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Dear Patients,

It has been a very tough year for all of us. At the start of the pandemic the work we do was appreciated both locally and nationally - but over the past few weeks there have been some negative and confusing media reports which have caused a lot of anxiety for our patients and staff and we are sadly seeing a rise in the cases of covid-19 once again.

Before this pandemic General Practice was already in decline due to decades of underinvestment. The number of practices in the UK has fallen by 10% in the last 8 years leaving 2.5million people to find a new GP. The number of senior GP doctors has fallen by 22% in the past 5 years. Despite this we are offering more appointments than ever before.

We feel that the negative reporting in the tabloids has caused unnecessary concern, dissatisfaction and distress to our patients and we wanted to clarify for you that your practice has been fully open throughout the covid-19 pandemic. We have never closed our practice, and our opening times have never been reduced at any stage, including our evening extended hours appointments. We have always been open to treat our patients. However, the covid-19 pandemic has meant that we have had to work differently to ensure that you are safe and that our staff are safe. This has included thinking carefully about the patients we call in to the surgery to limit risk and altering our consulting methods in order to ensure the safest provision of care to our community. Attending a Drs Surgery is different to a shopping centre or going to a pub or a restaurant, as people attending here are already unwell and the risk of contracting covid-19 because of that is higher. We want to minimise that risk at all times.

We have used telephone consultations, video consultations and imaging to consult more safely during the pandemic. Our patients have been provided with telephone triage as the first step with our most senior highly skilled clinicians for urgent problems. If a patient then needs a face-to-face review, they will be booked from that telephone consultation to a face-to-face safe consultation. Although our waiting room may appear quieter than it normally does, this is because we are working hard to deliver care in this safer way. We are adhering to **Government rules** and ensuring social distancing in our building during the pandemic to reduce exposure risk to other patients and to our staff. Our appointments have also been more spaced out for this reason and to allow time for cleaning and changing PPE throughout the day.

In some situations, the changes in consulting have been very positive for patients. Some patients have told us that they really value the remote consulting to be able to receive high quality health care with a more convenient format. Reviewing of photographs of rashes or skin lesions has also provided excellent reviews of skin problems by allowing images to be zoomed and examined carefully. These changes in consulting methods have also allowed us to consult more patients during a normal day. Our clinical teams are now consulting with far more patients on a daily basis than before the pandemic. We have never worked so hard.

As the hospitals are slowly reopening their outpatient clinics (often remotely) they are asking us to do a large proportion of their work – arranging blood tests and X rays and changing medications around – and of course sick notes. Because we are helping them, this has added tremendously to our workload.

The changes in the way we deliver care during the pandemic have been challenging for our clinical teams as well as for our patients. We enjoy seeing our patients. Consulting with patients is why we chose to become doctors and nurses and why we chose to work in Primary Care. We would like to reassure you that we will always book a face-to-face appointment to examine any patient when the clinical scenario deems that it is appropriate.

I have been a GP in this area for 37 years and I have never worked with a more dedicated and committed team through (hopefully) a once in a lifetime event. Please be assured your teams are here and are working harder than ever in stressful times. Please be kind and respectful when contacting the practice to help our reception team to help you. The reception team do a fantastic job in very difficult circumstances. By working together, we can get through this difficult time.

We would all like to thank our patients for their understanding and support during this difficult time. We like working here and are passionate about improving the health of our communities and helping address all the health challenges caused by this difficult pandemic.

Best wishes

Dr Jack Solomon