

Appointments System Update

March 2024



Carn to Coast
HEALTH CENTRES

We would like to share an update on how we are adjusting our appointments system with a view to cutting waiting times for certain types of appointment. Our urgent on-the-day clinician appointments and our routine nursing appointment processes remain unchanged, as do some of our planned procedure clinics, such as minor surgery or contraceptive services. However, we know patients are experiencing longer waits for general advance booked face-to-face and telephone appointments than they and we would wish, largely due to high levels of demand and insufficient funding to recruit more clinicians and staff. We have reviewed our processes for managing these types of appointment to see where we can achieve efficiencies, reduce wastage and, thereby offer quicker appointments for patients to see or speak to a doctor, advanced practitioner, acute illness clinicians and specialist clinicians such as physiotherapists and mental health practitioners.

Our key aims:

- 🕒 Ensure patient face-to-face and telephone appointments are offered equitably according to clinical need, whilst endeavouring to offer choice wherever possible.
- 🕒 Minimise wastage of appointments by reducing the number of missed appointments known as DNAs (“did not attend”)
- 🕒 Reducing duplication of appointments where a patient may have contacted us more than once and ended up with two face-to-face or telephone appointments.
- 🕒 Reducing disruption to our patients when clinics have to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances, such as staff sickness, and also seeking to facilitate a swift re-booking of those appointments when this does unfortunately happen.

Previous System

Our previous system included three ways in which an advance appointment might be needed:

1. Requested by patients for an existing or new problem, processed through our Klinik system and identified by our doctors as needing a future appointment with a clinician with a specified priority of clinical need (urgent appointments continue to be booked on the day).
2. Follow up appointments that a clinician may request are booked having viewed some test or investigation results for patients – these results arrive directly from the Hospital systems into our clinical record system ‘Emis’.
3. Follow up appointments that a clinician may request having received correspondence relating to a patient’s care from a hospital or other healthcare provider – these arrive directly from the hospital into our document management system ‘Docman’.

To date, where there has not been an appointment available to book for a patient as requested, our staff have held that request in each of the three systems described above, only getting in touch with the patient when there is a suitable appointment available to offer. This has meant patients are unaware that this action is pending while the request sits in the list waiting to be actioned. It has been a challenge to co-ordinate the booking process as appointments become available given there are staff working independently from three ‘lists’ described above, often across more than one practice site.

Patients have had to wait up to seven weeks for a telephone or face-to-face appointment which we sincerely regret. When staff are unfortunately unwell and clinics are unable to be re-assigned to an alternative clinician that day and, therefore, need to be cancelled, those patients are then subject to a

long wait for the appointment to be rebooked, given appointment systems are booked so far in advance. We endeavour to minimise this by booking additional 'locum' or overtime shifts but the staffing is often not available at short notice.

New System

From March onwards, we have made some changes:

- 🕒 We have combined the three routes described above into one list, ensuring that clinical need is highlighted on the combined master 'waiting' list, so those patients with more urgent need are offered whichever type of appointment they need first. This will ensure ALL patients needs are managed the same way in the right priority order.
- 🕒 We have stopped booking non-urgent face to face and telephone appointments more than two weeks in advance (again, please note this does NOT apply to nursing appointments and some specific types of appointment such as contraceptive procedure clinics and minor surgery). By doing this, we are able to book patients in urgency and time order and also prioritise rebooking of appointments cancelled by us due to sickness, offering a new appointment within three weeks should we be unable to reassign the clinic the same day or cannot source extra staffing. Where we regretfully have a clinician who unexpectedly needs to be absent for a number of weeks, this approach will also minimise the number of patient appointments disrupted given the clinics will not have been booked as far in advance as they have been under the previous system.
- 🕒 We will communicate with every patient (either by text or letter) to advise that there has been a request to organise some form of appointment for them for all three routes described above, ie, as a result of their Klinik submission, a test/investigation result or letter, and that we will be in touch as soon as we can to book that appointment. Patients can be confident we know they need an appointment should they see test results or receive a copy of a letter that may concern them and should not need to contact us themselves to request it.
- 🕒 We will continue to reserve face-to-face and telephone appointments for urgent needs on the day and for those conditions which clinicians feel need to be seen within two weeks.
- 🕒 Appointment systems will be monitored daily and we will contact patients to book their appointment as 'week 3' becomes available to book. It is our ambition to bring this back a week, should we find the above actions reduce wastage/lost appointments sufficiently to do so.

In summary, please be assured that we have the same number of appointments available under the new system as we had under the previous one, but we hope that less will be wasted due to duplication/DNAs and equity of offering and communication with patients will be improved.

What our patients can do to help

- 🕒 Please do indicate your availability and preferences when requesting an appointment – we might not always be able to offer the ideal time/date/location, but it will help us try to do so.
- 🕒 Please do not be alarmed if we contact you to say there has been a request by a clinician to book an appointment for you. Please know that if a clinician feels your test result or follow-up issue is urgent, they will request an urgent appointment and you will be prioritised accordingly.
- 🕒 If you cannot attend your appointment, please do use the 'cancel' option on reminder texts, or contact us to cancel. Wasting appointments only leads to longer waits for all patients, which will include your friends and relatives registered with us.
- 🕒 Read our other 'top tips' for using Klinik on our website: [Appointments - Carn to Coast Health Centres](#) which really helps us prioritise your care more appropriately:

Thank you for reading this information. We hope it has been informative and helpful.