

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**Tuesday 28 November 2017**

### **South Tyneside and Sunderland GPs extend winter opening hours to provide evening, weekend and bank holiday appointments**

As the NHS prepares for its annual winter surge, GP surgeries across South Tyneside and Sunderland will be opening their doors for longer, giving more people the chance to access appointments on evenings, weekends and bank holidays.

Year-on-year, hospitals across the North East have seen a steady increase in patients coming into Emergency Departments and Urgent Care Centres seeking help during the colder winter months. Whilst many of these people will need emergency hospital admission, particularly frail older people who are more susceptible to serious illness, thousands of patients could also be more effectively treated elsewhere.

In preparation for winter, NHS South Tyneside and Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) have given extra funding to local GP practices so that they can provide thousands more GP appointments during times when they are most needed by local people.

#### **South Tyneside**

South Tyneside GP practices are offering over 300 additional appointments every week and all 22 practices in the borough are working together in 'hub' arrangements to offer increased access to GP advice during the busiest times. The extra appointments will be available:

- 7am – 8am, Monday to Friday
- 6.30pm – 8pm, Monday to Friday
- Every Saturday and Sunday for a minimum of three hours per day

**The extra GP appointments available are bookable by contacting your usual GP practice in the usual way, or, if it is out of hours, by simply calling the free NHS 111 number which is available 24/7 and you will be directed to the most appropriate available service.**

### **Sunderland**

In Sunderland, extra appointments will be available thanks to practices working together through 'hubs' at Pallion Health Centre, Southwick Health Centre, Riverside Health Centre, Houghton Health Centre and The Galleries. Extra appointments will be available as follows:

- 6pm – 8.30pm, Monday to Friday (in all hubs)
- 9am – 5.30pm on Saturdays at Pallion Health Centre, Riverside Health Centre and Southwick Health Centre
- 9am – 5.30pm on Sundays at Pallion Health Centre and Riverside Health Centre (patients from all over Sunderland can book into these Sunday appointment slots)
- 10am – 2pm on bank holidays (including Christmas and Boxing Day) at Pallion Health Centre and Riverside Health Centre.

**The extra GP appointments available are bookable by contacting your usual GP practice in the usual way, or, if it is out of hours, by simply calling the free NHS 111 number which is available 24/7 and you will be directed to the most appropriate available service.**

Dr Shahid Wahid, Medical Director at South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust, said: "One of the big issues for the NHS during the winter months is managing the sheer influx of people seeking help and who access care via the hospital's emergency department. This is usually when other services have, historically, been closed and is especially true over weekends and bank holidays.

"We are delighted to be working in partnership with our primary care colleagues this winter to help ease some of the burden on busy emergency teams as we know that many of the people arriving at hospital simply do not need to be there. This will allow

us to prioritise and treat those people who have serious or life threatening problems and who really do need hospital-based care.

“If you need urgent help this winter, our simple message for everyone is to call ahead first and before leaving the house by using the free NHS 111 number.”

David Hambleton, chief officer at NHS South Tyneside CCG, said: “Winter is an extremely busy time for all parts of the health service as there are more viruses circulating in communities and the cold weather means more people get ill with things like sore throats, coughs and colds, the flu and upset tummies.

“By extending access to GP advice across the borough and offering more appointments at times that people want them, our aim is to help ease some of the pressure from our emergency care system but most importantly make sure patients get the right advice and help as quickly as possible.

“Most common winter illnesses are best looked after at home with plenty of rest, fluids and over the counter medication available from a local pharmacist – they don’t even don’t even need a GP appointment.

“There is nothing worse than feeling poorly, but I would urge local people to support us in making sure emergency services and urgent GP appointments are kept free for those who really need them

“We are urging people to call NHS 111 first and before accessing services so that we can direct people to the right source of help and advice.”

**ENDS**