

## Patient update

**Aug. 10, 2022**

Dear patients,

You may be aware that we are facing staffing challenges this summer. We want to assure you that we are here for you. We'd like to review how you can help us going forward. We are writing to share information about phone lines and appointment scheduling, and efforts we are making to manage challenges. Let's discuss some of the following:

- Telephone wait times
- How you can use email bookings
- How you can help

### Phone wait time you may experience phone wait times

Over the next few weeks, you may experience longer wait times when calling us. Call wait times can be as long as 30 minutes. We know how inconvenient that may be. We are working very hard to respond to all of the calls and support your needs.

#### Best times to call

**The lines are less busy mid-morning and mid-afternoon**, with Monday mornings being particularly busy. Please consider this when calling.

If you are calling about a medical emergency, call 911 or proceed to your nearest emergency room.

### How and when to use email bookings

We have re-opened our email booking option, allowing patients to send an email to book a routine appointment. **Please note the response time for an email booking request is 3-5 business days**. Please only email your request once. This helps us to manage volumes of messages and follow up with you.

If you want to book a non-urgent appointment via email, send your request to [FHTBookings@smh.ca](mailto:FHTBookings@smh.ca), and include the following information:

- Name of person the appointment is for
- Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY)
- Telephone Number
- Doctor or Nurse Practitioners Name
- Reason for visit

Email bookings **should not** be used for the following reasons:

- Follow up on test results (*in these cases you should schedule an appointment with your regular doctor or nurse practitioner*)
- Following up with a provider or asking for a call back (*If not urgent, please schedule an appointment. If urgent, please call the clinic and advise that you have an urgent health issue*)
- Asking for a referral (*please book an appointment with your provider*) or prescription renewal (*for renewal of existing medications please ask your pharmacy to fax a request (see below)*).
- An urgent medical concern (*in these cases please call the clinic to advise or if the clinic is closed use our urgent care clinic options*)
- Canceling appointments same day, or if you have not received an expected call from your provider. (*Please call the clinic to advise*)

## How you can help

We know waiting on the phone can be challenging. Here are some ways to avoid long phone wait times.

Book routine appointments in advance

If you need a follow up or routine appointment for an ongoing issue, call to book an appointment in advance. This can include appointments for monitoring chronic health conditions (ex: diabetes or hypertension), cancer screening and preventative health care, follow up for lab and test results, well baby/child visits, and ongoing health concerns.

Consider booking a follow-up appointment before you leave clinic. You can do this with our front desk staff.

*Important to note:*

There may be times that routine appointments with your doctor or nurse practitioner (NP) are being booked several weeks out. If you do not have an urgent concern, we encourage you to book in the next available time with your doctor or NP. If while waiting for your appointment your condition worsens or becomes urgent, please call the clinic back to inform us.

*All physicians, NPs and nurses are available for in-person appointments. You can choose to schedule either a virtual appointment or an in-person appointment. [Click here](#) to view guidance about what types of concerns should be assessed in person.*

Requests for same day Urgent Primary Care

**Our same day access is intended to address urgent health concerns that need to be assessed in the next 24-48 hours.**

When your health concern worsens or is urgent, meaning you need it assessed within the next 24-48 hours, please let us know at the time of your call.

As mentioned above, we encourage all patients to book appointments with their doctor or nurse practitioner first and only use this option when medically needed.

If you have a medical emergency requiring immediate attention, please call 911.

Emails from your care team

If your doctor, NP, nurse or other team member sends you a secure message via

email, please print or save important details, attachments, etc. right away. You will only be able to access the secure message for a couple of days. This will prevent you having to call us asking us to re-send the information.

### Medical forms or notes

If you require medical forms or notes, please do not wait until the day or week before the deadline to connect with us. We will not be able to accommodate these requests in an urgent manner and it could take up to 30 days to complete some medical forms.

### Prescription renewals

Be sure to have enough medication to avoid running out. If you need to renew your prescription, please connect with your pharmacy and have them fax us a prescription renewal. Allow for at least 3-5 days for a prescription renewal request from our team.

We are working on ways to help improve wait times and improve your experience when connecting with our clinics and appreciate your understanding as we do this. We will continue to keep you updated about our phone wait times and appointment booking options.

Take care and be well,

*SMHAFHT Leadership Team*