

NEWSLETTER – AUGUST 2020

Dear Patient

I thought I would write to update you on what is happening at The Allan Practice and the significant impact that Covid-19 is still having upon our practice, and on the way in which we are working. The official guidance for those who need to 'shield' may be at an end (for now) but there is the ever-present talk of a 'second wave' of Covid-19 that we all need to be watchful for.

Premises : most of you will know by now that the doors of the medical centre remain closed and that we are only seeing patients where face-to-face assessment is necessary. This is all in an effort to minimise the potential spread of Covid-19 and in line with given advice. Some quick reminders if you need to attend the medical centre - please remember to bring your own face mask, do not use the self-check-in screen and strictly adhere to social distancing guidelines in the waiting room. I had hoped that guidance would allow us to re-open our doors very soon, but I fear this is looking less likely now whilst the threat of a 'second wave' persists.

Booking Appointments : please always consider the option of speaking to an alternative healthcare professional if your concern is of a simple nature - the local pharmacists are all excellent and can often deal with your concerns. Minor injuries will be more smoothly managed by the Urgent Treatment Centre at Wycombe Hospital or the Minor Injuries Unit at Mount Vernon Hospital. The first point of contact for anyone who does need to see their GP continues to be by telephone. We are strongly encouraging all patients to book such appointments online, rather than via your doctor's secretary. Please bear in mind that our staffing capacity is reduced at present due to those who have been shielding, or who are otherwise absent due to Covid-19 related issues. Online booking frees up more time for our remaining staff and would be very much appreciated and helps to reduce the burden on our sometimes-overwhelmed telephone system. There are two ways of booking appointments online – **Emis Patient Access** and **AskNHS** (see below).

Emis Patient Access : many of you will already have an account to use this service but, if not, instructions can be found here <https://www.patientaccess.com/>. As well as allowing online booking of appointments, Emis Patient Access allows ordering of repeat prescriptions, securely messaging your own doctor or his/her secretary, viewing the results of your investigations and viewing any hospital letters or other communications. You may even be able to view what your doctor has written about you! I am certain that most of you have not yet realised this full potential and I would strongly encourage you to all to set up an account. Help us to help you.

Sensely AskNHS : this is something that we are currently trialling and I envisage will be particularly helpful for those who are unsure whether to speak to their doctor or to see someone else. This also needs account set-up – the AskNHS app can be downloaded to your device from here <https://www.sensely.com/asknhs/>. Alternatively you can access this via the 'Check Symptoms' widget on the bottom right of our website. <https://www.calcotmedicalcentre.co.uk/>. In essence, this is a triage service that asks you a series of questions. If followed correctly, AskNHS will either give you access to our appointment book, or otherwise it may signpost you somewhere else more appropriate or provide you with self-help advice. This will ensure that you are using the service that is most appropriate for your medical needs. Again, help us to help you.

GP Telephone Triage : we are trying to retain a 'personal doctor' service as much as possible as we know how much most of you value this. Where possible, the call back that you receive will be from your own GP but please be aware that this may not always be at the precise booked time (although we will always try to abide by any specific requests), and many times may even be earlier. Please also be aware that the call may originate from a 'withheld number' as we are sometimes working from home to minimise contact / infection risk between each other. Where helpful, you may be invited to participate in a video consultation, or else to submit pictures of your condition beforehand.

Chronic Disease Management : the last few months have really shaken up how we run our GP practice, but we remain mindful that healthcare is not solely about Covid-19. We are wary that other

illnesses must not be neglected, including the monitoring of chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma / COPD and heart disease, as well as many others. Please be reassured that we continue to offer safe monitoring for these conditions, although social distancing requirements do not always allow us to work as normal. Often you will be sent requests for monitoring blood tests via a text message, or otherwise be asked to provide data such as BP readings, weight etc. Some reviews may be via a video consultation. Many of these initiatives may continue to be useful post-pandemic – please bear with us whilst we explore the various options that newer technology allows us.

Improving Cancer Diagnosis : although the numbers have improved, international studies still show that the UK needs to improve its performance in the early detection of cancers. As a practice, I am pleased to say that our outcomes are well above the UK national average, and our also better than other local practices. I am convinced that this is down to the personal list system that we operate, allowing us to know our own patients well and hence provide proper continuity of care. Nevertheless, there is no room for complacency and we would like to further improve our performance. One area that has been highlighted is the sub-optimal uptake to national cancer screening programmes, specifically for breast, bowel and cervical cancers. I would like to remind you all of how important it is to take up these invites promptly as it will allow us to pick up any problems early. Whilst you may get a reminder, often you will not do so until the next round of screening.

GP Patient Survey : I am delighted to see that this recently published annual survey once again showed that our general approval ratings remain very high. The full results can be found here <https://www.gp-patient.co.uk/report?practicecode=K82078> and allows a comparison with other GP practices.

Practice Equipment Fund : over the years we have often been approached by patients asking if they could fund the purchase any medical equipment for us. Such offers are always welcome and should anyone wishing to help then please contact our Practice Manager kate.barber@nhs.net. At present we are targeting the purchase of a new Doppler machine which is used to assess circulatory problems and will cost around £2.5K.

GP Registrars : we are delighted to welcome back GP Registrars to our practice after a short hiatus. Both Dr. Rizwana Shaffiq and Dr. Joshua Balogen-Lynch will be with us for one year and are well down the path to becoming fully trained GP's ('ST3's in medical training jargon). Some of you may have already previously met Dr. Shaffiq as she returns to us after her maternity leave.

'Flu Vaccines : many of you will be aware of the real fear of having to deal with a 'second wave' of Covid-19 alongside an influenza epidemic over the coming winter. As such, the government has announced plans to widen the eligibility for a 'flu vaccine this year, including to those aged from age 50 upwards (although immunising this cohort will be delayed until November and subject to supplies). Please understand that the logistics of managing a normal 'flu vaccination programme is anyway no easy feat and that this year will really test how far we can stretch. That said, we are currently finalising plans to deal with the expected increased numbers, whilst at the same time trying to maintain social distancing requirements. It may be that we will have to think 'outside the box' with initiatives such as vaccinating people in the car park. Please bear with us if such slightly unusual arrangements are in place for this year, or if things do not seem as smooth as usual. Nearer the time we may also need volunteers for such tasks as marshalling the car park or helping other patients complete any consent paperwork – please let us know by e-mail if you might be available.

On a closing note, I have to say that the overwhelming majority of patients have been incredibly supportive of the new way in which we are working, and I am extremely grateful for this. There remains much uncertainty over which direction this illness will take, and how we all react to it as a society. Things always work much better if everyone works together and I ask you all to remember that in the coming weeks and months.

Kind regards

Dr. Gurjit S. Dhesi