

Dr Francis Campbell is a GP Partner at Elm Tree Surgery in Shrivenham, just outside Swindon. As well as this, Francis sits as the Partner Member for Primary Care on the integrated care board.



“It’s no secret that demand for all types of primary care is currently at an all-time high, with patients eager to speak through their health and care concerns with a clinician without delay, and at a time that fits in with their work and home life.

“Offering patients a timely appointment, especially at a convenient time, has always been a challenge, and it is one that is felt by primary care up and down the country.

“Before Covid-19, the vast majority of patient interactions took place within a surgery setting, with only a handful of appointments being carried out in a different format, such as by phone or video call.

“When the pandemic hit, the introduction of social distancing meant things had to change, and had to change quickly.

“Almost overnight, primary care teams had to adapt to providing care in a way that kept patients and staff safe from coronavirus, and that meant embracing new technologies.

“By necessity, appointments via Zoom and telephone became the norm, and most patients told us they enjoyed the convenience of being able to speak to a clinician from their home or place of work.

“A number of patients even said we should have started doing it years ago.

“However, even when faced with the challenge of a global pandemic, it was still extremely important for my colleagues and I to continue providing face-to-face consultations for those whose condition required an in-person review.

“And this approach still stands today.

“Currently, the overwhelming majority of my interactions with patients happen face-to-face, however I now have a proportion of virtual appointments set aside for those who are happy to be seen in this way.

“This level of flexibility supports patients to access medical services while at work and without needing to travel.

“The pandemic accelerated primary care’s move from its traditional model of always seeing patients in surgery to something much more diverse.

“Many practices in the region, including my own in Shrivenham, have commissioned a new digital service called Livi which allows patients to book video appointments with clinicians directly.

“All the patient has to do is download the Livi app to their smartphone or tablet, and arrange an appointment at a convenient time.

“As well as exploring digital opportunities, my practice is making more in-person appointments available outside of traditional working hours.

“We are currently working with our neighbouring practices to set up a Saturday clinic which, when up and running, will allow patients to access routine care, including that which is provided by nurses and other clinicians, at weekends.

“We know many people have extremely busy lives, and we want to remove any barrier that prevents patients from accessing the care they need.

“Primary care is committed to ensuring that patients are able to access care quickly, easily and safely, and we hope these new measures will help to make a difference at this very busy time.”