Dear Patients,

It seems like a good opportunity to write and update you about our services and how we are operating. We hope that you and your loved ones have remained safe throughout the last year.

Thank you for all of the support we have received during the last 15 months. Central Surgery in Sawbridgeworth has been open for our patients throughout the covid-19 pandemic. We have been extremely busy, remained accessible and have offered face to face appointments to patients based on clinical need.

You may be aware we have operated a telephone triage system since 2012 booking most of our face to face appointments after a discussion with a clinician. We intend to continue to work in this way, truly believing it is the most clinically effective and safe way to work, making best use of your time and our resources. No one will want to return to crowded GP waiting rooms mixing with patients who may be infectious. It is our job to ensure this does not happen. Our reception team are trained to ask you the purpose of your call so that they can direct your request to the most appropriate clinician who will then triage your needs. Please cooperate with our reception team, help them to help you.

Unfortunately in recent months, we have noticed an increase in abuse of our administrative and clinical staff. This is a nation wide problem and have been documented in a recent video  ‘if I die it will be  your fault’ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAM3fSDq9kA

I would like to remind patients that this is not appropriate and will not be tolerated.

The impact of covid-19 has been unprecedented which has led to increased waiting times for hospital appointments and a massive increase in workload for general practice.

As well as coping with this workload we organised and delivered the biggest flu campaign ever in the autumn of 2020 and then went on,  with our local GP practices through the recently formed Primary Care Network (PCN) to deliver the majority of doses of Covid-19 vaccines to thousands of patients across the region. This has been a huge success during this challenging period and could not have been done without the hard work and dedication of our staff who often worked over and above their normal hours to make this a success.

General practices locally have also worked with hospitals to try to ease pressures on their Emergency Departments running ‘hot clinics’ for suspected Covid-19 cases and monitoring some patients with Covid-19 at home in our virtual ward. We continue to work with our community teams to provide care at the homes of some patients who might otherwise need to be admitted to hospital with other conditions.

Now that the national lockdown is easing the team at Central Surgery would like to reassure the community that:

•Central Surgery is open for patients and if you require an appointment contact us by phone, the most appropriate appointment will be offered with the most appropriate healthcare professional.

•We are a team of GPs, Practice and Community Nurses, Health Care Assistants, Clinical Pharmacists, Physicians Associates, Paramedics, First Response Physiotherapists, Social Prescribers and Mental Health Practitioners. You may not be familiar with all of these practitioners but they have been welcomed into primary care, they bring their unique expertise, it is an exciting way to diversify the team and address the national shortage of GPs and Practice Nurses.

• The appointment may be face-face, by telephone, video or e-mail. You can use e-consultation directly through our website.

• The practice team will do everything to protect your safety and that of its staff. We are lucky to have a great administrative team who have worked so hard to keep everything going.

• Routine annual checks for long-term health conditions may have been delayed by the lockdowns, but they have not been forgotten, and the GP practice will contact patients as soon as is safely possible.

• GPs and practice staff and other teams in the mass vaccination centres are working hard to keep you safe by running your local Covid-19 vaccination programme. Please make sure you book an appointment when asked to do so.

Primary care is the bedrock of the NHS, with 90 per cent of healthcare starting and finishing in general practice.

We are experiencing high demand at the moment and staff are tired after their massive efforts during the pandemic and the vaccination programme. Bear in mind that due to the additional burdens of Covid there is a lot to catch up on and it will be quite a while before things are back to normal.

We have been working consistently throughout the pandemic to deliver safe and effective care.

This has been achieved at a time when demand for general practice services has reached an unprecedented level, against the backdrop of a national workforce shortage in the profession and years of under-resourcing.

I would like to pay tribute to our patient group who have given us invaluable support and feedback over the last few years.

People can find the most appropriate healthcare service to meet their needs by looking online at NHS Service Finder. If you need help now, and you're not sure what to do go to 111.nhs.uk or call 111. If you think it's an emergency call 999.

With best wishes

Dr Deborah Kearns

For the Central Surgery Team