

A Guide to our Appointments System

Why do we have an “Appointment System”?

There are many different ways of running a GP practice and we keep our appointment system under constant review. We try as much as possible to balance supply and demand for appointments.

In the past many GP practices used to run an “open access” system where anyone wishing to see a GP would come and sit and wait for their turn in the queue. This causes problems when many patients want to be seen at the same time e.g. Monday mornings, Friday afternoons or close to holidays. Also it disadvantages any patient who cannot afford to wait for an extended and unknown period; for example anyone in work or school.

How do we run our system?

We try to provide availability of GP and nurse appointments at 2 different surgeries that are about 13 miles apart. This means that the clinician of choice may not be available at all times in the place patients would prefer. Our clinicians rotate to work between both sites so patients should feel free to travel to the surgery of their choice if they wish to see a particular clinician.

How do we handle emergencies?

In more urban settings most urgent or emergency conditions are handled either by the ambulance service or by patients going directly to the local hospital Accident & Emergency department. Because of our remote geography and the nearest hospital being in Inverness we tend to see most emergency cases at the surgeries. This means some times clinics can be disrupted by an unplanned case which needs urgent attention. Most patients with pre-booked appointments are very understanding when this happens and are happy to wait and/or rebook their appointment. Perhaps the local community realises that the next emergency needing us to drop everything could be for themselves or a close family member. In the busy tourist season (roughly Easter to October) we tend to experience a greater number of emergency or urgent cases.

In a medical emergency dial 999 and ask for the ambulance service. If the ambulance medics believe the patient needs to be seen by a doctor then they will get in touch with us directly to organise this.

How to make an appointment?

To make an appointment either telephone your local surgery or visit in person and a receptionist will arrange this for you. Our rota is prepared up to one month in advance so this is usually the maximum period available for prior booking. Towards the end of the month, this will be reduced until the next month’s rota has been finalised.

Most appointments are face-to-face but we also include a number of telephone appointments at the end of each morning surgery. Please make it clear to the receptionist if you wish to speak to a clinician. They will then arrange to call you at or around the allotted time, depending on how closely they are running to time.

When are appointments available?

Our current GP and/or nurse practitioner appointments are arranged as follows:

Aultbea Surgery		Gairloch Health Centre	
Mon	09.00 – 11.00 face to face 11.15 – 11.35 telephone 15.00 – 16.15 face to face	Mon	09.00 – 11.00 face to face 11.15 – 11.35 telephone 15.00 – 16.15 face to face
Tues	09.00 – 11.45 face to face	Tues	09.00 – 11.45 face to face
Wed	09.00 – 11.00 face to face 11.15 – 11.35 telephone 15.00 – 16.15 face to face	Wed	09.00 – 11.00 face to face 11.15 – 11.35 telephone Eve sur 16.30 – 18.30 face to face
Thurs	09.00 – 11.00 face to face 11.15 – 11.35 telephone Eve sur 16.30 – 18.30 face to face	Thurs	09.00 – 11.00 face to face 11.15 – 11.35 telephone 15.00 – 16.15 face to face
Fri	09.00 – 11.00 face to face 11.15 – 11.35 telephone 15.00 – 16.15 face to face	Fri	09.00 – 11.00 face to face 11.15 – 11.35 telephone 15.00 – 16.15 face to face

At other times there is always a clinician available for emergencies. We also have to find time for attending to clinical mail, reviewing test results, carrying out home visits, seeing care home patients, attending patient review meetings, etc.

Who else can help me?

Our **Nurse Practitioners** are also available for booked appointments. They are nurses with additional training, experience and qualifications who can help with pretty much any clinical issue that in the past might have been seen by a GP. For example they can:

- Take a comprehensive history
- Carry out a physical examination
- Make a diagnosis
- Recommend a course of treatment
- Refer to secondary care where necessary
- Prescribe medication

They work alongside the GPs and as with any clinician they will only work within the limits of their knowledge and clinical expertise.

Our **Practice Nurses** are also available for booked appointments. Our 2 practice nurses between them work roughly full time and rotate across both surgery sites so there is on average a nurse available ½ the time at each site.

The following list shows some of the many tasks practice nurses can carry out during appointments. These tasks do take different times to complete - between 5 and up to 40 minutes. When requesting a nurse appointment, please let the receptionist know what it is for (in general terms) as they can then book the appropriate length of slot and avoid your having to return later if insufficient time is made available.

- Blood tests
- Vaccinations including childhood immunisation, influenza, etc.
- Blood pressure checks
- Asthma and other respiratory disease reviews (Yvonne)
- Diabetes reviews (Joan)
- Other chronic disease reviews
- Cervical smears

- Travel advice and provision of associated medication or vaccination
- Contraception reviews
- Smoking cessation (Yvonne)
- Sexual health reviews
- Dressings and bandage changes
- Ear syringing (must review with GP beforehand)
- Minor injuries
- Weight management

Our current Practice Nurse appointments are arranged as follows:

Aultbea Surgery		Gairloch Health Centre	
Mon	09.10 – 11.40 Yvonne 13.00 – 16.30 Yvonne	Mon	08.00 – 12.00 Joan
Tues	08.00 – 12.00 Joan	Tues	Not available
Wed	Not available	Wed	08.00 – 12.00 Joan 13.00 – 16.30 Yvonne
Thurs	08.00 – 12.00 Joan	Thurs	09.10 – 11.40 Yvonne 13.00 – 16.30 Yvonne
Fri	Not available	Fri	08.00 – 12.00 Joan

Other members of the local primary healthcare team may be able to help with particular patient needs:

District Nurses visit people in their own homes or in residential care homes, providing increasingly complex care for patients and supporting family members. They work with a patient case load that is referred to them by the GPs, social work or when a patient is discharged from hospital. We work really closely with our district nursing colleagues, especially during palliative and end of life care in the community.

Pharmacists are involved in the sale and supply of medicines and can give advice about medicines, symptoms and general health matters. They are responsible for dispensing medicines, counsel patients on their proper use, clarify with GPs and other prescribers that dosages are correct, and check that new treatments are compatible with other medicines the patient may be taking. They can also provide advice and treatment for minor ailments and are often available for advice in the pharmacy, without the need for a booked appointment.

Midwives help prepare women for the delivery of a new baby and they are a vital presence during all stages of pregnancy, labour and the immediate postnatal period. Our local midwives can be contacted directly without having to see a GP first.

Health visitors are nurses or midwives whose role is to improve the health of families and children in the crucial first few years of life. Working in the community, they prevent illness and promote health and wellbeing.

Community Psychiatric Nurses (CPNs) work with GPs, psychiatrists, psychologists, and others, to help care for patients with mental illnesses.

School Nurses provide a variety of services such as providing health and sex education within schools, carrying out developmental screening, undertaking health interviews and administering immunisation programmes.

There are a range of other health professionals who visit our practice area to help care for the local community: dietician, psychiatrist, respiratory nurse, Macmillan nurse, podiatrist, social workers, etc.

The aim of this leaflet is to help patients understand how services are configured in our locality and to also help make the best use of our appointments system. We would welcome any feedback from patients that might help us achieve this.

Aultbea And Gairloch Medical Practice

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