From Monday 22 September we have a new way for you to contact us to book an appointment and submit general queries. From this date, all requests for an appointment, as well as general queries, will need to be submitted through an [**online form**](https://accurx.nhs.uk/patient-initiated/K82040). If you are unable to use the internet, you can call us or visit the surgery in person and we will complete the form with you.

The form allows you to describe your symptoms and the support you require or specify your admin request. Depending upon the type of request, a clinician or a team member will review your form and assign it according to priority. You will then receive either an appointment, advice on the most appropriate service, or a response to your general enquiry within the specified timeframe.

Nurse or HCA appointments such as blood tests will continue to be booked by calling the surgery in the normal way.

**Why are these changes happening?**

NHS England has asked GP practices to introduce online systems that make it easier for patients to request appointments and improve the care you receive. By using the online request form to share important information about your needs, our clinicians can quickly decide the most appropriate care and support for you.

·       The system should be fair and equitable. This means those who have the greatest need are prioritised.

·         We do not want our patients to experience long telephone waits and uncertainty for appointments.

·         Patients should be able to have their needs met by the most appropriately skilled professional.

We have a finite number of appointments that can be safely delivered by a finite number of doctors and other Allied Health Professionals (including Paramedics, First Contact Physiotherapists and Clinical Pharmacists) each day. The number of requests for appointments is higher than the actual number we have available. This is the case for GP Practices across the country. The only way to ensure that the people with the greatest need are given these appointments, is for each request to be screened (or triaged).

This link gives information about some of the reasons for the increasing pressure on General Practice [**Pressures in general practice data analysis**](https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/pressures-in-general-practice-data-analysis)

**Here to help**

We are here to support you with these changes. If you need assistance filling out the form, please ask our reception team who will be happy to help. Please be patient as we all adapt to this new system.  We appreciate your support and understanding during this time.

**How to request an appointment**

To request an appointment, you will complete a simple online form.

This will be reviewed, and, in some cases, you may be asked for more information or a request made for you to send a photo. They will then either offer you an appointment within an appropriate timeframe, or signposted information. We understand that a small number of people will not be able to complete these forms. If this is the case, one of our reception team can complete the form with you. Phoning the practice or attending reception in person will not give you priority for an appointment, so please use the online form if you can.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**1. Can someone fill in the form on behalf of the patient?**

Yes, the form can be completed by someone else, such as a family member or carer. We will respond to the patient only, unless they have given us explicit consent to contact someone else.

**2. What does signposting mean?**

Signposting is when we give you information about how to access other support instead of an appointment with us for example we may direct you to the community pharmacy ([**How pharmacies can help - NHS**](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/pharmacies/how-pharmacies-can-help/)) or links to online resources to support self-care or self-refer to their services when appropriate.

**3. If I am offered an appointment, will it always be with a GP?**

We will book you with the most suitable professional. This may be a doctor, but often it may be more appropriate to consult someone else in our team, e.g. a paramedic, specialist nurse, practice nurse, healthcare assistant, First Contact Physiotherapist, Clinical Pharmacist, Health and Wellbeing Coach or a Social prescribing link worker. Sometimes we may suggest arranging a test, e.g. blood test, first.

**4. What if I do not agree with the triage decision?**

The decision is made by an experienced GP. Our priority must always be patient safety, ensuring those with the greatest need get an appointment the soonest. Please include any essential information on the form you complete. Please use the system honestly and fairly, and if your condition worsens, let us know so we can advise on the next step.

**5. Does this affect hospital appointments?**

No, this change is for Whitehill Surgery. We do not have any control over the waiting times for hospital appointments.

**6. Can I choose which GP I see?**

We agree that it is preferable to see the same doctor, particularly when following up a condition you have already consulted them about. Where possible, we will try to accommodate this. Sometimes this will mean waiting longer, but we will not suggest a longer wait unless it is safe. If that doctor is not available within a clinically suitable time, the triaging GP will advise that you consult any doctor in our team, who will have full access to your medical records.