

# NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2021

Dear Patient

A lot has happened since I last wrote to you with a practice update and so I thought that I would pen a few words to bring everyone up to speed. The pandemic has continued and unfortunately the bad news continues to flow. Nationally, lots of questions are being asked about the impact of lockdown and the Covid-19 vaccination programme but, perhaps what's more helpful to you, is to explain what's happening more locally.

**Covid-19 vaccination** : The Allan Practice is one of three local practices that work collaboratively under the umbrella of The Chalfonts Primary Care Network (PCN). The Covid-19 vaccination programme is being run by this PCN and has been set up at the Chalfont & Gerrards Cross Hospital. (On a side note, I am delighted that this often forgotten community resource has served us so well at this time of great need.) With a lot of hard work from so many (much of it on a voluntary basis and on weekends / evenings), we have been able to get our site up and running much ahead of most others. I am proud to say that we were the first site vaccinating in the whole of Buckinghamshire and nationally, one of seven 'pilot' PCN's chosen to explore care home vaccination. You will all have read about the complicated logistics around the handling of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine but we have nevertheless cracked on apace to protect our most vulnerable. Moving forwards, we are now sharing the hospital site with other local PCN's on an alternate week basis but are hopeful that we will ultimately be able to deliver the vaccine from our own practice premises (at least for the Astra Zeneca–Oxford one). Whilst this is not the place to detail issues outside of our control, it is fair to say that there have been times when we have been ready to vaccinate but have otherwise been held back by supply or site issues. Hopefully these issues can be eliminated going forwards.

A pressing question for many of you will be when you will get a first dose of the vaccine. The government has clearly set out the priority groups to receive the vaccine and these can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-care-home-and-healthcare-settings-posters/covid-19-vaccination-first-phase-priority-groups>. Thus far, we have successfully vaccinated most in Priority Risk Groups 1 & 2 and are currently working through those in Priority Risk Groups 3 & 4. Please be aware that, in the interests of fairness, we are strictly adhering to the above guidance. There is therefore no 'special case' or other exception that your GP can make to move you up this priority list. We have had lots of patient enquiring along these lines, or else asking when they will receive the vaccine. I would ask you to please avoid doing so. I can assure you that you will not be forgotten, or otherwise miss an invitation to receive the vaccine. Work time is particularly precious for all at present and we really need to preserve as much of this as possible to allow us to focus on delivering 'normal' patient care alongside delivering the vaccination programme.

Some of those who received their first dose were also given a date for their second dose. You will be aware that the government changed its guidance after vaccine delivery first commenced and that the interval between doses has now been set at 12 weeks for both of the currently available vaccines. The reasons for this can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-from-the-uk-chief-medical-officers-on-the-prioritisation-of-first-doses-of-covid-19-vaccines> I know that there has been much debate about this policy and the science behind it. I also know that some areas of the country are ignoring this advice and offering a second dose at a shorter interval. Here is not the place to debate these issues but, suffice to say, we are adhering to this government guidance. I feel that a national crisis is not the time for individuals to freely adopt their own local policies. I know that many of you will be disappointed to have not received your second dose as

originally promised but I hope you will understand the correctness in us following national guidance. Should the guidance be changed again then we will, of course, adapt accordingly. Again, please be reassured that you will not be forgotten for the second dose when we are able to offer it. Our delivery, recording and recall systems are robust and fair.

**Covid-19 infection** : There will now be very few people around who will not know of a close relative or friend who has had Covid-19, some more severe than others. Sadly, some of you will have lost loved ones to this awful disease. All of this may heighten your own anxieties should you get Covid-19 yourself. There is much excellent guidance already available online but I would like to highlight this one published by NHS England : [https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/12/C0719\\_COVID-Isolating-at-Home-Safety-Netting-Leaflet-Revised-FINAL-171220.pdf](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/12/C0719_COVID-Isolating-at-Home-Safety-Netting-Leaflet-Revised-FINAL-171220.pdf) You will note the frequent mention of pulse oximeters and I would strongly encourage all households to, at minimum, have access to one. They can be bought cheaply in local pharmacies or online for around £20. Pulse oximeters, coupled with a thermometer (ear ones are probably easiest) and perhaps a blood pressure monitor, allow you to monitor your illness more objectively. They will also help any professional from whom you may need to seek any advice.

Once you are coming out the other side of the infection, there will be many questions about how you feel and what you can do to help yourself. It is now becoming increasingly clear that full recovery from Covid-19 can be a very prolonged process for some patients. Obviously a better understanding of this is developing but there is much useful information that can be found here <https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/OH-090.20-Post-COVID-Leaflet.pdf>

**How We Are Working** : I want to start by emphasising that we have continued to offer 'routine' medical care through this whole pandemic. Please do not delay in seeking medical advice when necessary but, in particular, if you have ongoing unusual symptoms that you have not previously discussed with your doctor. We are particularly anxious that we do not miss serious illness underneath the veil of Covid-19.

Most of you that have used our service over the last few months will now be familiar with our current modus operandi but please allow me a quick reminder. Due to the need to still minimise the risk of spreading Covid-19, we are still unable to offer 'routine' face-to-face consultations. All patient contacts are initially by telephone, in most cases by your own registered GP. In the vast majority of cases, any issues can be safely addressed during this call but, where a face-to-face consultation is deemed necessary, then the triaging doctor can book this. This whole process may be supported by patient-submitted photographs or video consultations as necessary. I am aware that many of you miss the opportunity to see your own doctor in Calcot but we do think that this current system is generally serving its purpose well. I can assure you that it is kept under constant review. The preferred way of booking appointments is either through Patient Access <https://www.patientaccess.com/> or else via AskNHS <https://www.sensely.com/asknhs/> (requires registration). You can also call to your doctor's secretary to book an appointment if necessary. <https://www.calcotmedicalcentre.co.uk/our-staff>. Please also remember that simple queries can often be addressed by using 111 <https://111.nhs.uk/>, AskNHS or other community resources (pharmacies, optician etc). Please also refer to my earlier newsletters from last year where I have discussed using these services in more detail.

**Repeat Prescriptions** : A quick reminder that the preferred way of requesting repeat prescriptions is via Patient Access. If you have not already registered for the service or downloaded the app then details can be found here : <https://www.patientaccess.com/> The only alternative to this is a request in writing, addressed to your doctor's secretary. Should your request be for non-regular medication, you can also send an online message via Patient Access.

**Premises** : For the time being, our surgery doors remain closed in order to minimise footfall and consequent spread of infection. Should you be asked to visit the building then please remember to wear a face mask and to maintain a social distance. A video entry phone has now been installed to the left of the main doors. Please use this to call reception. You will be allowed into the building as necessary for a confirmed appointment, or if you are collecting any paperwork etc.

**Staff Changes** : I would like to highlight a few recent and planned staff additions that you may come across in the course of accessing services through us.

Firstly, we are delighted to welcome Jorgo Nikollo who is also working privately in the village with Apex Physio. Jorgo has been operating with us as a 'First Contact Practitioner' and is available on Thursday mornings and Friday afternoons. He is trained to directly assess new musculoskeletal problems that have not been first screened by a doctor or nurse. This might be for anything from back pain to knee pain, or indeed any other joint pain. Please be reassured that Jorgo is fully trained to identify any 'red flags' so that a more serious problem is not missed. I would encourage you to use him – he is usually available with no wait and you can book to see him either online (preferred) or via your doctor's secretary.

Secondly, we have recently been joined by Raj Bhamra. Raj is a clinical pharmacist and will be helping all the doctors to monitor prescribing. This will ensure that the risk of medication errors is minimised, whilst at the same time ensuring appropriate safety monitoring where necessary. Raj will work over five days each week and you may end up speaking to or seeing Raj in the context of medication reviews. He will also be helping us expand eRD (Electronic Repeat Dispensing) in the practice, about which in due course.

Finally, next week we are looking forward to welcoming Madiha Moghul to our practice. Madiha is a new breed of professional called a Physician's Associate that the NHS will be seeing more of over time. She is trained to deal with the full range of medical problems that the doctors already see and will be closely overseen by them. From time to time, you may find yourself seeing or speaking to her. Madiha will be working over four days each week.

**Kindness** : I know that I mentioned this at the start of the pandemic but I just wanted to throw in a quick reminder about some of the lessons that we have perhaps learnt. The virus is not selective. We are all the same susceptible human beings. Please remember to be considerate for each other, and to keep an eye out for those who are perhaps that little bit more vulnerable than you might be.

I write this letter as I watch Joe Biden being inaugurated as the 46<sup>th</sup> US President. Without becoming too political, many Americans will see this as a sign of fresh and happier times ahead. Likewise, I see the rapid rollout of Covid-19 vaccination, coupled with the passing of peak winter pressures, will allow a much free-er and safer later part of 2021. In the meantime, it remains essential for us to follow all the rules of national lockdown <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home#summary-what-you-can-and-cannot-do-during-the-national-lockdown>. I know it can be so easy to think that a small shortcut does not matter, but a collective effort by all will allow us to move back to a semblance of normality more quickly and prevent the NHS getting stretched beyond breaking point. It may not be the end but better times are now in sight.

Kind regards

Dr. Gurjit S. Dhesi

22/01/2021