**We would like to thank those patients who are showing kindness and patience during these very unusual times. We can promise you that we are finding it difficult too and we are very frustrated at not being able to deliver the usual level of service to which we are all accustomed.**

**It is with huge sadness that we find ourselves battling against circumstances beyond our control and we would like to take some time out to answer some frequent questions that we are posed. We feel that it is important that we share the reality of issues facing general practice and manage expectations that, despite the easing of lockdown, the pressures faced by general practice and the NHS is unlikely to ease soon.**

**Why aren’t you running the usual appointment system?**

*In order to protect our patients against catching any virus, we wipe down every surface in a consulting room between patients, this takes time to be certain we have done it effectively. To minimise the risk of catching Covid, we are still assessing the need for a patient to come in to the surgery. You will only be seen face to face if you need an examination by the GP.*

**Why are you still asking patients to wait outside before inviting them into the surgery to be seen?**

*The Covid virus is still present in the community. Whilst many of you will have had 2 vaccines this offers you some protection and not immunity from catching the virus. We feel a sense of duty to protect our patients, particularly the vulnerable, from inadvertently catching the virus and the single easiest way to achieve this is to keep people away from enclosed spaces. As the weather worsens, or if we should see that a member of the public is going to struggle to wait outside, we will use our judgement and invite a small number of patients in to the surgery as appropriate. THIS IS FOR YOUR SAFETY.*

**How do I get to speak to a GP? Why are the receptionists preventing me from speaking to a GP?**

*Our GPs are under a lot of pressure to get through their normal workload with all the additional measures that they have to put in place (cleaning surfaces, use of PPE, telephoning before seeing etc). We are seeing an increase in demand on our service and it is vital that patients wishing to speak with a GP book a telephone consultation, to ensure that sufficient time has been allocated for their discussion with the GP. It might only take 5 minutes of patient time to say what is wrong, but it takes more than 5 minutes for the GP to answer, issue the medication and update the patient record.*

*The receptionists have been trained to offer you alternative approaches to answer your medical queries. For example they may suggest you contact your local pharmacist, the optician, a mental health liaison worker or a physiotherapist (MSK clinic) who are better equipped and have more time allocated to deal with your enquiry. The receptionist is trying to make sure you are getting the best care available rather than preventing access to a GP.*

**Can I email the surgery for an appointment? Will I get an appointment quicker this way?**

*Emailing is not designed for anything of an urgent nature. We appreciate that there will be times when you are unable to get through on our telephone lines. We are at our most busy 8 – 9am Monday to Friday. We are continually reviewing the way we release our appointments. If you wish to make a routine appointment with a nurse, the phlebotomist or Health Care Assistant, there are appointments freely available in advance. If your condition needs the help of a GP, you are best placed ringing the surgery to get the best advice and most suitable appointment available for you.*

**Why is Rhiwbina Clinic still closed to Birchgrove Surgery patients?**

*It became clear quite early on that we needed to minimise the risk to our patients and staff from catching the virus which would leave us at risk of not being able to run an adequate service for our patients. By repatriating all our frontline staff to Birchgrove, we have been able to protect our ability to serve our patients when there have been unforeseen staff absences. We are only a small team delivering general medical services to 11000 patients. Having one person absent from the team has a significant impact on us all and this is already affecting our workforce significantly. With an increase in prevalence of covid in the community, and reduced resistance to common coughs and colds, we are concerned that we will struggle during the forthcoming winter.*

***Why don’t you just employ more staff to help?***

*We do not have excess finance available to employ more staff as our income for distribution remains the same as pre-pandemic.*

**When are you going to run normal services? I want to see a GP face to face.**

*We have continued to offer General Medical Services throughout the pandemic. We have had to change the way in which they are delivered, but patients still have access to our GPs, nurses and health care assistants. It is essential that we assess patients by telephone first to ascertain if their appointment needs to be face to face.*

**Can I have a coil fitted?**

*We have been advised that it is now safe for us to provide this service once again.*

**Why have I had to wait to have a steroid injection?**

*During the height of the pandemic, it was made clear to us that it was unsafe to inject patients with steroids which reduce the immunity system. We are now able to recommence this service in light of new guidance.*

**I am concerned that I am being missed for routine screening services – when will I be called?**

*Routine screening (cervical smear, breast, bowel screening) has not ceased, but was briefly interrupted by Public Health Wales in the early stages of the pandemic. Our nurses have continued to offer smears to patients who are due. Please ring the surgery to book an appointment in the normal way.*

**Can I have a medication review without seeing a GP?**

*Please visit our website and fill in an online form.* [*https://www.birchgrovesurgery.wales.nhs.uk/medication-review*](https://www.birchgrovesurgery.wales.nhs.uk/medication-review)

**When are we getting our covid vaccine boosters?**

*There has been no announcement by the Local Health Board as yet, but we will not be offering this service at the surgery.*

**When are you releasing flu jab appointments?**

*GPs are having to cancel hundreds of flu jab appointments due to vaccine delivery delays of ‘up to two weeks’, reports Pulse Today 06.09.21.*

*In an email to GP practices, Seqirus, the UK’s biggest supplier of flu vaccines, said the delay was due to ‘unforeseen road freight challenges’*

*Practices have been told not to book any clinics until they have received confirmation from Seqirus a week prior to delivery. We will be in contact with you in due course.*