

Appointments

Policy

Our patient scheduling system is flexible enough to accommodate patients with urgent, non-urgent, complex and planned chronic care, and preventative needs.

The individual preference of our general practitioners or other healthcare providers, such as our nurses, is accommodated and members of the clinical team are consulted about the length and scheduling of appointments.

Patients can request to see their preferred general practitioner or member of the health team.

The length of clinical consultations will vary according to individual patient needs. Our aim is to provide enough time for adequate communication between patients and their practitioners to facilitate preventative care, effective record keeping and patient satisfaction. Patients are encouraged to ask for a longer appointment if they think it is necessary.

Our practice endeavours to accommodate patients with urgent medical matters even when fully booked.

All practice team members are trained to have the skills and knowledge to assist patients in determining the most appropriate length and timing of consultations and to recognise and act accordingly for patients with urgent medical matters.

Where possible, information is provided in advance about the cost of healthcare and the potential for out-of-pocket expenses.

We endeavour to respect patients' cultural backgrounds and, where possible, meet their needs including providing privacy for patients and others in distress.

Procedure

Each general practitioner and other healthcare provider (such as nurses and allied health) have specific times allocated to their consulting sessions to accommodate the need for interval times, short and long consultations, diagnostic tests, procedures etc.

Generally, no more than four (4) appointments are made for any one (1) hour period and we aim to ensure no appointment is scheduled for less than fifteen (15) minutes. Patients are advised that one appointment is required for each family member requesting to be seen where more than one family member needs to consult with a general practitioner.

Patients are able to request their preferred general practitioner when making an appointment and our practice team will endeavour to ensure that patients generally see the same practitioner. If patients are unable to obtain an appointment with the general practitioner of their choice, they are advised of the availability of other practitioners they can consult with. A patient can expect to see their practitioner, or an alternative as approved, within two (2) working days.

If a third party is to be present during a consultation/treatment, whether requested by the general practitioner or accompanying the patient, consent from the patient will be obtained prior to the consultation (refer to **Section 7.10 - Third party observing or clinically involved in the consultation**).

Our practice information sheet outlines the types of consultations that may require a longer consultation and the costs. Patients can readily request a longer time when making an appointment.

Our practice team members have the skills and knowledge to assist in determining the most appropriate length and timing of appointments. Should a longer consultation be requested or is determined by information received from the patient, our team will endeavour to allocate the appropriate time for a longer consultation.

Our practice aims to ensure patients do not wait past their appointment time; however, where patients will likely be waiting more than 30 minutes, we will communicate these delays. Wherever significant delays are expected, we aim to contact patients prior to them attending the practice to advise of the delay.

As a priority, practice team members are vigilant of the need to detect and place requests for urgent care for immediate or timely attention by a general practitioner; our practice accommodates urgent care even if we are fully booked (refer to **Section 5.9 - Medical emergencies and urgent queries**).

Cancellations and 'no-shows' are monitored and marked accordingly in the appointments schedule and these patients are followed up as appropriate. Attempts to contact patients that fail to attend appointments are documented in the patient's health record.

Appointments made for patients required to attend a recall or periodic medical review are flagged so that if a patient cancels the appointment the practice team are alerted to ensure another appointment time is scheduled. If the patient fails to attend the practice for the appointment, the general practitioner is alerted to determine the appropriate action to be taken (i.e. contacting the patient to arrange a re-scheduled appointment time) (refer to **Section 7.7 - Follow up of tests, results and referrals**).

When booking an appointment, our practice team members obtain the patient's name and correctly identify the patient using three (3) approved identifiers in accordance with **Section 7.6 – Patient identification** then:

- Determine the urgency of the appointment

- Determine the length of the appointment required (i.e. does the patient have complex medical or communication needs or multiple health matters they want to discuss?)
- Annotate any appointments made for a periodic review (e.g. blood pressure check) or medical recall (e.g. abnormal pathology result) so follow up procedures can be instigated if the patient does not attend
- Advise of any potential for additional or out-of-pocket costs associated with longer, urgent or missed consultations
- If the general practitioner requested is not available at the preferred time, give the nearest available time/day before asking the patient if another general practitioner would be suitable
- Provide suggested appointment times if needed
- Record the patient surname and given name in the agreed timeslot for the chosen general practitioner, and
- Verbally re-confirm to the patient their name, scheduled appointment time and general practitioner being seen.

If the patient scheduling the appointment is new to the practice:

- Inform them of the practice location and parking arrangements
- Outline consultation costs and payment methods
- Obtain their contact telephone number/s, address and other demographics, and
- Ask the patient to bring list of current medications where applicable.

Cancellations and missed appointments

Patients who do not attend for their scheduled appointment are telephoned to determine if an appointment is still required and if another appointment is to be scheduled. The original appointment is recorded as a did not attend, which will turn red in the appointment book and be able to be identified within the patients record.

Patients that fail to attend a recall or periodic medical review appointment

For appointments of significance, it is imperative every attempt is made to contact these patients and that such attempts are documented in the patient's health record.

In attempting to contact the patient, it is recommended that the telephone calls are made at different times of the day and should the patient not respond, a follow up letter is sent requesting the patient contact the practice (also refer to **Section 7.7 – Follow up of tests, results and referrals**).

Patients in distress

We respectfully manage patients and others in distress by providing privacy through:

- Talking to the patient and ascertaining if there is any support we can provide them
- We are accepting and nonjudgmental
- We know our limits as a helper and will seek help from others where applicable, practice manager, doctor or nurse on duty.