



Gosport Medical Centre



# The Willow Group and Gosport Medical Centre are planning to merge: *Your* top questions answered

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We've put together this Question and Answer factsheet to hopefully answer the key questions that you might have.

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Both practices – like all GP surgeries in the country - have been continually exploring how to provide the very best primary care (GP) services that they can to their patients both now and in future, particularly with the ongoing extremely heavy demand for our services. GP partners at GMC approached The Willow Group to suggest a merger which offers exciting opportunities for both existing practices, but, most importantly, should guarantee GMC's long-term sustainability so we can continue to provide the highest-quality services that we can to our patients.

## 2) **Why does Gosport Medical Centre want to merge?**

Working together will offer us the opportunity to create a more resilient service and workforce for all our patients, particularly for the partners of Gosport Medical Centre - who are facing real concerns about the imminent retirement of two key GPs, which will have a significant impact on the number of GP appointments and related services it can offer at a time of national recruitment challenges. GMC relies heavily on GP locums (temporary staff) and fear that there is a real risk of the practice having to close in the next couple of years unless it takes action to safeguard its 13,500 patients and its remaining staff. The merger will provide stability and increased efficiencies, particularly working with The Willow Group, which works in partnership with Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust, a large NHS organisation that has significant resources and infrastructure to support its day-to-day operations.

## 3) **Why is it a good idea for The Willows Group to take on so many new patients, when it has faced its own challenges over GP recruitment?**

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**4) Is it unusual for practices to merge?**

Not at all. There have been a number of other GP practice mergers throughout Gosport and South East Hampshire and nationally in recent years – usually for the same reasons as ours - to ensure the stability of the surgeries involved and their long-term sustainability at a time of considerable challenges and pressure on primary care, and when demand for our GP services has never been greater.

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By pooling our clinical and administrative resources, we will be able to respond more effectively to staffing issues – such as potential shortages caused by holidays or sickness.

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Gosport Medical Centre



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Gosport Medical Centre



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Gosport Medical Centre



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Gosport Medical Centre



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Gosport Medical Centre



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There are no plans to reduce any services. We hope the merger will be able to improve our patient experience. We also hope to make it a seamless transition - so that it will generally be 'business as usual' for most patients of both practices, with patients possibly getting more choice over which building they use to access some services – or one or two specialist services being switched to other buildings.

**11)Are all staff jobs safe?**

Yes. We don't envisage any need to change to staffing levels. The merger will greatly increase job security for current staff at Gosport Medical Centre for reasons explained and it will also lead to an improvement in their terms and conditions of employment, which we hope will further improve retention and future recruitment. The merger will also support all staff development as the increased number of employees will make it easier to free up staff to attend training.

**12)When is the merger taking place?**

We are planning to merge – and to formally join our contracts together – on April 1, 2023, when Gosport Medical Centre will become part of the Willow Group.

**13)Who has agreed to this? Is the decision final?**

Our proposed merger has been approved by our commissioners – the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board, subject to certain conditions, including assurances that our staff, stakeholders and most importantly you, our patients, have been informed and engaged with. Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust will also go through an approval process with their executive board. This Question and Answer factsheet is part of that process. The bottom line is that if GMC does not merge, it faces closure in the future.

**14)Are there any ways we can have our say about this?**

We will be working closely with our respective Patient Participation Groups (who are patients, like yourselves, and your representatives with us). We warmly invite you to take part in an online patient survey which, like this Question and Answer factsheet, is also available on our websites - [www.gosportmedicalcentre.co.uk](http://www.gosportmedicalcentre.co.uk) and [www.thewillowgroup.nhs.uk](http://www.thewillowgroup.nhs.uk).

Once evaluated, we will use your responses from the survey to inform our future planning at the merged practice – and to provide themes for patient drop-in sessions which will be held for you to come and discuss the merger. Hard copies of the survey will also be available at all five of our sites. Please watch this space on our websites for other ways that we plan to engage with you about this proposal, including details of the drop-in sessions.

**Thank you for reading this.**