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Dear Skerryvore Patient,

We are expecting an unprecedented demand during the first winter of the pandemic. We are writing to you to ask for your help over the next few months.

In order to keep you safe, we cannot have large numbers of people sitting together in our waiting room. Therefore, we will continue to telephone patients first to assess if clinical examination is necessary. Please be aware telephone consultations are not always our preferred method of assessing patients and are more time consuming as we cannot assess all the visual clues we normally use.

Each time we invite someone in, we must apply PPE (personal protective equipment consisting of a mask, gloves and apron) and clean the entire room before removing the PPE and re-applying for the next patient. This has resulted in a loss of a third of our nursing appointments.

We are currently conducting 20% more GP appointments than we did this time last year. As you can imagine, an increasing number of much slower consultations is causing huge problems with our workload.

We are seeking your cooperation to ensure that services are used wisely during this period of high demand and to help us guarantee the most vulnerable members of our community can access healthcare.

Here are some ways you can help us:

NHS Inform Website – www.nhsinform.co.uk

Please use this website, which has been developed by the NHS in Scotland. It includes a helpful symptom checker, which will guide you to the most appropriate place to seek care.

NHS Pharmacy First Scotland

NHS Pharmacy First Scotland is an NHS service provided by your local community pharmacy.

If you have a minor illness, a pharmacy is the first place you should access for advice. They are able to help you with a host of illnesses and can give you medicine if they think you need it.

They can help you with:

Acne, allergies, athlete's foot, backache, blocked or runny nose, cold sores, constipation, cystitis (in women), diarrhoea, earache, eczema, headache, headlice, haemorrhoids (piles), hay fever, impetigo, indigestion, mouth ulcers, pain, period pain, sore throat, threadworms, thrush, urinary tract infections (UTIs), verrucas and warts.

Both Boots and WHB Sutherland provide these services and you can contact them on the following numbers:

WHB Sutherland 01856 873240 Boots 01856 872097

Please phone in advance of attending the pharmacy as they may be able to assist you on the phone.

Practice Pharmacist

You may receive a phone call from one of our practice pharmacists to review your prescription requests. Please be assured the pharmacy team work closely with the doctors, nurses and admin team at Skerryvore to ensure the best possible care is provided by the practice. Our pharmacy team consists of Lyndsay Steel, Christopher Woolham and Sylvia Robertson and are all highly trained clinical pharmacists with independent prescribing qualifications.

Skerryvore Appointments

In order to book a phone appointment, please call our practice as early as possible during the day. This allows us to plan our workload and ensure urgent medical problems are addressed first. Our reception staff are trained to take a short history over the phone in order to ensure that patients get the most appropriate appointment for their need. We ask that you provide as much information to them as possible as it allows us to prioritise who we contact first, based on where the need is most urgent.

We have adapted our appointment system so that we can continue to function should we have staff shortages caused by illness or the need to self isolate.

We offer two types of appointments:

Routine Appointments

These are booked up to three working days in advance. For these appointments you can request a doctor of your choice - you can speak about more than one problem, and you can request a time period more suitable for you. Our appointments are still booked at 10-minute intervals and so it is important that you only save up as many problems as you feel can be discussed in this time. Sometimes your chosen doctor may already be fully booked, in this case you can telephone back on another day, if it is essential you speak to this doctor; alternatively you may choose another doctor.

Urgent Appointments

These are for problems which you feel must be dealt with on the day that you phone for an appointment. You can only discuss the urgent problem and will be fitted in with any doctor who is available. You must be available during the day to receive a call.

For all consultations, our GPs will call you twice. If you are not available, you will be judged to have missed your appointment and will need to re-book.

Medical Emergencies

Once all our appointments are filled for the day, we would ask you to call back the following day for an appointment. However if you feel you have a medical emergency, the receptionist will take your details and the first available doctor will call you back. Please be aware that these should only be used for true emergencies, such as someone suffering from pain, distress or where you feel your symptoms point to an urgent, serious condition.

Home Visits

If you think you might require a home visit, then please call the surgery between 8:30 and 10am wherever possible. The receptionist will ask you for some details about your illness, so that we can plan and attend the most urgent cases first. Our home visiting service is strictly reserved for patients who are housebound and unable to attend the practice or seriously ill and we appreciate your support in not misusing this service.

Hospital Clinic Appointments

Waiting lists for hospital appointments are longer than they were prior to the pandemic. We understand that this is very frustrating for our patients. Pathways of care for patients with cancer and emergencies are working well. If you are waiting to see a specialist in a hospital clinic and need to find out how long you may have to wait then you can call **01856 888075**. Please be aware that as your GPs we have no ability to speed up clinic appointments or "move you up the list".

COVID-19 symptoms

Covid-19 numbers are once again increasing throughout the UK and we anticipate that throughout the winter months there will be large numbers of patients who require medical advice due to the main recognised symptoms of:

- continuous cough (have a new cough that has lasted for an our and/or have had 3 or more episodes of coughing in 24 hours and/or coughing more than usual)
- fever (37.8 C or greater) or
- loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste (anosmia).

The NHS Inform website has a wealth of useful information in relation to coronavirus but essentially, if you've developed symptoms (however mild), stay at home for 10 days and arrange to be tested. Do not go to your GP, pharmacy or hospital.

You can arrange a test in Orkney by calling 01856 888 211

You should remain at home until you get the result of the test, and then follow the advice you will be given based on the result.

If you develop any of these symptoms and think you may need to speak to or see a Doctor, then please call 111. A 111 Doctor will assess you over the phone, and arrange a face to face appointment at the Orkney COVID Assessment Centre if this is required.

Only phone 111 if:

- Your symptoms worsen during home isolation, especially if you're in a high or extremely high risk group
- Breathlessness develops or worsens
- Your symptoms haven't improved in 10 days

If you have a medical emergency, phone 999 and tell them you have coronavirus symptoms

Zero Tolerance

Unfortunately, a small but increasing number of patients are rude or abusive towards our staff. Skerryvore Practice supports the government's 'Zero Tolerance' campaign for Health Service Staff. This states that GPs and their staff have a right to care for others without fear of being attacked or abused. This type of behaviour may result in the perpetrator being removed from our list.

The vast majority of our patients treat our staff with respect and we want to thank you all for this.

We would like to thank our patients for supporting us in these very difficult times.

We are very grateful to all our staff who have worked diligently throughout lockdown and beyond.

We will continue to post updates and useful information on our Facebook page.

Yours faithfully

GPs Skerryvore Practice