

Chaperones

We are committed to providing a safe, comfortable environment where patients and staff can be confident that best practice is being followed at all times and the safety of everyone is of paramount importance.

Our fundamental principle is that trust is a critical component in the doctor-patient relationship; as a patient you must be able to trust doctors with your life and health. In most successful doctor-patient relationships a professional boundary exists between doctor and patient and we always seek to protect this.

Our personal list system means you and your GP form a trusting relationship and your GP understands your history, personal life and wishes. If this boundary is breached, this can undermine your trust in their doctor, as well as the public's trust in the medical profession. Therefore at East Quay:

- The safety of patients must come first at all times
- Clinicians will treat patients with dignity
- Good communication with patients is the key to avoiding misunderstandings
- Clinicians will not abuse their professional position

Intimate examinations

Before conducting an intimate examination the doctor or nurse will explain to you what examination is necessary and why, and give you an opportunity to ask questions. This will mean you have a clear idea of what to expect, including any potential pain or discomfort. Please do ask any question you wish and tell the doctor or nurse if you are worried or anxious, or if you don't understand. If possible they will usually give you privacy to undress and will maintain your dignity as much as possible. During the examination they will often offer you reassurance and be courteous.

Chaperones

If you are worried about an intimate examination and would like an impartial observer (a 'chaperone') present these are available at the practice. Occasionally the doctor or nurse will request a chaperone themselves if they feel this is appropriate.

The chaperones will be on your side of the curtain with the doctor or nurse. They are not medically qualified but are familiar with the procedures involved in a routine intimate examination so that they can check that the examination is appropriate. The chaperone will be sensitive and respectful of your dignity and confidentiality. They will be prepared to reassure you if they see signs of distress or discomfort. If they have any concerns during or after the examination they will raise this promptly.

Please tell the receptionist you wish to have a chaperone present when you book your appointment so we can ensure one is available. If you decide you want a chaperone when the consultation has already started, please tell the doctor or nurse before the examination starts. There may be a slight delay before one can be available and, if one is not available, or if you or your doctor is unhappy with the choice of chaperone, a further appointment may be made when a chaperone is available.

in some circumstances a relative or friend of yours may be an acceptable chaperone but we try to avoid this where possible.

Issues Specific to Religion, Ethnicity or Culture

We recognise that the ethnic, religious and cultural background of some women can make intimate examinations particularly difficult. For example, some patients may have strong beliefs that restrict being touched by others. Therefore we try to respect this as much as possible whilst also providing the appropriate examination.

We may not proceed with any examination if we are unsure that you understand due to a language barrier. If an interpreter is available they may be able to double as an informal chaperone. If we are unsure but it is a lifesaving situation we make every effort to communicate with you by whatever means available before proceeding.

Issues Specific to Learning Difficulties/Mental Health Problems

We recognise that patients with learning difficulties or with severe mental health problems may be more vulnerable and may need extra consideration. A careful, simple and sensitive explanation will be given by the doctor or nurse. If an adult patient with learning difficulties or mental health problems resists any intimate examination or procedure, we will interpret as refusing to give consent and we will stop.

For patients with learning difficulties or mental health problems that affect capacity, a familiar individual such as a family member or carer may be the best chaperone.

Home visits

Where you are being seen at home the same principles for offering and use of chaperones apply. Please tell the doctor when they call to arrange the home visit. Where it is appropriate, family members/friends may take on the role of informal chaperone. In cases where a formal chaperone would be appropriate, i.e. intimate examinations, we will usually reschedule the examination to a more convenient location. However, in cases where this is not an option, for example, due to the urgency of the situation, communication with you to ensure you understand what examination is necessary and why is especially important.

If you have concerns

If you ever have any concerns about a Doctor or Nurse's behaviour, or an examination that has been carried out, please contact Rachel Stark, the Practice Manager, immediately. Rachel will investigate your concern sensitively and thoroughly and offer you appropriate support. The appropriate action will be taken depending on the outcome of the investigation.

If we feel you have behaved inappropriately towards a member of our team or knowingly made a false allegation, we will politely and considerately try to re-establish a professional boundary. If this is not possible, then we may remove you from our list.

