

PRACTICE CoVID-19 UPDATE – April 13th 2020

Dear Patient

I thought that I would write to you with an update on developments since my last letter. It has only been a few weeks or so but much has changed. I guess that the reality of Covid-19 has now sunk in, and we are much clearer on the sacrifices that we all need to make to conquer this pandemic. We are all aware that this will not happen quickly, and that there will be a lot of damage done to peoples' lives outside of the immediate impact upon health. I would like to remind everyone of the absolute importance of following government guidelines on social distancing and avoiding all non-essential trips outside your homes. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults> . Only by all working together will it be possible to more quickly lighten the current constraints upon of us, and at the same time protect the more vulnerable in our communities.

Thank you : it is always nice to start with a 'thank you'. The issue over the lack of appropriate PPE for front-line workers has become a national one and we are truly grateful for those local businesses and individuals that have donated equipment to the practice. Amongst others, these have included Gayhurst School, Quattro Plant Hire www.quattrouklt.co.uk and Zoe Albright www.firestix.co.uk .

Practice Continuity : we are acutely aware that medical matters will arise over the coming months that are not necessarily related to Covid-19. To that end, the practice is continuing to operate as much as possible within current constraints. With regret, we have had to lock the doors to our premises and access is now only for those patients specifically invited up for a face-to-face consultation. This is to both reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission to other patients, and also to help protect the welfare of our staff. As many will now be aware, we have moved to a system of telephone triaging all surgery contacts. Where appropriate, this is being aided by video consultations (using webcams and a patient's own smart 'phone). Thus far we have been pleasantly surprised with how few patients actually need to be seen at a face-to-face appointment. Many patients have found this way of interacting preferable to a trip to the surgery, especially for relatively minor medical problems. As a reminder for those with online access <https://www.calcotmedicalcentre.co.uk/doitonline.aspx>), it is still possible to book telephone triage appointments online (although please understand if we are not always able to call you back at the precise booked time). I would also like to remind everyone that a number of our staff are now working remotely and so please understand if any call back that you receive is from a withheld number.

Local Hospital Services : understandably our local hospitals have significantly changed the way in which they are now working and this obviously has an impact upon what we are able to offer our patients. These changes have included:

- Limited phlebotomy at Chalfont & Gerrard Cross Hospital (Amersham and Wexham Park phlebotomy services are still operating normally at present).
- No / limited access to routine x-ray facilities in all local hospitals. Urgent requests are still being processed (where approved after discussion with the department).
- Routine hospital outpatient appointments are nearly all being either cancelled or else carried out remotely by telephone. No new routine outpatient referrals are being accepted.
- The local musculoskeletal service 'MuslC' (which is responsible for physiotherapy provision, joint injections etc) has stopped all face-to-face interactions. Where possible, they are advising patients remotely, or else providing self-help literature to patients.
- Routine breast and cervical cancer screening services have been suspended.

Please be reassured that the intention of all these measures is not to limit treatment for more serious medical issues such as cancers or urgent heart problems etc but to free up capacity for Covid-19.

Repeat Prescriptions : the processing of these is largely unaffected from the practice perspective. Please continue to make requests via 'online access'. Where this is not possible, we will currently accept requests by e-mail or by telephone. To make things as easy as possible for everyone, we are trying to issue 2 months of regular medication where possible. As a further reminder, please only request medication that you need now - stockpiling of medication by patients has meant that there is now a real shortage of some, including inhalers for our regular asthma and COPD patients.

Hot Hubs : at the time of writing, we expect to hit the peak of the current pandemic in the coming week or so. The CCG is establishing a 'Hot Hub' for patients with potential Covid-19, and who need to be seen face-to-face by a medical professional. Please note that this will not be for all patients with symptoms of potential Covid-19 – the vast majority of these will be asked to self-manage their symptoms at home. Instead, it will be to assess those patients who may have slightly more severe symptoms, and who may need further management in hospital. The nearest site for our practice area will be at the Urgent Treatment Centre in Wycombe Hospital and appointments there will initially ONLY be accessible via the 111 service. **It is therefore important to understand that 111 is your first port of call if you need further help with symptoms of Covid-19** <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/>. This will then allow local surgeries to focus on medical problems that are not related to the pandemic. It is also important to understand that the 'Hot Hub' will NOT (as yet) offer a testing service for Covid-19.

'Extremely Vulnerable' Patients : the government have identified specific categories of patients who are particularly at high risk should they get Covid-19. The full details can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>. These patients need to 'shield' themselves at home for 12 weeks and have very limited contact with others. The process of identifying this cohort of patients is still ongoing and I am aware that the government have already written to many that are affected. I also understand that further letters are still being sent out. As a practice, we have been working with guidelines given to us (which have been updated more than once) to help produce a final list of affected patients - we ask you to bear with us in this process. If you feel that you should have received a letter and have not done so, then please register for extra support online <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>.

Volunteer Help : the government has now suspended seeking volunteer help due to the overwhelming interest shown. Many local communities have set up their own service to help those most in need, and I am truly grateful to all those involved. There is a national database for all such local volunteer groups which can be found at <https://covidmutualaid.org/>. One such service that operates locally can be found here <https://m.facebook.com/gxsupportgroup/>. Where needed, patients can now ask for volunteer help at <https://www.goodsamapp.org/NHSreferral>. I understand that the submitted form creates an alert on the 'phones of local volunteers who can then put themselves forward to help.

On a closing note, I am grateful to the many individuals who have shown their appreciation for OUR NHS, both at community and at hospital level. This truly does make a difference to keep us going through these difficult times. We are trying to keep the service running for all of you, but at the same time ensuring that those in greatest need are prioritised. I hope that my next update will start to bring better news and a resumption to more normal service levels. In the meantime, please re-read my first paragraph which emphasises all that is important to do right now.

Kind regards

Dr. Gurjit S. Dhesi

13/04/2020