

**Press release from Norfolk and Waveney LMC following a letter from NHSE to GP practices instructing them that they must offer face-to-face appointments to patients:**

“Norfolk and Waveney GPs have been working incredibly hard to keep their services as accessible as possible during the Covid-19 pandemic. As directed by NHSE, all practices have been offering virtual triage as the first point of contact to ensure patients receive the appropriate care for their needs and to minimise the numbers of patients having to physically attend surgeries to be examined where this is not necessary. This is to keep patients and General Practice staff safe.

Norfolk and Waveney LMC strongly dispute NHSE’s letter to GPs which paints a false impression of the vast majority of GPs who have taken their professional responsibilities to their patients extremely seriously, at some considerable cost and risk to GPs themselves. General practice has not stopped face-to-face appointments at any point in the pandemic, and they continue to be offered where safe and necessary to meet the needs of patients.

NHSE Digital data from July demonstrates that General Practices in Norfolk and Waveney have remained open and offered in excess of 473,296 appointments, with 298,678 face to face appointments - NHS Digital believes this represents an under-estimate.

Thanks to the dedication and adaptability of General Practice teams across the county, problems can now often be dealt with more efficiently, and redirecting patients to the appropriate professional service. Surgeries should be commended for adapting so quickly and seamlessly to what was – and remains - a massive shift in their usual working pattern and the Government needs to do much more to recognise and support practices doing this.

There will always be a need for some patients to see their GP or another clinician in person, and where it is safe and clinically or socially appropriate to do so, practices will always ensure this is facilitated. Practices also remain committed to making sure their services are accessible to those without access to digital consultations, or who struggle to use technology and will ensure adjustments are in place for those who find it difficult to engage in virtual consultation so they can access the appropriate care.

General Practice workload has significantly increased as a result of the ongoing impact of the pandemic on other NHS services and the unprecedented number of people waiting for postponed procedures. NHS England and Government have so far failed to recognise the significant impact this is having on general practice and should be tackling this as a priority for our patients.

Technology can support GPs and their teams deliver good quality care to their patients, and improve access at the same time but it is clearly not a complete solution. Regardless of how patients wish to receive their care, general practice remains open for business and GPs continue to give communities the care they need, be it via video, phone, or face-to-face.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Morton" with a horizontal line above it.

Dr Tim Morton, Chair, on behalf of the Norfolk and Waveney Local Medical Committee

Wymondham Medical Centre

Postmill Close

Wymondham

NR18 0RF