

Clinical Hub - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why are you operating this Clinical Hub system? Other practices just allow patients to book appointments with their GP when they want to.

It's not always easy for people to know who the right person is to help them, or what kind of help they need. We can help guide you to the right kind of help, from the right person, at the right time. About half of the requests that the Clinical Hub receives need a telephone or face to face consultation with a GP. The other half can be managed in other ways, freeing up a lot of GP time for patient care.

We now also have a much more diverse clinical team of professionals who can help you, such as pharmacists, physiotherapists, paramedics, social prescribers, a chaplain, a mental health practitioner and of course our nursing team. Increasingly, external primary and secondary care services are now open to self-referral, meaning that you don't need to see or speak to your GP first. We can direct you to these services.

We have around 10 full time equivalent GPs looking after 18,000 patients. We want to be able to help as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. If we operate a 'first come, first served' appointment system with direct booking of GP appointments, we rapidly run out of appointments and waste valuable time tied up with things that could have been managed more effectively in a different way. This means that overall we can help fewer people and our care is less effective.

Why is a receptionist asking me medical questions?

Our Patient Services Team have been trained to gather specific information about your request to enable our Hub to guide you to the right kind of help. All members of our team are bound by data protection and confidentiality rules.

Alternatively, just go to www.lighthousepractice.co.uk and click 'Contact us Online' on the homepage and send us your request digitally. It will be processed in exactly the same way as by phone.

What if I don't want to tell a receptionist about my medical problems?

If your reason for contacting us is of a very sensitive or distressing nature and you do not wish to divulge this directly to our Patient Services Team, you can contact us online instead, via our secure online consultation service. Just go to www.lighthousepractice.co.uk and click 'Contact us Online' on the homepage.

Alternatively, let the Patient Services Team know and they will pass your request on to the Clinical Hub. A clinician will then contact you for further information.

Who runs the Clinical Hub?

The Hub is made up of at least two and usually three experienced GPs. Alongside them in the same room may be a paramedic or doctor in training and experienced and trained administrators who carry out all the administrative work for the Hub.

When will the Hub get back to me?

The Hub will respond to your request for help the same or next working day, depending on demand. If we cannot respond the same day, we will let you know that your request has been put on our list for the following working day. Please help us to help you by providing correct contact details and enough information about your symptoms, share your questions and concerns and tell us if there is any particular kind of help you were hoping for. We prefer to contact you initially by text or email to clarify your request and send booking links for appointments, so please respond promptly if you can. Tell us if you are unable to use text or email technology and we can contact you by phone if necessary.

What kind of help will the Hub offer me?

The hub will likely contact you to get more information about your request for help, so please ensure you are contactable. The more precisely you tell us what your problem is and what kind of help you need, the easier it is for us to help you. Once we have all the information we need, we may signpost you to appropriate services, provide self-help advice and information, manage the problem with you directly if a quick phone call or face to face appointment is needed, forward your query to one of our internal clinical teams (e.g. pharmacy), or book an appointment for you to see or speak to a GP or other clinician such at an appropriate time. In most cases, this will be the same day.

What if you don't have time to deal with my request on the day?

Because the Clinical Hub is a more efficient way of managing patients' requests for medical help, we are more likely to be able to manage your request for help on the same day. In addition, the Clinical Hub system means that you won't be asked to phone back another time because we have run out of appointments. If we are very busy and can't manage your request on the day, we will add you to the Clinical Hub list for the following working day and we will contact you then, without you having to call back or contact us again. We'll let you know on the day if we need to postpone your request for help to the following day.

Why are you texting me instead of seeing or speaking to me?

Communicating by text message is the Clinical Hub's preferred method of initial contact with patients. Communicating by text message is a safe and effective way of communicating for both you and the doctor and is used nationally across primary care in the NHS. It enables us to gather more information to help us make the right decision about further help you may need. We can send you clinical questionnaires, documents such as clinic letters and sick notes, patient leaflets and safety netting advice, and you can send us text information, photos and even videos. All this correspondence is saved directly to your clinical record. It is a very efficient form of communication, freeing up doctor time to help more people. It also helps patients who are busy and don't always find it easy to set aside time for a telephone or face to face consultation. Text communication is not right for everyone though, so we communicate by phone or face to face too as the need dictates.

I have special communication needs, what should I do?

You and/or your representative can let us know when you contact us about any special communication needs you may have. We will accommodate your needs to ensure we communicate with you in a way that works for you, for example via a professional interpreter.

What if I disagree with the decision or advice from the Clinical Hub?

When we are negotiating a management plan, we won't end our communication with you unless you have confirmed you are happy with the plan, you don't get back to us within a reasonable timescale or we are unable to contact you despite several attempts. We understand that patients won't always agree with our advice, so if you're not happy, please just tell us and we will treat your concerns seriously and with respect and change the plan if your concerns are justified and reasonable. We may still advocate our original plan even if a patient isn't happy, if we are professionally confident our management plan is appropriate and safe.

Can I still request to see or speak to my doctor?

Yes of course. If you think you need to speak to your doctor please let us know along with some information about what you'd like to discuss and how urgent you think it is, and if the Clinical Hub doctors agree that the best way to help you is for you to consult with your own GP then we will arrange this for you. If not, we will discuss alternative options with you to resolve your problem to your satisfaction.

The Clinical Hub system also allows us to gather relevant information in advance of a GP appointment, arrange any necessary investigations before you are seen and provide you with useful information prior to your appointment, which helps make the most of the time you have with your GP.

The Clinical Hub system makes it MORE likely that you will be able to see or speak to your doctor when you need to.

I was asked to book a routine follow up appointment with a doctor – what should I do?

Ideally, follow up appointments should be booked at the request of the GP at the time you consulted with them. However if this hasn't happened, then please just let the Hub know in the usual way and we'll take a look at your medical notes and put your request forward to your GP if necessary.

Why am I being directed to another service when I just want to speak to my GP?

There are many services that are now available that serve patients interests better than seeing or speaking to a GP in the traditional way. Community pharmacies can offer enhanced assessment and treatment services for minor illness, patients can self-refer for midwifery services, physiotherapy, child and adolescent mental health services and iRock, the early pregnancy assessment clinic, health visitor service, adult psychotherapy and mental health support services, bereavement counselling, school health service, substance and alcohol misuse services, sexual health clinics, child and adult bladder and bowel/continence services, and more. This list is growing all the time. It is not necessary to consult your GP before referring yourself to many of these services, and in many cases your GP is not best placed to help you as this is not their specialist area. You can read more about some of these services here: <https://www.lighthousepractice.co.uk/care-support/referrals-self-referrals/>

How do I request a home visit?

In the same way as any other request for medical help. Please try and get your request in as early as possible in the day to give the Clinical Hub time to assess and respond to your request. In most cases, home visits are done by our GP-based paramedic team, who then debrief after the visit with one of our GPs. Our paramedics are highly skilled and experienced, and have all worked in previous posts with the 999 ambulance service.