

Hertfordshire and West Essex ICS
Charter House
Parkway
Welwyn Garden City
Hertfordshire AL8 6JL

30 November 2020

New A&E appointment system to help keep patients safe

Dear colleague,

I have previously shared with you information about a planned new approach that will ensure our residents can safely and conveniently get help for urgent health concerns this winter and in the future.

The new way of working will enable NHS 111 to make appointment slots within the Emergency Departments of our acute hospitals in Watford, Stevenage and Harlow, when patients need them. This is being introduced nationwide to help keep urgent NHS services safe and to make sure that they are available for everyone who needs them.

It is vitally important that everybody who needs urgent care is seen and treated safely in the right place, first time. Waiting for hours in an emergency department to be seen for a minor injury or illness is not in anyone's interests. By picking up the phone and dialling 111 or going online to 111.nhs.uk before making the decision to travel, patients can be assured that the right clinician is expecting to see them.

An appointment system will help to ensure that everyone who needs urgent care help can be seen safely and comfortably. This way of working will help our residents to get the help they need without spending time in a waiting room where the likelihood of contracting COVID-19, flu or other viruses is increased.

I am pleased that NHS England and Improvement has now confirmed that our system is ready to go ahead with the new appointment system across Hertfordshire and west Essex from the start of December. This is as a result of successful partnership working between staff from our three acute Trusts – West Herts Hospitals Trust, East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust and Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust – as well as GP-led clinical commissioning groups and the local NHS 111 service which is operated by HUC (Herts Urgent Care).

NHS 111 can already make booked appointments with GP surgeries and pharmacies, or divert a call to the ambulance service if necessary. Callers can also get directly through to a specialist mental health team. What is changing is that from 1 December, NHS 111 will also be able to make patients a booked appointment at an A&E or Urgent Treatment Centre if needed.

The key messages which will be shared in all of our communication are that:

- You should always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured, or if their life is at risk.

- No-one who needs emergency care will be turned away.
- NHS 111 can help if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do. Anyone going online to 111.nhs.uk or calling the free NHS 111 number will be given a thorough assessment and then helped to find treatment, which could be at their local pharmacy, their GP surgery or an appointment slot at an A&E department or Urgent Treatment Centre.

There will be a national campaign (including TV advertising) to support the new way of working and our system has also received funding from NHS England and NHS Improvement to support a comprehensive communications plan to raise awareness of this new service within our area over the next few months. We will be working closely with all our stakeholders to ensure the message is shared widely.

Our communications will focus on reaching those groups of residents who are more likely to use urgent and emergency services as well as those who face health inequalities. My team would appreciate your help to reach those who are particularly vulnerable so please do let us know if there is any further information you would like, material you feel would be helpful or if you would like to discuss this in more detail.

By raising awareness of the use of NHS 111 for urgent health concerns, we aim to increase the use of this service as the first port of call. From December onwards, those arriving without a booked appointment at an emergency department, urgent care or urgent treatment centre, will be assessed by a senior nurse to see if they need immediate emergency treatment. They may be asked to contact NHS 111 to be assessed and directed to the most appropriate service for their needs.

A video featuring local A&E staff highlighting the new ways of working can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/Hnlx4eUgrqM>. It will be promoted widely across west Essex and Hertfordshire.

If you would like any further information, please contact enquiries@healthierfuture.org.uk

Yours sincerely,



Dr Jane Halpin
Joint Chief Executive
West Essex and Hertfordshire CCGs, and
Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care System