

**Rollout of Doctor First Telephone Appointment Service
Briefing for Overview and Scrutiny Committee
November 2012**

Introduction

This briefing outlines the forth-coming rollout of a new telephone appointment service by some GP Practices across the NHS Tees area, known as 'Doctor First.'

Background

NHS Tees is committed to improving patient access to services and, as part of this, we are supporting some local GP Practices in their implementation of the Doctor First telephone appointment service.

The Doctor First system means that every patient who telephones the surgery speaks directly to a doctor on the day that they call, who will agree with the patient whether an appointment / visit to the surgery is necessary or not.

The aim is to reduce unnecessary visits to the surgery by patients who may be appropriately managed over the telephone – for example those patients requiring advice around self-care – and effectively prioritise those who do need an appointment so that patients with more urgent needs can be seen first. The system aims to be less frustrating and more equitable for patients – as they are prioritised based on clinical need and not a 'first come first served' basis and enable doctors to work more efficiently by freeing up appointment time previously spent seeing patients who did not need to attend the surgery.

The Doctor First system is implemented by Productive Primary Care Ltd. Further information is available on their website www.productiveprimarycare.co.uk

Process

NHS Tees provides support to independent contractors, including GP Practices, in enhancing the accessibility of their services and improving the patient experience. We also have a critical role in ensuring that patients receive the right care, in the right place and at the right time.

As part of this, supported by NHS Tees, the following GP Practices will be implementing the Doctor First system in stages from late-November 2012 to early 2013:

- Coulby Medical Practice, Coulby Newham www.coulbynewham.gpsurgery.net
- Hillside Practice, Skelton www.hillsidepractice.co.uk
- McKenzie Group Practice, Hartlepool www.mckenziegrouppractice.co.uk

- Norton Medical Centre, Stockton-on-Tees www.nortonmedicalcentre.nhs.uk
- Tennant Street Medical Practice, Stockton-on-Tees www.tsmp.gpsurgery.net
- The Discovery Practice, Middlesbrough
www.nhs.uk/Services/GP/Overview/DefaultView.aspx?id=36120
- The Endeavour Practice, Middlesbrough www.endeavourpractice.co.uk
- Woodlands Surgery, Middlesbrough www.drmurphyandpartners.co.uk
- Zetland Medical Practice, Marske www.zetlandmedicalpractice.co.uk

Subject to successful rollout by these practices, and evaluation of the impact, the system may be adopted by other practices across NHS Tees.

Impact of the Proposal

An Equality Impact Analysis has been completed for the proposal, and will be published on www.tees.nhs.uk once finalised.

Patients who are unable to use the system, for example those patients who are Deaf, whose first or preferred language is not English or who have difficulty using a telephone, will be contacted directly by their Practice so that an alternative arrangement may be put in place for them.

Evidence from implementation of the system by other GP Practices outside of the NHS Tees area suggests that patients should benefit as follows:

- Improved access to the surgery by telephone;
- Quicker, direct access to a GP to clinically assess symptoms;
- More effective prioritisation of patients who need to be seen urgently by a doctor;
- Less time spent in the surgery waiting area;
- Fewer trips to the surgery needed.

Involving Local People

As part of implementing the system, each GP Practice is committed to effectively communicating and engaging with their registered patients so that they understand the rationale behind the change and how they can benefit from it. This will include writing out to each of their patients and including a contact point for any patients with concerns.

A copy of the template Communication and Engagement Action Plan is appended to this briefing. Each Practice will tailor this plan to meet the needs of their patient list, however it is anticipated that in each case notification will be sent to key local stakeholders including OSC, LINK and MP.

Action for Overview and Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the content of this briefing and highlight any additional issues that they feel may need addressing in informing and involving the local community and how they may wish to be involved.