

Dear Dr Farmer

Thank you for your letter.

I'd like to state from the outset that we are all extremely grateful to the NHS staff who have worked, and continue to work, so tirelessly to treat and support patients. I don't think any of my constituents or colleagues in Government doubt GPs commitments to patients.

In recognition of this, supporting General Practice is at the heart of the delivery of the NHS Long Term Plan (LTP). As part of the plan, investment in primary and community care is set to receive at least £4.5 billion more a year by 2023/24. I know that this is one of the largest uplifts in the £33.9 billion increase to NHS England's budget by 2023/24, and will mean primary and community funding will grow faster than the rising NHS budget. Increasing the number of nurses and doctors working in General Practice is also a Government priority and will be boosted by increased funding for the core GP contract, which is set to rise by £978 million a year by 2023/24.

However, in the short to mid-term, there is evidently enormous pressure on all arms of the health service. I am absolutely clear that it is never acceptable, under any circumstances, for healthcare workers to be abused in the line of duty. I am also happy to highlight in my correspondence with constituents the significant demand on GP services at the current time, and ask that they have patience. I must also reiterate to you the point I made in our previous correspondence, which is to say that whilst I know that every constituent of mine greatly values the work GPs and surgery staff have done throughout this pandemic, I also know that there are many with very legitimate worries about health issues that they have not had investigated due to the pandemic. Nationally, around seven million patients in England did not come forward for treatment during the pandemic – and it is right that they should now be seen and given the treatment that they need.

I do recognise that strict infection control procedures mean that you can't see all patients face-to-face. However, I would also encourage you to see if there is any way to further increase the number of face-to-face appointments being offered here in Worcestershire. The Standard Operating Procedures for GP practices have been updated to set out that, while the expanded use of video, online and telephone consultations can be maintained, this should be done alongside a clear offer of appointments in person. The guidance does explicitly says that patients' input into the choice of consultation method should be sought and practices should respect preferences for face-to-face care unless there are good clinical reasons to the contrary, for example COVID-19 symptoms.

From the Government's point of view, as I'm sure you're aware, we have embarked upon a unprecedented package of measures to support all arms of the health service in recognition of the demand they face. GPs have been able to access additional funding to support expanding GP capacity as part of the General Practice COVID Capacity Expansion Fund. £150 million was made available from November to March and this has now been extended, with an additional £120 million, until 30 September 2021. Priorities for the use of this funding include maintaining routine

appointments, supporting the clinically extremely vulnerable and those with 'long' COVID-19 and continuing to reduce the backlog of appointments.

Nevertheless, it is evident that it will take time to clear the backlog. Locally here in Worcestershire, I would say that I think there is perhaps more we can all be doing to try and better communicate between the different arms of the health service locally. I have recently had meetings with the senior leadership at both the County Council and the Acute Hospital Trust, and it is positive to see that there is a lot of work going on behind the scenes to try and improve communication and triaging between the GPs, MIUs, Pharmacies, Ambulance Service, Social Care Teams and the Hospitals. We must make sure we are as efficient as possible in the way we use our current resources.

However, I will take your comments on board, and are happy to pass your wider points on to my fellow Ministers.

Thank you again for taking the time to write to me.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Huddleston  
Member of Parliament for Mid Worcestershire  
Minister for Tourism, Sport and Commonwealth Games

[nigel.huddleston.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:nigel.huddleston.mp@parliament.uk)  
0207 219 5814  
[www.nigelhuddleston.com](http://www.nigelhuddleston.com)