



14 October 2020

Sent via email to: alex.stone@parliament.uk

Julia Lopez MP
Member of Parliament for Hornchurch & Upminster

Dear Julia

Thank you for your correspondence dated 23 September 2020 regarding phlebotomy services.

We are aware that our community blood testing services are currently experiencing a high level of demand and that waiting times are longer than we would wish. We have been working with service providers to increase capacity in a safe and timely way.

Prior to the pandemic, Barking, Havering and Redbridge (BHR) had a range of providers across acute, community and primary care providing phlebotomy services/clinics across approximately 53 sites in total.

From March onwards, the focus rightly shifted to enabling providers to respond to the pandemic and to maintain stringent infection protection and control measures. It was therefore agreed in March that BHRUT would temporarily cease to provide community-based phlebotomy as part of the initial Covid-19 response and focus provision of phlebotomy services for priority groups only; inpatients, oncology, haematology, children under 12 and a small number of other patients whose treatment is ongoing and reliant on blood testing.

Other community provision reduced to a smaller number of community sites and all primary care phlebotomy provision (33 clinics) ceased.

As we moved into recovery of services from June, BHRUT was unable to re-open its phlebotomy sites as its staff had been 're-purposed' to support inpatient care and as such could only continue with the limited provision for priority patient groups. In response, the CCGs and its community services and primary care providers worked closely together to rapidly increase capacity by funding additional clinics and staff resources enabling the introduction of a number of new community clinics.

For Havering, this included one new clinic in addition to re-opening four existing clinics, extended opening hours, and setting up a GP practice-based phlebotomy service (to commence early October 2020). The GP practice-based phlebotomy service is not available in all practices and we continue to work with our GP colleagues to bring more practices on line.

Accountable Officer: Jane Milligan
Managing Director: Ceri Jacob
Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge Clinical Commissioning Groups

Chairs:
Dr Jagan John, Barking and Dagenham Clinical Commissioning Group
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Dr Anil Mehta, Redbridge Clinical Commissioning Group



It is also worth noting that the requirement to maintain stringent infection, prevention and control measures has resulted in additional pressure across the system as bleeding times for patients increased from approximately 5 minutes to 10 minutes.

What we have done so far to improve phlebotomy services across Barking, Havering and Redbridge

- **Introduced online booking system**
NELFT launched its online booking system in July 2020, enabling patients to choose and book appointments directly. We have received positive feedback from patients, Healthwatch partners and GPs on the effectiveness of the system. In addition to the online system, patients and practices can also book appointments by telephone to ensure we do not digitally exclude patients without access to technology or where they require support in making an appointment (due to language or disability needs).
- **Implemented fast track priority system for urgent blood tests**
A fast track priority system was put in place in July 2020 for practices to identify and refer patients who require an urgent blood test (in line with the clinically developed criteria) so that providers can proactively contact those patients to arrange blood test appointments. This includes 2-week wait (2WW) cancer referral, cardiac conditions, diabetes, those who require medication reviews and patients at high risk of infections. Currently these patients are being seen within eight days to two weeks of the referral. A new urgent service commenced in Havering week commencing 12 October with a current waiting time of 8 days.
- **Increased phlebotomy capacity/sites**
Most existing and some new additional community sites and clinics are now operational – 17 clinics in total in BHR.
- **Implemented GP practice-based phlebotomy service**
To further support demand and capacity requirements, we have implemented a GP practice-based phlebotomy service to commence from early October 2020 (noting that some services have been live from September). As of 7 October 2020, 52 practices have signed up to provide blood testing from October 2020 including nine GP practices across Havering to provide primary care-based phlebotomy for their patients enabling Havering GP practices to provide blood testing for approximately 54,000 registered patients in Havering.
- **Specialist phlebotomy services (domiciliary)**
Housebound patients are supported by NELFT's domiciliary blood testing service which is operated in line with infection control guidance. Referrals are made by GPs directly to the specialist service.
- **Communicated with stakeholders to keep them updated**
We have developed a communication strategy so that we can continue to update GPs, stakeholders (including Healthwatch), community and voluntary sector groups and patients with the latest service information through a variety of channels.

Establishing phlebotomy services in community settings and getting them up and running means that patients who require non-urgent blood tests are currently facing waits. However, there is still earlier availability at other locations and work is underway to reduce waiting times across our three boroughs. The CCGs continue to work with providers to improve waiting times. All urgent requests are bled within eight days - two weeks of referral as a priority.

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This change in provision is a huge undertaking, but necessary to ensure the best infection and control measures during the covid-19 pandemic. We expect our waiting times to reduce as the new capacity comes on line and clears the backlog.

Waiting times for non-urgent appointments at services in Havering

Site name	Next available appointment slot	Waiting time
Elm Park Clinic	Monday 15 February 2021	Wait - 23 weeks
Harold Hill Clinic	Tuesday 5 January 2020	Wait - 16 weeks
Harold Wood Polyclinic *	Friday 26 October 2020	Wait 4.5 weeks
Long Term Conditions Centre	Friday 4 December 2020	Wait - 16 weeks
Cranham Health Centre	N/A	Currently organising to re-open clinics

I can confirm that in developing BHR practice based Local Incentive Schemes (LIS) we undertook a phlebotomy benchmarking exercise. There are distinct differences to the model we have proposed across BHR from other areas in north east London and this reflects the BHR payment.

GPs are awarded a payment of £3.05 per bleed. This rate reflects that BHR practices are not required to offer extended hours, community locations or transport services. In addition, the CCG is funding all consumables, transport collections for specimens, covering the costs of laboratory processing of samples and offering free phlebotomy training to support practice staff to start the service. However, in recognition of the increased time required there is a north east London (NEL) wide review of phlebotomy LIS payments underway.

I hope this response has been helpful.

Yours sincerely



Ceri Jacob
Managing Director

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