

# PE2070/D: Stop same-day-only GP appointment systems

## NHS Grampian submission, 17 April 2024

For any complaint, we would first advise that these are raised directly with the practice concerned. Where access complaints are escalated to the HSCPs or direct to the Health Board, we work directly with the practice to address them using our local Sustainability and Support Framework and the National Escalation Framework.

Access is challenging in general, with just over 10% of Grampian practices electing to hand back their GMS contract between 2022-2024. So, whilst we have shared the "General Practice Access Short Life Working Group: access principles" published by the Scottish Government in November 2023 with all GP practices in Grampian, their sustainability remains a national concern.

Through our recent large-scale "Future Vision of General practice" workshops, we commissioned a patient survey which received 1300 responses. The survey highlighted that being "Able to access same day/emergency appointments" and "Book an appointment in advance" are two of the top considerations for patients.

**The Committee is seeking information on whether any GP practices in the health board operate a same-day-only appointment system and if so, whether this is causing wider challenges across other areas of the health service.**

Most of our practices (64 out of 69) are independently run. This means they have a level of autonomy in how they deliver their services, as long as the health board is satisfied that patient care is not being adversely impacted by their decisions. Some may choose to offer a total triage solution. This means appointments are all booked after an initial assessment by a member of the practice team, rather than being directly booked by the patient through a receptionist. This is one way of ensuring a right person, right time, right place approach and has become more common due to the widening nature of the multi-disciplinary teams now working in practices as a result of the 2018 contract.

We would like to highlight that Grampian practices continue to have one of the lowest Emergency Department attendance and secondary care referral rates in the country.

**The Committee also noted that GP practices may only allow a short window in the morning for patients to contact the practice. The Committee would welcome information on how common this approach is in the health board area.**

All practices are required to have their phone lines open during a period of 8am to 6pm except for in emergency circumstances. Just over 70% of practices in NHS Grampian have some form of call waiting system in place. When a practice reaches maximum capacity for safe clinical workload and effectively runs out of available appointments (capacity) during the day, they should still be available to take calls and to signpost / triage requests that come in. We are not currently aware of any

practices in Grampian who only have their telephone lines open for a short window in the morning.

**“I once tried to call my GP at 8am and I rang over 100 times until I spoke to a receptionist, I was then told there were no appointments left for that day and to try again the following day.”**

Several advances have been made available to practices including phone systems that allows queuing to avoid patients having to call back. There was previously also funding locally, from PCIP underspend, to pay for practices to use asynchronous consultation platforms to further improve access and decrease the reliance on phone lines. This funding stream has since ended, but many local practices still pay to utilise these systems to the benefit of their patients. This funding withdrawal reduced the numbers using eConsult from 57 practices to around 21. We are aware that the Scottish Government did investigate the possibility of this being funded centrally as part of a modern, digital access solution but that did not come to fruition.

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to respond to the committee's questions and the petition, and we would be happy to address any further questions raised.