

Merse Medical Practice | Chirnside Branch Surgery – Frequently Asked Questions

General

- **Is it possible for the Practice/NHS Borders to change their mind about the closure of Chirnside Branch Surgery?**
No. This decision is not one which has been taken lightly and is the only remaining viable option to ensure the sustainability of Merse Medical Practice.
- **What do you mean by sustainability?**
Making the best use of limited resources to provide an appropriate level of safe care to patients.
- **When is the Chirnside Branch Surgery going to close?**
The Branch Surgery will close on 31 March 2023.
- **Are the staff who work at the Chirnside Branch Surgery leaving the Practice?**
No. The staff who work currently from the Chirnside Branch Surgery also work from The Knoll, Duns.
- **What are Scottish Government doing about this?**
Merse Medical Practice is independently run. Scottish Government is aware of the impending closure.
- **Why are you closing Chirnside Branch Surgery and not the surgery at The Knoll?**
There is not enough space in Chirnside to accommodate all practice staff and be able to see patients. There is more space at The Knoll, Duns.
- **Why can't you just amalgamate practice with Duns Medical Group?**
Duns Medical Group and Merse Medical Practice are separate business run independently from one another. Merging the Practices was not one of the options considered by the Partners of Merse.
- **Is it the case that you cannot afford to keep Chirnside going so as a cost cutting measure you are cutting off Chirnside and moving to Duns?**
This is not a cost cutting exercise. The decision is based on the availability of GPs and overall sustainability of the Merse Medical Practice.
- **Who owns the Chirnside Branch Surgery building?**
The building is leased by the practice from a private landlord.
- **Will the physical site at Chirnside be kept open?**
The future of the Chirnside building is the responsibility of the landlord.
- **I previously had to travel to Duns anyway for some appointments/services from the practice, will that continue?**
Yes, if you had to travel to Duns previously then this is not changing as all patients will be required to travel to Duns.

Prescriptions/Pharmacy

- **What will happen with my prescriptions?**
- **How will repeat prescriptions be managed?**

Any patients who handed in their repeat prescription slips to the Chirnside Branch Surgery and wish to continue to order prescriptions in this way, can hand in their slips to the Chirnside Pharmacy or any other local pharmacy of their choice. Chirnside Pharmacy have agreed to carry out a once daily delivery/pick up of prescriptions slips to/from The Knoll, Duns.
- **What is going to happen to Chirnside Pharmacy?**

Chirnside Pharmacy is privately owned and run so Merse Medical Practice and NHS Borders cannot answer this question.
- **Is there a way of the Pharmacy contacting a GP if they are concerned about a patient?**

If a pharmacist is unable to provide a patient with the required care/advice, they will advise them to contact their GP.
- **Do Chirnside Pharmacy have a prescribing Pharmacist?**

Chirnside Pharmacy has an independent prescriber offering the 'Pharmacy First Plus' service which if used appropriately will mean patients can see a pharmacist for assessment and prescribing for common clinical conditions. A process is being developed to allow the Pharmacy to alert the Practice to the days that the independent prescriber will be available to allow them to signpost patients accordingly.
- **Why don't you incorporate the pharmacy into the practice?**

There are technical issues regarding pharmacies being in GP practices which mean that this is not practical or possible in this situation.

Transport/Access

- **How are you expecting patients to get to Duns to attend appointments?**
- **Access to transport via Berwickshire Wheels is already an issue, this will make things worse. What are you doing about this?**
- **What about access for disabled and elderly people?**
- **The Pingo bus cannot be guaranteed to arrive at a certain time.**

A meeting facilitated by NHS Borders has been held with Scottish Borders Council, public and community transport providers to discuss how the impact on access to transport for patients can be mitigated. There are various public and community transport options that are already in place in the Berwickshire area that can be used by patients. A promotion of the services already in place is to be undertaken to ensure the public are aware of what transport options are available. A review of the areas not served by public transport will also be carried out to identify if there are any solutions that could be put in place to improve access.

In addition to this, Scottish Borders Council have announced that the Pingo on demand transport service has been extended until 2024. This service enables residents to access transport on demand in areas which are not serviced by public transport routes and offers a door-to-door service. To book Pingo, you can call 01289 385506 or use the "Ride Pingo" app. These buses are wheelchair accessible.

- **Can my appointment be arranged around the bus/local transport times?**

The Practice have offered, where it is practical, to try and provide patients with appointments around bus times. However, we must stress that this will not always be possible as appointment availability is dependent on many factors, including the clinical priority of patient's needs.

- **Why were there no conversations with Scottish Borders Council and bus companies before making this decision?**

The timing of the decision to close the Chirnside Branch Surgery could not have been avoided or postponed. However, a meeting has now been held between NHS Borders, Scottish Borders Council, public and community Transport services as detailed above.

- **Parking at The Knoll is already an issue, what are you doing about this?**

This will be raised at the NHS Borders Car Parking Group.

GPs

- **Can I register with another GP Practice?**

Primary Care services across Duns, Chirnside and the surrounding areas are under considerable pressure so please do not attempt to move to a different GP Practice whilst we are going through this period of change.

- **Will you continue to do home visits?**

- **If patients cannot get to Duns, will the GPs do home visits?**

Home visits are based on clinical need.

- **Will this mean delays in getting an appointment with a GP?**

Appointments are allocated based on clinical need. As there will be less GPs working at Merse from April 2023 there may be some impact on the time patients need to wait for an appointment however we remain hopeful that new GPs will be recruited.

- **Will this mean an increase in the number of telephone appointments?**

The type of appointment offered to a patient may differ based on patient need and preference, and availability of medical staff. Following the impact of the pandemic, the practice has increased the number of face-to-face appointments available.

- **In Highlands and Islands there are dedicated rooms in villages for patients for video consultations with GPs. Is that a possibility here?**

There are a large number of IT solutions which can be used across Primary Care i.e. Near Me video consultations. NHS Borders are currently looking into a number of innovations which could be implemented across Primary Care services.

- **Why not keep Chirnside open with a reduced number of GPs?**

- **Why can't we get more doctors? Why can't the international market be looked at? The Care home sector is doing this.**

There is a national shortage of GPs which means that recruitment is challenging across the whole of the UK. The Partners have been advertising for GPs for a prolonged period of time and there has been no interest expressed by doctors overseas.

- **How does closing Chirnside surgery help?**

- **What difference does it make to have less GPs over one site rather than 2 sites?**

The GPs cannot split themselves between two practices. Closing Chirnside will improve patient care and they can concentrate on working together. It is much easier to be safe and sustainable by delivering services from one site.

- **Can we not get locums to come into the Chirnside practice?**

We cannot rely on locums to sustain the Chirnside Branch Surgery. By definition locum staff are contracted on a short-term basis, and therefore would not provide the continuity of care necessary. In addition, it is increasingly difficult to secure locum cover due to the overall shortage of GPs.

Other

- **Can we have blood testing facility in Chirnside?**

This has been discussed at the Community Treatment and Care (CTAC) Leadership Group who are developing the CTAC service, which includes the provision of phlebotomy services. Unfortunately, the provision of a blood testing facility in Chirnside is not possible.

- **I would like to make a complaint, who do I contact?**

Complaints should be addressed to Ashley Durie, Practice Manager. Alternatively, you can ask for an appointment to see her to discuss your complaint. Ashley will explain the complaints procedure to you and will make sure that your concerns are dealt with promptly.

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