Practitioners to help manage people who are becoming frailer, and they help to prevent hospital admissions where possible.

Social Prescribing Link Worker

Social Prescribing Link Workers connect people to community groups and agencies for practical and emotional support. Your GP can refer you to this service.

Health and Wellbeing Coach

Health and Wellbeing Coaches support people to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to manage existing issues, low motivation, long-term conditions etc. They work alongside people to coach and motivate them to implement their personalised health and care plan.

Patient Participation Group (PPGs)

Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) are generally made up of a group of volunteer patients, the Practice Manager and one or more of the GPs from the practice. PPGs meet on a regular basis to discuss the services on offer, and how improvements can be made for the benefit of patients and the practice. There is no set way in which they work – the aims and work of each group entirely depend on local needs, but they all have the aim of making sure that their practice puts the patient, and improving health, at the heart of everything it does. Gloucestershire has a network of PPGs who meet on a bi-monthly basis. If you would like to be involved, contact your practice for more information.

Please visit your own GP practice website to see which roles your practice has, as not all practices will have all roles as described above.

For further information about these roles please scan the QR code

Registering at a practice

What we hear from the public:
"I don't have a fixed address so how can I register with a doctor?

Anyone in England can register free at a GP practice. Some will ask to see proof of address; however, the law does not require you to provide this. NHS guidance clearly states that a practice cannot refuse to register a patient because they do not have identification or proof of address.

Go to: www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp

Use the above link to find a GP and register using an online registration form on the practice website. Alternatively, you can pick up a paper-based registration form directly from a practice. When you register it is helpful to have your NHS number if you know it, as well as the name and address of your previous GP, if you had one.

If you are transferring to a new practice, the NHS will automatically request your medical records from your previous GP practice. This is done electronically and usually happens within 1-3 days.

You can ask to be registered on a temporary basis if you cannot provide these documents.

Temporary GP Information

You can register as a temporary resident with a GP practice for up to three months. To register, you must fill out a temporary services form (GMS3) provided by the practice.

After three months you must reapply to register as a temporary resident or become a permanent patient. You will remain a patient of your permanent GP if you are already registered elsewhere.

Registering at a practice

What to do when in full-time education elsewhere in the country

You can only register with one GP. Therefore, if like most students, you spend more weeks of the year at your university address than your family address, you need to register with a GP near your university as soon as possible.

That way you can receive emergency care if you need it and access health services quickly and easily while you are away.

This is especially important if you have an ongoing health condition, particularly one that needs medicine, such as asthma, diabetes or epilepsy.

You can choose to register with any local GP. The Health Centre attached to your university is likely to be the most convenient, and the doctors working there will be experienced in the health needs of students.

Moving to a different GP practice within the same catchment area

You can apply to move to a different GP practice in the same catchment area and you do not need to give a reason. You will need to fill in a registration form and the new practice will request your medical records are transferred to them. However, sometimes you may not be able to transfer to a new GP because they are not accepting new patients.

Scan this QR code to find out more about how to register with a GP Practice.

Scan this QR code to find a GP Practice.

If you have problems registering with a GP:

- call the NHS England Customer Contact Centre on 0300 311 2233

Making an Appointment

What we hear from the public:
"I am unable to get through to my GP Practice using the telephone!

How to book, change or cancel an appointment

If you think you need an appointment at your GP practice, you can contact them:

- by phone
- in person, by going into the surgery and talking to the receptionist/care navigator
- using an online form on your GP practice website
- some practices also have a form you can access if you use the NHS App or log into your account on the NHS website (www.nhsapp.service.nhs.uk/login)

Before booking an appointment, your GP practice may ask what you need help with. This will help them decide how soon you need to be seen and help them choose the most suitable doctor, nurse or health professional to help you. This is known as 'triage'.

Information on Appointments

Double Appointments

A standard slot is 10 minutes. If you have more than one issue to discuss or feel that you may need a longer consultation time for a more complex problem, then you can request to book a double appointment.

Enhanced Access Appointments

Enhanced Access is an extension of your usual GP practice, offering patients access to appointments during evenings and weekends. The service is not a walk-in service, and you can only book an appointment through your usual GP practice reception.

Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are a legal requirement to make sure health services are accessible to all people.

Examples of reasonable adjustments are:

- making sure there is a hearing loop system in consultation rooms
- making sure there is good access for people who use a wheelchair
- providing plain English or easy read appointment letters

Interpreters

If you require an interpreter, please let reception know when booking your appointment or registering with the practice. This will ensure additional time for your consultation is provided and allow time for an interpreter to be booked.

Accessible Information Standard

The Accessible Information Standard aims to ensure that people with an impairment, or any degree of sensory loss, who use health or adult care services:

- have access to information that they can understand
- receive any communication support they might need

Scan the QR code for more information and guidance about the Accessible Information Standard on the NHS England website.

Scan the QR code to download an Easy Read version of the Accessible Information Standard (www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/3mmncolv/change-easyread-version-of-ais.pdf)

Wasted Appointments - DNA (did not attend)

A DNA occurs when an appointment is not attended, and the patient has not contacted the practice in advance to cancel it. Wasted appointments are a huge problem throughout the NHS. The issue of DNAs is a continued frustration both for patients waiting to get an appointment and for those working in the practice as well as a waste of resources.

If you cannot attend or no longer need an appointment, please let the practice know in advance. Mistakes do happen and it is understandable that appointments can be forgotten or overlooked. Preference, of course, is for the practice to know in advance so they can offer the appointment to another patient.

You and your general practice

The NHS has put together a guide called 'You and your general practice' which can be found here: www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/you-and-your-general-practice-english/

The guide tells you what to expect from your general practice and how you can help them, so you get the best from the NHS. It has been translated into a number of different languages.

How do I give feedback?

Comments, Compliments and Complaints

All GP practices have a Comments, Compliments and Complaints process.

Comments and Compliments

These are equally important. Please tell your GP practice what they are doing well or if something they did was particularly helpful. Let your practice know so they can try to do more of this for you and for others.

Complaints

All GP practices will have a complaints process, and you can get this information by contacting them directly or on their website. In the first instance, it is usually best to try to find a resolution to your problem directly with the practice by speaking to a member of the Practice Management Team. This ensures your complaint receives the full consideration and response it requires.

Patient Record Keeping

There are strict national guidelines for the upkeep and sharing of patient records. All GP practices have policies and procedures in place to ensure patient records are kept up to date. These include records of clinical and non-clinical consultations and any actions undertaken. The policies and procedures also cover how and when information is shared with other health providers to ensure patients receive the care they need.

You can access your health records by using online services such as the NHS App or by speaking to your GP practice.

Carers

What we hear from the public:
"I can't register as a carer at my practice because the person I care for doesn't go to the same doctor!"

If you are an Unpaid Carer, it is important you register this with your GP practice, whether or not the person you care for is registered at the same practice. As a carer, you are entitled to a free flu vaccination, and your surgery may offer the following:

- some flexibility with appointment times, for both yourself and/or the person you care for to accommodate your caring situation
- agreement to share information about the condition of the person you care for (with their consent)

Veterans

You are a Veteran if you have served in the UK armed forces for at least 1 day. Non-mobilised reservists are also regarded as Veterans. The NHS can support your health when you leave the armed forces. It does not matter if your health needs are a result of your service or not. If you have not already, it's important to register with a GP practice and tell them you served in the UK armed forces so they can add it to your medical records.

When you register with an NHS GP practice, it is important to give them any information you received from your military medical officer. This will help your GP to better understand your health, including any health problems related to your service. It will also help make sure you are referred to dedicated NHS services for veterans, where appropriate.

If you are already registered with a GP but have not told them you served in the armed forces, make sure to let your GP or a member of the practice team know when you next speak to them. This is important to do because it may be relevant to your health and care, now or in the future. It does not matter how long you served for or when you left the armed forces.

Registering as an armed forces family member at a GP practice

You can ask a GP practice to register you as an armed forces family member on your medical records. They do this by adding a specific code representing armed forces families. This means NHS staff accessing your medical records are more likely to be aware of your situation and can refer you to specialist care if you need it. It also makes it easier for a new GP practice to continue treating you if you move due to a new posting.

Patients with Learning Disability and/or Autism

Your GP practice should offer an Annual Health Check (AHC) to all patients aged 14+ with a learning disability. If you have a learning disability or care for someone who does, make sure the GP practice is aware of this because not everyone may be on the practice's Learning Disability Register.

Community Pharmacy and Prescriptions

What we hear from the public:
"What is the best way to order prescriptions?"

There are currently 105 Community Pharmacies in Gloucestershire and all need a Community Pharmacist on duty to be able to support our local population with a range of services. These include dispensing prescriptions, disposal of unwanted medicines, promotion of healthy lifestyles and support for self-care. Pharmacies can now offer an increasing number of clinical services such as vaccinations, blood pressure checks, contraception and Pharmacy First services.

When ordering a prescription, only order what you need. If you pick it up from the pharmacy, please check it is correct before you leave the premises. If you do this and it must be returned, it can be re-used. If you take it out of the pharmacy prior to checking, it cannot be re-used. This will reduce waste and support environmental sustainability.

Use the Right Service

Self Care

Care for yourself at home

Minor cuts & grazes | Minor bruises
Minor sprains | Coughs and colds

Pharmacy

Local expert advice

Minor illnesses | Stomach upsets
Headaches | Bites & stings

NHS 111

Non-emergency help

Feeling unwell? | Unsure? | Anxious?
Need help?

GP Advice

Out of hours call 111

Persistent symptoms | Chronic pain
Long term conditions | New prescriptions

UTCs

Urgent Treatment Centres

Breaks & sprains | X-rays
Cuts & grazes | Fever & rashes

A&E or 999

For emergencies only

Choking | Chest pain | Blacking out
Serious blood loss

Not sure where to turn?

Click or call first:
www.nhsglos.nhs.uk/your-health-services/urgent-advice-and-care

NHS App

The NHS App gives you a simple and secure way to access a range of NHS services. It is designed to help manage health conditions, book appointments, order repeat prescriptions etc. Download the NHS App on your smartphone or tablet, or alternatively you can access the same services by logging in through the NHS website.

Healthwatch Gloucestershire

Healthwatch Gloucestershire is your local health and social care champion. From the Forest of Dean to Fairford and everywhere in between, they make sure National Health Service (NHS) leaders and other decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care.

To find out more: www.healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk
Call: 0800 652 5193
Email: info@healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk

Local Services

NHS 111

NHS 111 can help if you think you need medical help right now. They will direct you to the best place to get help if you cannot contact your GP during the day, or when your GP is closed (out-of-hours):

- by using 111 online (www.111.nhs.uk)
- in the NHS App
- By calling 111

Minor Injury and Illness Units

Many people go to an Emergency Department (A&E) with minor injuries which could usually be treated more quickly at a Minor Injury and Illness Unit (MIIU).

You can get help for a variety of new or recent minor illnesses or injuries, including sprains, minor fractures, wounds and burns, skin problems, eye conditions and more. Minor Injury and Illness Units (MIIUs) have a telephone triage system and appointments, if required, are booked via NHS 111 online or by calling 111.

Cinderford – Based at the new Forest of Dean Community Hospital. Open 8am – 7:30pm to walk-ins and booked appointments.

Cirencester – Based at Cirencester Hospital. Open 8am – 7:30pm to walk-ins and booked appointments.

Dursley – Based at the Vale Community Hospital. Open 8am – 8pm to walk-ins and booked appointments.

Moreton-in-Marsh – Based at North Cotswolds Hospital. Open 8am – 8pm to walk-ins and booked appointments.

Tewkesbury – Based at Tewkesbury Community Hospital. Open 8am – 8pm to walk-ins and booked appointments.

Stroud – Based at Stroud Hospital. Open 8am – 8pm to walk-ins and booked appointments.

There are also Minor Injury Units at Tetbury Hospital. Open 8am - 4pm (Mon to Fri) and Winchcombe Medical Centre. Open 8:15am - 6:30pm (Mon to Fri).

Local Services

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Be Well Gloucestershire
www.bewellglos.org.uk

Connect and Offload (CandO)
www.gloucestershirecando.org

On Your Mind Glos
www.onyourmindglos.nhs.uk

Talking Therapies - 0800 073 2200
or refer yourself online
(www.talk2gether.nhs.uk/refer-yourself/)

Other Useful Links

Adult Social Care Helpdesk
01452 426868
Email – socialcare.enq@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Age UK Gloucestershire
01452 422660
Email – helpteam@ageukgloucestershire.org.uk

Gloucestershire Carers Hub
0300 111 9000
Email – carers@peopleplus.co.uk

Gloucestershire VCS Alliance – Voluntary Community Sector Alliance
Email – info@glosvcsalliance.org.uk

Go Volunteer Glos
www.govolunteerglos.org

Emergency Departments in Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital
www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk
Tel – 0300 422 6600

Cheltenham General Hospital
www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk
Tel – 0300 422 3046

Optometry

To find an NHS sight test:
www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-an-nhs-sight-test/location/

Dentistry

To find an NHS dentist visit:
www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist
Contact 111 if there is an urgent need for a dentist

Local Services

Comments and Complaints

Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS Team) Hospitals Trust
0800 019 3282
Email – ghn-tr.pals.gloshospitals@nhs.net

PALS – NHS Gloucestershire ICB (Integrated Care Board)
Freephone – 0800 0151 548
Tel – 01452 566698
Email – glicb.pals@nhs.net

Gloucestershire Health & Care NHS Foundation Trust (GHC) Patient and Carer Experience Team
0300 4218 100
www.ghc.nhs.uk
www.bewellglos.org.uk

Support Services

GARAS – Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers
01452 550528
Email – info@garas.org.uk
www.garas.org.uk

GDASS – Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service
01452 726570
Email – support@gdass.org.uk

Inclusion Gloucestershire
01452 234003
Email – info@inclusion-glos.org

Royal British Legion
0808 802 8080

SSAFA - Soldiers' Sailors' & Airmen's Families
0204 566 9131
Urgent help – 0800 260 6780

Notes

You can use this page for writing down notes.

Acknowledgements

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Get in touch

Visit our website: www.healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk

Call: 0800 652 5193

Email: info@healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk

To discuss receiving this information in other languages, large print or Braille please contact:

Aby omówić możliwość otrzymywania tych informacji w innych językach, w formacie dużą czcionką lub alfabetem Braille'a, prosimy o kontakt:

Pro projednání možnosti obdržení těchto informací v jiných jazycích, velkým písmem nebo v Braillově písmu, prosím kontaktujte

Pentru a discuta despre primirea acestor informații în alte limbi, cu caractere mari sau în alfabet Braille, vă rugăm să contactați:

এই তথ্য অন্য ভাষায়, বড় অক্ষরে বা ব্রেইল লিপিতে পাওয়ার বিষয়ে আলোচনা করতে, দয়া করে যোগাযোগ করুন:

如果您想讨论以其他语言、大字版或盲文获取此信息，请联系：

لمناقشة إمكانية الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغات أخرى، بخط كبير أو بطريقة برايل، يرجى التواصل مع

برای بحث در مورد دریافت این معلومات به زبان‌های دیگر، با خط بزرگ یا به خط بریل، لطفاً تماس بگیرید:

اس معلومات کو دیگر زبانوں، بڑے حروف یا بریل میں حاصل کرنے پر بات کرنے کے لیے، براہ کرم رابطہ کریں:

Email: glicb.pals@nhs.net / Tel: 0800 015 1548

FREEPOST RRYY-KSGT-AGBR
PALS, NHS Gloucestershire ICB,
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Gloucester, GL1 2TG

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