

**Autumn Newsletter**

Covid has been part of our lives for over 18 months and we’ve had to cope, as patients, with many things, such as shielding, lockdowns, vaccinations, face masks etc.

When needing an appointment we’ve had triaging, phone consultations, video consultations and sometimes a face -to -face appointment.

We would like to know what has been going on behind the scenes at the surgery, so we’ve asked Justin Cankalis, the Practice Business Manager to clarify some things for us.

**Is the surgery open?**

Yes, and we have been throughout the pandemic. However, we needed to restrict access to the surgery for the safety and welfare of fellow patients and staff. Therefore we, along with other NHS organisations took the decision to close our front doors to prevent open access and to reduce the risk of Covid-19 infection within the practice. Patients with pre-booked appointments gained access by one of the side doors.

**If a patient phones up for an appointment please can you explain what will happen?**

Based on patient and staff feedback we knew we needed to change the access process that was previously in place i.e. appointments were offered on a first come first serve basis and not on medical needs, therefore often by early morning all face to face appointments had been allocated meaning those patients that genuinely needed to see a clinician had to be booked into emergency appointments.

To combat this over the last couple of years we have been building a ‘Duty Team’. This team is built from a mixture of GPs, Advanced Nurse Practitioners and Pharmacists. Now when a patient calls, the receptionist takes a brief reason for the call and places it onto a list (known as a triage list). The Duty Team then call every patient back on that list that day and those who need to see a clinician are given an appointment usually that day. We can also liaise with patients via text and video call, this has proven instrumental during the lockdown phases. We also created a dedicated email address for patients to email us their prescription requests to avoid the need to post their prescription. Please note for safety and security reasons we are unable to take prescription requests over the telephone. However, some patients have realised that calling into the surgery with routine conditions near to 18:30 means they will get a call back quickly. We are mindful of this change in approach and will be working on a process to avoid an influx of late calls just for convenience.

**Are you finding the facility whereby patients can take a photo of what is troubling them, eg. wart, mole, bruise, marks on body etc and send it via a link to the surgery, is popular and working well?**

Yes. Previously these patients would have needed to be seen face to face, often at the inconvenience of the patient (working, child care, mobility etc) and this could have taken up a valuable appointment that a patient with urgent needs would have needed.

The photo/text facility is closely monitored and has strict governance procedures surrounding it, therefore patients can feel secure that any pictures they send are dealt with in strict confidence and are only seen by a clinician.

**What about patients who don’t have online access or a smart phone?**

For patients who did not have access to a smart phone we took a more traditional approach and invited them into the surgery or visited them. We also worked closely with family members who did have access and structured our appointments around them. This was in part why we restricted access to the surgery, i.e. so we could protect our most vulnerable patients from contracting Covid or other ailments.

Also, during the early stages of lock down, demand did drop off so we used this time to proactively contact our housebound patients (letter and telephone call) to check on their welfare and to inform them of food delivery options that the local council had set up.

**What percentage of appointments are face to face?**

Whilst simple to answer, there needs to be some back ground surrounding it. Due to our new system the vast majority of contacts are now made via the telephone, therefore this will affect the percentage of face -to -face appointments. We are also using the text and photo system, especially with the young/middle aged generation, so again the number of face- to- face appointments will appear to have reduced. We also need to take into account our Nursing team that see many pre-booked patients with chronic diseases and a high number of Phlebotomy patients.

If we take a typical Monday, we could receive around 170 inbound triage cases and we see around 145 patients face to face (across the whole surgery), meaning an average of 85% of cases are seen face to face. This figure is inflated due to pre-booked appointments with our nursing team, none the less they account for actual appointments.

As a foot note: West Sussex had an average face-to face appointment rate of 63.8%, the highest rate for a CCG in the region (which had an average of 55.1%) and the 16th highest rate nationally (out of 106 CCGs)

**How many extra hours have the doctors, nurses and other staff had to work on an average day during the pandemic to cope with extra demand for appointments, Covid cleaning regulations, etc.?**

This question is difficult to quantify as the main increase in the number of hours worked were due to cover required due to Covid infections, staff isolation and the organisation and running of the Covid clinics. As our partners are not salaried or paid overtime, their hours were not logged in the normal way. Also as an example it was not uncommon for many of us to work 13 hours a day, 6 days a week when we started the Covid Vaccination clinics. Our cleaners were excellent and accommodated late and early starts depending on day of the week and what clinics were happening. We transformed our meeting room into a Hot Hub Room where we could see patients that potentially had Covid if they had other ailments that needed addressing. We placed a temporary wipe clean floor over the meeting room carpet and adapted it to meet all health and safety requirements.

Six of our team contracted Covid-19, we like to think this number is low because of the strict infection control and social distancing measures we put into place. None the less having 4 team members fewer, and a number of staff having to isolate due to coming into contact with positive cases meant that many of us had to work additional hours to ensure the surgery could operate. At no stage did the surgery close or stop working throughout the pandemic.

As you may be aware we volunteered the Strand Surgery to be a local Vaccination Centre for Worthing, this required hours of planning and multiple inspections by the NHS as well as the hours spent running the Covid clinics. But this was one of the most rewarding experiences I and my team have ever participated in. The patients were most grateful, they bought us boxes of chocolates and other gifts as a thank you and we received hundreds of thank you letters and cards, this truly kept the team going.

**What was the Strand Medical’s biggest success during the pandemic?**

There have been a number of success stories that we are very proud of, from running very successful Covid clinics for the population of Worthing to keeping up spirits and retaining the workforce during this worldwide pandemic. I would also like to thank my team for adapting to ever changing requirements at the drop of a hat. Often, we would find out what we were doing tomorrow after a government public announcement the night before. This truly stretched the team but I am extremely proud of their ability to adapt and respond as quickly as they did.

**We notice that two of the team are Advanced Nurse Practitioners. What are Advanced Nurse Practitioners and what are they qualified to do?**

Advanced Nurse Practitioners have obtained at least a master’s degree in nursing, and usually with further specialisations. They can work autonomously and are often more specialised in Women’s Health. The majority can prescribe medication and due to regular training updates, that can often be a point of call for many ailments and care pathways guidance. Depending on their levels of training and qualifications, Advanced Nurse Practitioners can see and treat virtually every patient.

**When will we get our flu jabs and booster vaccinations?**

FLU - As you may know due to haulage challenges, there was a national delay in the delivery of this year’s flu vaccine, hence we (and others) have had to start our programme later in the year. We purposely held back clinics until we had received delivery of the flu vaccine, which is just as well as it was further delayed. We are delighted to say that the programme is now underway and our first flu clinic was on the 25th September.

BOOSTERS – This week the Government has approved plans for COVID-19 boosters for eligible groups. Over the coming weeks our teams will now start offering booster jabs to people in eligible groups as the vaccination programme moves to the next stage.

The same priority groups will be offered the boosters in phases. This means care home residents, health and social care workers, people aged over 50, those aged 16 to 49 years with underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of severe COVID-19, adult carers, and adult household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals will be offered a booster.

Vaccines will be delivered through existing vaccination sites. We have been asked to prioritise care home residents and staff ensuring they are offered a vaccine by the beginning of November.

Patients DO NOT need to contact us to arrange their booster vaccine, our team will be in touch when they become eligible for the jab. Patients will get a call or text from us or IPC (our booking agents) to make an appointment, or will be invited by the National Booking Service, which will start issuing invitations from next week.

Booster jabs are effective for topping up protection for people who have had both of their jabs from at the very least six months on after their second dose.

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**Do look at the u-tube video on the surgery home page called “Why can’t I get an appointment with a GP?**

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**Useful websites**

<https://adur-worthing.westsussexwellbeing.org.uk>

This is your local Wellbeing Service which can help you to find out about local wellbeing services and information about stopping smoking, prediabetes, being active, wellbeing at work etc.

[www.nhs.uk/better-health/](http://www.nhs.uk/better-health/)

Whether you want to lose weight, get active or quit smoking, there are lots of free tools and help on this website.