

# Extended hours – Your Questions Answered

## Why are GPs opposed to extending the hours that practices are open?

GPs aren't necessarily against extending opening hours but we don't believe that the Government's current plan for extending opening hours in the evening or at weekends is the best use of public money, nor will it give patients the service that they want.

Government plans for extended hours will mean:

- No referrals to other parts of the health service. During evenings and weekends, the rest of the NHS is only available for emergency services.
- No access to practice nurse or other members of the healthcare team as they will not be working the extended hours.
- No diagnostic tests, as these services are not available in evening or weekends.
- Problems with blood tests – very few samples can be refrigerated overnight in the practice.
- No guarantee of safety for GPs (or patients) within the practice, as only one doctor may be on duty without full support of other healthcare staff.
- No chaperone to oversee intimate examinations, as only one doctor will be on duty.

As you can see there will not be the comprehensive range of services available at evenings and weekends and the quality of patient care that can be provided will therefore not be to the same standard as that provided during normal hours and this is something which GPs do not want to happen.

In addition, those attending an evening or weekend appointment will:

- Have no guarantee of getting an appointment as they cannot be reserved for those who can only attend at these times (i.e. those who work during the day).
- Have to come back during the day anyway if they need diagnostic testing.

It is important to note that these evening and weekend appointments will be for pre-booked appointments only. If patients need to see a doctor or nurse at these times, but have not booked an appointment in advance, they will still need to call NHS 24.

## Why are GPs angry about the Government's plans for extending opening hours?

- GPs believe first and foremost in delivering quality of care to patients.
- GPs recognise that some patients want to have more access to GP appointments, but the Government's plans will not deliver what patients have been led to expect.
- The Government is not listening to the advice of GPs and is trying to force them to provide a lesser service to patients. If they had worked with GPs we could have come up with a plan that would improve access and would be practical for patients and practices.

## What is the alternative?

Comprehensive extended hours services should be available in areas where there is an identified need or demand. These should be developed locally and be funded with additional resources so that patients get similar levels of service to those available during the day.

If you would like further information on this issue please speak to the staff in your GP practice.

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