

To: All Practice Managers

Dear Colleague

Feedback on You and Your General Practice / 1st October Contractual Changes

As discussed at the recent Practice Managers meeting, I am writing to outline the findings from the recent assessment of contractual compliance undertaken by NHS England.

The checks identified variation in compliance against a number of contractual areas which I summarised at the meeting; I clarified that I would follow this up in writing to share the feedback and ask that practices review their own arrangements against the contractual expectations.

1. Patient Communication – Timescales

NHS England's review found that some practice websites are not sufficiently clear in respect of the timescale for when patients will receive a response. This requirement formally relates to Paragraph 7.5.3 in the GMS Contract:

7.5.3 The appropriate response must be provided:

- (a) if the contact is made outside core hours, during the following core hours;*
- (b) in any other case, during the day on which the core hours fall.*

The national FAQs¹ provide further clarity:

Practices should keep patients informed around next steps when a consultation is submitted. In line with the contract, patients should receive an appropriate response on the day that their submission is made to the practice and know how their presenting issue will then be handled (if contact is made during core hours, or the following working day if not). That does not mean the practice has to see or treat the patient on the same or next day, rather the patient should know how their presenting issue will be managed by the practice, which could involve arranging an appointment for the patient on another day, or signposting to another appropriate service, such as Pharmacy First. 111 would not constitute an appropriate alternative service during core hours.

If the care needed by a patient falls under the scope of general practice, then practices cannot simply direct them somewhere else within core hours. 111 is not a suitable alternative to for in hours primary care services for patients registered with a GP practice.

Practices can and should put relevant safeguards on their webpages, explaining crucial pieces of information and managing the expectation of patients, for example, where it supports the practice's local operating model, practices may want to include patient messaging on their website or online consultation tools, for example, requesting that urgent requests should be made by phone or walk-in, rather than online.

As a reminder, the commitments set out in the You and Your General Practice (YYGP) state:

*"Whether you make your request by phone, on-line or visiting your practice, you may be asked to give your practice some details so that they can assess what is best for you based on your clinical need. The practice team will consider your request for an appointment or medical advice and tell you **within one working day** what will happen next.*

This could be:

- *An appointment that day or a subsequent day*
- *A phone call that day or a subsequent day*
- *A text message responding to your query*
- *Advice to go to a pharmacy or another NHS service. Your practice will decide what is best for you based on your clinical need. Your practice cannot tell you to just call back the next day."*



To confirm, these requirements do not mean the practice has to see or treat the patient on the same or next day, rather the patient must know how their presenting issue will be managed by the practice. Providing the patient with an automated acknowledgment that their request has been received (without active triage) would **not** meet the contractual timescale requirement.

Specifically, the feedback suggested that some practices indicated that patients would be contacted within 48 hours or more which was felt does not meet the requirements. For reference, the following examples from practice websites illustrate more compliant approaches to manage patient expectations for when they will receive a response:

- *All online requests are reviewed on the day they are submitted. You will receive an outcome or next steps within one working day.*
- *Our clinical team will assess your request within 24 hours (Monday–Friday). We will contact you with advice, an appointment, or further instructions.*
- *Please fill this in if you require help with a new health problem. Your request will be reviewed on the day if sent before 3pm Monday-Friday. If sent after 3pm, we will review the following working day”. (“Use our online form at any time”).*
- *Clinical requests can be made between 8:00am and 6:30pm. These will be reviewed by a doctor and responded to the same day, but please note that requests after 6pm will not be looked at until the next working day. Administrative requests can be made 24 hours.*
- *Your request will be considered within 1 working day, at which point you will be told what will happen next. This could be an appointment for that day (or future date), a telephone call, a text message response, or advice to visit a pharmacy.*

2. Websites – You and Your General Practice and Online Consultations

Practices must ensure that their websites meet the following standards:

- The You and Your General Practice (YYGP) Charter must be displayed **prominently**, accessible directly from the **homepage** [NHS England » You and your general practice – English](#)
- Information on access routes, care navigation, and response times must be up to date, accurate, and aligned with contractual expectations.
- Online consultation platforms must be clearly signposted for ease of access and state the timeframe within which the practice will review and respond to submitted requests.

The prominence of the online consultation tool was also variable across websites and therefore would ask that you review your website narrative around appointments including the accessibility of your online consultation tool. For reference, this requirement relates to Paragraph 16.7E.5A

The Contractor must also ensure there are links on its practice website or online practice profile which direct people to:

- (a) its online consultation tool;*
- (b) the symptom checker and self-care information available on the NHS website; and*
- (c) the General Practice Patient Guidance published on the NHS England website. 80 16.7E.5B*

The links mentioned in clause 16.7E.5A must be displayed prominently on the home page (or equivalent) of its practice website or online practice profile (as the case may be).

We are also aware that some standard messaging on the online consultation tool may be interpreted as non-urgent queries are unable to be submitted. As part of the feedback from NHSE, some practices were identified as non-compliant as a ‘notification banner’ indicated the patient to call back tomorrow, particularly when the general term ‘health problems’ was used, and was unavailable.

We understand that in some of these cases, ‘health problems’ relates to urgent requests but non-urgent queries continue to be available. However, in light of the feedback we would request that practices review the wording/settings on their website/online consultation tool to ensure this is clear for patients that they are still able to submit **“non-urgent appointment requests, medication queries and admin requests”** throughout the duration of core hours.

The national FAQs set out the following:

Assessing a patient as urgent should be based on clinical judgement. Definitions will not be defined nationally and are for local clinical judgement, following review and triage of an OC submission, on an individual OC submission basis (as with telephone and walk-in requests).

Whether OC submissions are classified as clinical or administrative depends on the online consultation tool that a practice uses and the options that patients select when using the tool. When an OC submission is reviewed by the practice, the practice may determine that a submission is in fact clinical rather than administrative or vice versa, depending on the nature of the submission. Therefore, practices must not prevent patients from submitting what they would consider clinical requests (other than urgent requests where a practice chooses not to accept these). Classifications will not be defined nationally.

We appreciate that due to the different ways practices operate, standard wording may not always reflect the practice workflow, however here are a couple of examples:

- You can submit **non-urgent requests** on PATCHS between **8am and 6:30pm**. This includes routine appointments, medication queries, and admin tasks — please use the '**admin query**' option for these.
*You can still use PATCHS for **urgent medical issues**, but once we've reached capacity for same-day urgent appointments, you may be redirected to another service that can manage your needs safely.*
- PATCHS is available for **non-urgent** requests between 8am and 6:30pm Mon-Fri. Please use the 'Admin Query' for routine appointments (smear tests, vaccinations, annual reviews), medication and admin requests.

3. Display of Core Opening Hours (8.00am–6.30pm)

In line with previous notification, practices are reminded that core opening hours must be displayed as **08:00–18:30**, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays), in line with contractual requirements.

The majority of practices have now confirmed their transition to these hours. Practices that have not yet updated their website should do so without delay, ensuring that:

- The correct opening hours are displayed prominently on the homepage and on the "Contact Us" or "Opening Times" page.
- *Any approved (and compliant) sub-contracting arrangements are made clear.
- Information is consistent across all patient-facing platforms, including online consultation systems and automated messages.

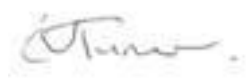
Since 1 October 2025, we have taken a supportive approach to transitioning to the new contractual arrangements however we do need to make you aware that non-compliance could result in future contractual breaches and therefore we would kindly ask all practices to:

1. Review and update website to ensure response-time information is clear, accurate and prominently displayed.
2. Ensure the YYGP Charter and your online consultation tool is visible and easily accessible (on the homepage) and clearly identifies compliant requirements about the availability of non-urgent appointment requests, medication queries and admin requests
3. Update all references to opening hours to reflect 08:00–18:30*.
4. Check that all patient-facing communication channels provides consistent information

Thank you for your cooperation and continued commitment to meeting national standards for patient access and communication. We do understand the demands being faced by practices and therefore if your practice requires further support or has any further queries or concerns about compliance, please do not hesitate to contact Vicky Annakin or myself.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely



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