

Thank you to GPs for their commitment during the most challenging of times – but patients must be able to see their doctor the way they want

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Like many Asian parents, my mum always wanted me to be a GP.

When I told her I'd been made Health and Social Care Secretary, she said: "Well, you didn't quite make it to GP, but at least you're working in healthcare!"

In truth, she was only half joking. There's a reason why people such as my mum have such high regard for GPs: their powerful blend of expertise and empathy has made generations of communities happier and healthier.

So I want to say a huge thank you to GPs and their teams across the country for their commitment to patients during the most challenging of times.

I may not have become a GP, but I do want to make it easier for them to do their vital work. Equally, I am committed to making sure patients can see their GP in the way they choose and have a better experience when they do. [The Mail has run an important campaign on this issue.](#)

Working closely with the NHS, we've made a plan for GPs and patients to do just that: it will mean more appointments in the ways people want.

While I'm determined to get us closer to pre-pandemic levels of face-to-face appointments, it is, of course, true that online and telephone consultations are more convenient for many people.

There's no question that telephone and video calls will be a part of the future of general practice. But it cannot be the whole future.

With winter just around the corner, I know GPs are under real pressure: the demand for appointments is high and so is their workload.

So today, I'm announcing a fresh £250 million investment in general practice to boost capacity ahead of the winter, opening up more appointments.

With this money, we will expect GPs to provide clear plans for how they will improve access and deliver more face-to-face appointments, such as offering appointments on evenings and weekends.

By and large, people understand why it's been a difficult time for our GPs: coronavirus (COVID-19) pressures, concerns about infection and reduced space

in waiting rooms have often made the process of getting an appointment more difficult.

While I understand the frustration, violence and abuse towards GPs and their teams will never be tolerated.

GPs and their teams need to feel safe at work, and the NHS is making £5 million available for practices to improve their security measures as part of our plan.

Another way we're going to ensure more time is spent with patients is by spreading the workload.

I want every practice to use the [NHS Community Pharmacy Consultation Service](#), so our brilliant community pharmacists can do more in terms of prescribing.

I'm asking my department to work with the NHS and look at a 'Pharmacy First' scheme for England, so pharmacists can provide treatment for specific conditions such as sore throats, without patients having to go to their GP – building on pilot schemes in England and much as they already do in Scotland.

We also need to measure GPs against clearer standards. The vast majority of GPs are doing brilliant work but, where GPs are not, we have to fix it: it's simply not fair for their patients to suffer in silence.

The challenges in general practice are far from over, but I have every confidence we can meet the difficulties ahead by working together to achieve our common goal – delivering for patients.