

The Vale of Neath Practice

Survey Comments Regarding

Changes to Doctor's Surgeries in Resolven

The following comments were recorded by the ABMU Health Board during their survey of Resolven Health Centre patients held on 30th June, 1st, 6th and 9th July 2010. Where the comments relate to more than one issue it has been separated and a relevant response provided according to the subject matter. The **red** type shows the comment and the **blue** type is the response.

Afternoon Appointment Issues:

1. Working during the day so I require late afternoon appointment
2. I work mornings so require afternoon appointments.
3. If you need a doctor at weekends it would be better to be able to see a doctor on Mon pm and Fri pm.
4. Monday and Friday afternoons are important because of closure on Saturdays. If you are not well by the afternoon it will be clear if you need to see a doctor
Afternoon appointments are available in Glynneath and, by prior arrangement with the doctor, can be late afternoon. It is always possible to request a telephone consultation to determine the appropriate course of action. For urgent medical attention that cannot wait until the surgery is next open, i.e. overnight, there is an out-of-hours service commissioned by the Local Health Board provided by Primecare. Primecare can be reached on 08456 011186.
5. Suddenly becoming ill - you must now avoid Mon, Wed, Fri Afternoon - this is a danger to people.
6. It is quite possible that I may have a pre-life threatening complaint on a Monday afternoon.
For life-threatening conditions, such as severe chest pain or shortness of breath, do not delay treatment by coming to the surgery. Emergency treatment for severe conditions is more appropriately available through the local hospitals and direct access to their expertise and equipment is the best option.
7. Recently tried to make a pm appointment but was difficult as only 2 pm's a week. New hours do not accommodate working people. Friday pm appointments are better as people can finish work early on a Friday.
8. I don't work Monday and Friday afternoons but there is now no surgery. Friday pm is most essential. I am concerned that our GP service will be taken away.
9. My main concern is that there is no Friday afternoon surgery.
10. If I fail to get an appointment on a Friday morning because of high volume of calls I would have to wait until Monday morning.
For those people who work away, a late appointment at Glynneath on a Friday afternoon is possible. For those people working locally, an afternoon appointment is possible on Tuesday and Thursday in Resolven. There is normally no reason for failing to get a morning appointment as the surgery runs until all patients, who need to be seen, have been seen by an appropriate clinician. For the housebound, house calls are still available. For those other patients who experience transport problems and who do not qualify for a house call, steps are being taken to investigate possible solutions – see below. The current plan is to continue to provide a doctor led service in Resolven.

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11. If my child is ill on a Monday, Wed or Fri afternoon I have to wait till the next day to see someone.

The Practice is an independent contractor working to a contract. This previously required patients to have access to an appropriate clinician within 24 hours (excluding weekends). This practice offers appointments within 3 hours if location is not an issue and within a maximum of 20 hours if Resolven is the only option.

12. Three afternoons is a lot to be closed. More inconvenient for a lot of people even though there's more doctors it is a long time to be closed from Friday midday to Monday morning

The Resolven surgery closed at 5pm previously. Anyone falling ill after this time and wanting to see a GP either had to go to Glynneath or if after Glynneath had closed, call Primecare. The situation has only changed slightly in that the surgery closes 3 hours earlier in Resolven but patients can still see the GP in Glynneath or if the patient is housebound can request a house call and will be seen that afternoon, if a house-call is appropriate.

13. I can attend anytime but I don't like the idea of there being no afternoon surgery on certain days.

The role of a GP practice has become one of managing long term illness through the provision of clinics focussed on long term conditions such as diabetes and asthma etc. Anyone experiencing severe chest pain or shortness of breath should not delay treatment by coming to the surgery. Emergency treatment for severe conditions is more appropriately available through the local hospitals and direct access to their expertise and equipment is the best option. Friday afternoon appointments are available at Glynneath for those people able to travel to the surgery. Telephone consultations are also available if unsure whether a new condition needs to be seen by a doctor or treated at a hospital or can wait until the next morning surgery. In this case an appointment may be pre-booked by the doctor to ensure fast access to appropriate treatment.

14. Previously spoken to Assembly Member regarding changes. I am very unhappy.

15. Cutting out Fri pm surgery limits, even more, Resolven's Medical Services as there is only 1 doctor on Thurs pm and Fri am i.e. only 10 sessions out of a possible 20 a week.

Any feedback and comment from the Assembly Member is welcomed. A large proportion of those patients surveyed had no objections to the change. It is regrettable that change is, on occasions, necessary. Unfortunately this is one of those occasions and the practice has made provision for the delivery of the same number of consultations in the Health Centre, albeit on a different structure. Prior to the change to the open times at the beginning of June, there were two doctors on a Monday morning, then one doctor each other morning and afternoon with the exception of Thursday morning when the surgery was closed. This is a total of 10 GP surgeries. Under the new arrangement there are two GPs on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday morning, one GP on Wednesday and Friday mornings and one GP on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. This is 10 GP surgeries. There is therefore no change to the number of surgery sessions; only a change to when they are delivered.

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16. Inconvenient for working people. Initially the surgery was open for longer. As I was ill after hours on a Friday had to wait over 2 1/2 hours on Monday to see a doctor. Satisfied with care when eventually received.

The practice offers late appointments, if needed and appropriate, after a telephone consultation. For those people who need to pre-book time off to see their GP, we offer a number of pre-booked appointments.

General Appointment System Issues:

1. The surgery should stay open as before. It should be convenient for the patients not to save money for the practice.

The NHS is under pressure to make savings. There has been no increase in funding of the practice since the start of the new contract in 2004. The only way to continue to provide ever more costly health care is to make savings and reduce costs. This is unfortunate but inevitable. This change has made it possible to deliver the same number of appointments to see a doctor at the Health Centre whilst reducing overhead costs. The quality of care is unchanged although the point of delivery has changed to make this work.

2. I like to see the same GP but he is now only here one morning every two weeks. Currently the doctors all provide surgery sessions in Resolven on a regular basis. Each doctor provides at least one surgery session each week with Drs Hepburn, Westwood and Regulski/Pradhan providing two sessions each week. The only time this is different is when a doctor is on holiday and the schedule has to be adjusted to ensure adequate cover for Resolven. In this situation it is Glynneath that loses out.

3. GP advised that there will be no changes to the new arrangements - I am concerned that this consultation is just a tick box exercise. I am concerned that this is the first step to removing services from Resolven. I was told previously by a GP that they would withdraw services once the new surgery is built. What about patients who are ill on the afternoon that Resolven is closed and they are unable to get to Glynneath - it could be a young child. When the GPs took over Resolven they promised that services would stay the same but slowly changes are happening.

This change has not reduced the number of surgeries run in Resolven. The practice took over the Health Centre in April 2001. Three years later the new contract came in and services continued undiminished. Since that date there has been no increase in funding despite the cost increases that have occurred over the interim period. In 2001 who would have predicted that in 2010 the country would be nearly bankrupt and that our country's financial survival depending on the government making radical efficiency cuts? No-one is immune to the current difficult situation and the practice is no exception. The practice has managed its costs effectively and has so far achieved this without removing any services. In fact the practice delivers far more services than will be found generally elsewhere. Health care continues to develop and new services always carry a cost. Change is inevitable if we are to continue to provide the best possible care to the maximum number of patients. No undertaking was made, at the time of taking over the Health Centre, to stay the same. The history of the NHS has been one of continual change and Resolven is not exempt.

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4. It is sometimes difficult to get appointments. Difficult to get to appointments when working. As a teacher unable to make morning appointments difficult to see a specific doctor. Staff very helpful, however inconvenient to get to Glynneath as alternative, as I Live in Tonna but work in Resolven.

A number of appointments are available for patients who may need to book ahead. The Resolven surgery has, for a long time, closed at the latest by 5pm but late appointments, in Glynneath, can be arranged via the duty doctor.

5. Maybe an earlier start for morning appointments so I can get to my job in Swansea on time or not so late.

The practice meets the terms of its contract with regard to open times. There are no plans to extend the opening hours.

6. The main problem is that you can only ring for an appt for the afternoon during the afternoon. Also I visited the surgery in person to make an appt and was told I should have telephoned.

We request that a patient telephones first to avoid a lengthy wait in the waiting room. This helps prevent the spread of infection and makes it more comfortable for those patients who are in the waiting room, ready for their appointment. The practice recognises that not everyone has a telephone and exceptions are made where appropriate. Practice policy is "To do this morning's work, this morning; and this afternoon's work, this afternoon". If you need to make special arrangements to be able to come to the surgery, decide which session you want to attend and make those arrangements. Then telephone and fix the time to arrive. Currently, everyone who needs to be seen will be seen by an appropriate clinician on the morning or afternoon of their choice.

7. I tried to make an appt for my 2 year old son in the morning but it was full and there was no surgery in the afternoon. I had to wait until the next morning as I cannot get to Glynneath.

Surgery sessions run until the last patient has been seen. There are a series of pre-defined appointment times and then an open book after that. I would be interested to know where this problem arose, so that it can be specifically answered.

General issues:

1. What happens when you have an urgent complaint and are unable to wait - A&E?

The GP practice is not a trauma service nor does it provide an A&E service. It is mainly involved in the care and management of long-term illnesses. If you are unable to wait for the next surgery session, A&E may be the correct answer. For out-of-hours urgent problems please call Primecare. For general advice about a problem please call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47. Alternatively, a patient can request a telephone consultation with the doctor to determine the correct course of action. Ask the receptionist if you feel this is an appropriate solution.

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2. This is fine as long as you are ill at the doctor's convenience.
Appointments are available in Glynneath when Resolven is closed. If transport is a genuine problem this can be overcome by a house call for the house-bound or telephone consultation to determine the urgency of the situation and the appropriate course of action that needs to be taken.
3. Who is responsible if someone dies through lack of care on the off afternoons - lawyers must be relishing it.
All life threatening problems, such as chest pains or shortness of breath, should go straight to hospital. Dial 999 immediately. Do not delay medical treatment by trying to see a GP first. The surgery does not have the equipment or the clinical specialists who may be needed.
4. Fewer patients are being seen even if they say no hours are being lost.
The same numbers of appointments are available now. All patients who need to be seen will be seen by an appropriate clinician. Nothing has changed on a weekly basis.
5. Doctors should be available at all times, everyday.
The practice has a contract to deliver services and exceeds the requirements of that contract in terms of its open hours. There are no plans to extend the opening hours.
6. Children can react quickly to an illness and may need to be diagnosed as soon as possible. A visit to a doctor may either allay the parent's fears or may necessitate an immediate visit to a hospital. A pain in the head, chest, kidneys, etc may be dealt with simply by a course of treatment or once again may warrant a hospital visit. A GP filters out the less serious case otherwise the local hospitals are going to be inundated.
Telephone consultations with a doctor can be arranged. This may be sufficient to determine the correct course of action. The duty doctor will be able to decide the most appropriate course of action and agree this with you. That is, if a house-call is then deemed necessary, the duty doctor will arrange it. Or, if the patient has to be seen but can wait until the next day, a forward appointment can be made by the duty doctor during the telephone consultation.

Transport Issues:

1. If my daughter is ill and the surgery is closed I have no transport to get to Glynneath.
2. If the surgery is closed I find it hard to get to the Glynneath surgery because I don't drive I only use public transport.
3. I do not have a car to travel to Glynneath so I would need to call an ambulance to take them to hospital
4. No-one can predict when they become ill it is very inconvenient to go to Glynneath as we find it too far to walk.
5. It would be difficult to get to Glynneath if my husband wasn't able to drive.
6. Not everyone can drive to be able to access Glynneath. Buses not always available.
7. Opening times are unfair. Don't tie in with the bus times and very awkward for people that work to attend in the morning.

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8. Not everyone has transport to go to Glynneath if needed, especially the disabled and elderly.
9. At the moment I can drive to Glynneath for an appt once I am no longer able to drive this may cause problems.
10. My only concern is that if an appointment is need on a Wednesday I will have to travel to a different practice.
11. The change does not affect me personally but will affect patients requiring assistance (car or carer).
12. Please bear in mind that not everyone has his or own transport.

Not everyone has their own transport and the practice recognises this. A discussion has been started with the Resolven Community Council members of the Patient Participation Group, to seek to identify possible public transport solutions that will make travel easier. There will be more information about proposed solutions later. In the mean time, the practice does offer telephone consultations with the doctor and this sometimes can be all that is needed.

Most appointments with a GP are now for disease management rather than for sudden onset of an illness. In many cases a delay until next morning is unlikely to cause exacerbation of the condition. However, the practice does offer a telephone consultation option, whereby the duty doctor will call back and discuss the problem and a decision can then be made about the most appropriate treatment or course of action. Telephone consultations are performed during the surgery session as time permits and should have a maximum delay of an hour or so. Urgent issues can be dealt with urgently. Please inform the receptionist if you feel this is the case but please only do this if it is urgent.

13. My son is diabetic and will have to travel to Glynneath if an afternoon appointment is needed - this is not good enough.
14. My son is diabetic so I am concerned that there will be some afternoons when he won't have access to a GP. I feel it is unreasonable to expect Resolven patients to travel to Glynneath.

Specific issues relating to problems associated with a particular disease or condition need to be addressed individually. The general points relating to travel and transport to Glynneath also apply to this comment.

15. Perhaps the practice manager could provide a shuttle service back and fore, as public transport is unreliable. Also there should be a practice nurse there on closure days.

This is an interesting idea but probably not practical. You don't know how good or bad the Practice Manager's driving is and any way he does not have the necessary driving licence to do this kind of work.

With regard to the practice nurse, a receptionist would also be required and from a clinical standpoint, a practice nurse needs to have a doctor present when running a clinic for patient safety. This brings us back to the previous situation of the doctor working alone in the surgery and being inundated without other GP support, which was a significant part of the decision to make the change in the first place.

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Telephone System Related Comments:

Although the telephone system was not part of this survey, some patients used the opportunity to raise their concerns about it anyway. As there are only four specific comments, the practice can provide the following information and responses:

1. **Also not happy that the telephone number is 0844 which is expensive to call and it took 8 minutes to get through to make this afternoons appointment**

The Department of Health investigated the use of the 0844 range of telephone numbers and has agreed that as long as the call costs no more than the standard local call rate, it is permitted. The telephone company has provided reassurance that their charges satisfy this requirement. Much of the concern about the cost of calling this number stems from patients who have contracted with a telephone company giving free local calls. Calls to a 0844 number are not considered to be a free-call number and a charge is made. However, the charge should not exceed the standard local call rate. To minimise the cost of the call, we provide six incoming lines to the practice and endeavour to answer all six lines simultaneously, whenever staffing levels allow. A wait of 8 minutes should be unusual but can occur if the already answered calls are lengthy. During peak call times, members of staff try to deal with each call as quickly as possible but sometimes this is not possible and extended waits might then occur.

2. **Use of the 0844 tel number is an arrogant treatment of patients - they have to pay a premium to talk to their health provider, to the financial benefit of the surgery these calls can be lengthy because of the call system.**

The number was introduced in response to patient criticism that the lines were always busy and they could not get through, so had to keep redialling. The current system allows for queuing on the network and at the switchboard, thus avoiding the engaged tone but can result in a wait. It does at least mean all calls are dealt with in sequence, though, which redialling does not do. In satisfying one group of patients we have failed to satisfy another.

The practice receives no financial benefit. The cost of the switchboard and associated computer is partially offset by shared revenue but without that it would have been financially impossible to introduce any changes to address previous concerns.

3. **It would be far better if the surgery had a 01639 number.**

It would definitely be easier to remember and would be considered a local call number. However, to introduce the changes that addressed previous concerns and complaints, the only option was to move to a 0844 number, which is charged at local call rate.

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4. As the phone calls cost a lot for this number its impossible to get though to get an answer. I have been on the phone for 20 mins to get an appt as I don't pay for local calls I have to pay for this service. It is easier for '01639' number. Sometimes I don't phone even when ill because of cost. Also elderly patients find the number hard and you can't even call into the surgery for an appointment, you have to go home and phone.

The telephone system is computer based and occasionally gets software problems. This can lead to a call being placed into a "dead-end", which will never be answered. Software problems are a fact of computing life and all systems are now computer controlled. To avoid long waits in a dead-end queue, a time-out limit has been set of 10 minutes. If a call is not answered in this time, the call is automatically terminated. The average call wait once through to the practice is currently running at 4 seconds. The attached table gives some statistical information about our call handling.

Statistics for Prior 22 Working Days:

*Total Number of appointments: 4,355
(doctors and nurses)*

Total Number of Calls: 12,404

Average Response Time: 4 seconds

Average Call Duration: 1 minute 26 seconds

*Response Times: 78% answered in 10 seconds
85% answered in 20 seconds
90% answered in 30 seconds
95% answered in 60 seconds
98% answered in 90 seconds*