

Briefing (Update): Phlebotomy Service delivered by Pathology First in Thurrock

Background

1. **Capacity** - During the pandemic, phlebotomy clinics were moved from the main hospital sites, to community settings, to minimise footfall. The demand has continued to increase year-on-year, escalating from 30,000 phlebotomy appointments per month in 2020 to 42,000 in 2021 and a significant 45,000 in 2022 (A 66% increase in demand).
2. **Incorrect use of appointments** - Patients needing non-urgent blood tests are attending clinics for patients requiring urgent blood tests. As a result, the clinics offering urgent blood tests are experiencing exceptional demand and often vulnerable patients requiring urgent tests are reporting waits of several hours. Patients and GPs are being encouraged to use the non-urgent service. There are approximately 2,000 non-urgent phlebotomy appointments readily available each weekday at clinics across the area. Booking these appointments is a seamless process, either through a dedicated phone line or online whereby patients can view appointment by location on the website map so they can also see where other appointments are in other alternative locations.
3. **Different types of appointment** - There are several different types of appointments, and we encourage patients to understand the difference and book ahead. For example:
 - Non-urgent appointments – These are available at multiple venues and clinics and can be booked in advance.
 - Urgent blood test appointments requested by a GP – These are appointments made by a GP who use the bespoke, GP-dedicated number whereby GPs can book appointments at multiple locations across Basildon and Southend.
 - Same Day Queue/ walk-in appointments – These are for hospital-based patients, but we allow urgent time critical appointments for those patients with urgent GP referrals. These are available at either Basildon or Orsett Outpatient Departments (OPD) and Southend Hospital currently.
4. **Did Not Attend (DNAs)** - A high number of people book appointments but do not attend. For example, our Thurrock clinic has one of the highest level of patients not attending their appointment. However, Pathology First have been actively monitoring appointments and also displaying posters to inform patients about cancelling appointment, and as such the provider has seen a reduction in DNA's from above 8% to currently 6.8%.

Service Overview

With Pathology First releasing the previously held clinic at Thurrock to NELFT, the current offering to the residents within Thurrock is in Orsett, South Ockendon and Corringham. The appointment capacity was held on SwiftQueue for Thurrock has been added to Orsett to ensure there is no net loss of appointments. The current appointment waiting times at these three sites are:

- Orsett (operational Monday – Thursday 7am-7pm and Friday 7am-5pm) – full appointment availability from 7 March – **9 days**
- Corringham (operational Monday-Wednesday 8am-4pm) – full appointment availability from 13 March – **15 days**
- South Ockendon (operational Tuesday 8am-4pm) – full appointment availability from 2 April – **35 days**

The department is pleased to advise that they have not received any recent complaints for this area.

Delays with Appointments

Delays in appointments within Thurrock are now in South Ockendon with an average wait of four weeks. This is contributed by the fact that the current phlebotomy service at South Ockendon Health Centre is operational one day per week.

Pathology First have reached out to South Ockendon Health Centre in an attempt to increase the service provided to two days per week however the health centre are currently not able to offer a further day of service due to lack of room capacity.

Pathology First are also scoping whether there is any opportunity for other locations within this area, however conscious that there are plans for a Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC) in this area and so both the Trust and Pathology First are working together to formalise a plan for a short-term relocation to increase the capacity within South Ockendon until the CDC is operational.

Pathology First are also actively using their call centre to redirect appointments to other local clinics.

Service Developments

In terms of service improvement, Pathology First have seen a positive change in the district recently. With the move of capacity over to Orsett, this clinic continues to provide an effective and resourceful service to patients.

Pathology First can accommodate urgent request walk-ins as well as the Trust's regular patient appointments. The installation of label printer machines on site at Orsett has massively improved the booking in of patients and the phlebotomist's efficiency as well as the overall patient experience.

Plans are focused on opening an extra chair at Orsett Hospital from 7am-7pm, alongside an ongoing focused recruitment drive within the phlebotomy department.