

School Lane Surgery

Patient Reference Group (PRG)

(Condensed)

Thursday 22nd July 2021

This evening we had the pleasure of Dr Jon Bryson's company, and he was able to give us a front-line perspective of how the practice is coping with all that the pandemic has brought us.

1. Previous minutes

No issues were raised concerning the previous minutes.

2. Covid-19 update

The vaccination clinic has performed extremely well and there is now just a low number of second doses to be administered before the job is done. The surgery is now waiting to hear from the government about the likelihood of a booster jab being required, probably in the autumn, where vulnerable groups, the over 50's and children over 12 years of age will get priority.

The Did Not Attend rate among younger patients has been disappointing, though there has been no large-scale refusal to have the vaccination. There is no clear reason why people are reluctant to attend the vaccination clinic and the much-publicised potential side effects are extremely rare.

Thetford has not done badly in the pandemic and though Covid infections are now rising, East Anglia figures remain low. The surgery continues to encourage the wearing of masks in shops and other crowded places, and recommends people still practice social distancing.

The General Medical Council has received complaints about the compulsory wearing of a mask when visiting a GP surgery, which was upheld, but the surgery can still ask patients to wear a mask if not insist.

Winter cold symptoms are already beginning to appear and the surgery is trying to ensure that vulnerable patients are made aware that they should still have the flu jab when it becomes available.

We are all, even the experts, still learning about the behaviour and long-term effects of Covid, especially as new variants have appeared and then shown themselves to be more virulent than the last. Long-Covid is a condition that does not seem to affect everybody who has tested positive for the virus.

Covid isn't what it was and there is not as many infections as people seem to think, locally at least. The take up of the vaccine has been low with some social groups, down to age or ethnicity mostly, and these groups are being encouraged by the Clinical Commissioning Group get vaccinated and help to keep the number of infections manageable.

There is always going to be an issue with some patients that feel they should have their second (booster) jab before it is due, especially if they have booked a holiday and are due to leave, but the absolute minimum gap between vaccinations is 8 weeks and this is non-negotiable.

3. Staffing

This evening we welcomed Jenny, a Clinical Pharmacist, who is now working from School Lane. Jenny has a considerable amount of training behind her and GP's will look to her for advice on drugs; their effects and frequency of dose etc.

4. Footfall

The surgery is under considerable pressure as the number of patients asking for help has risen, and is continuing to rise. Some staff members have been pinged by the NHS App and they have been told to isolate at home, so are not able to work.

The surgery is trying to prioritise footfall and get people to use the website more by making it slightly easier to use, though this is easier said than done.

The surgery is not trying to limit access but asks patients who feel they have an urgent need to be seen to ring NHS 111, which has a call-back service and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

5. Complaints, Significant Events & Compliments

There have been some problems with prescriptions via the website and the online forms have now been stopped, which means patients will now have to use the NHS App or SystmOnline to make a request.

Some patients have said that it is confusing when so many medications are issued in differing sizes, as some pills come in packs of 28 while others come in 30's, and it can mean more visits to the pharmacy to collect prescriptions than is convenient. The pharmacy can issue a couple of extra pills upon request, but this will probably be necessary with each repeat request.

6. Other Business

- a) The list of outstanding minor surgeries is not bad considering the difficulties posed by the pandemic, though it is taking a little longer to be seen at the moment. It is not feasible to speed things up and the surgery is grateful for everybody's patience.

Hospitals are doing their best to catch up but are rightly prioritising cancers.

- b) Staff having to self-isolate has affected the surgery and we are waiting for the government to bring in an exemption list, in the hope this will improve the situation.
- c) The hypertension clinic is monitoring blood pressures at home, which regularly gives better results as there is less stress involved and patients are in a more relaxed environment.
- d) This GP Practice has one of the highest blood test tallies, which can be seen as good or bad, but it is felt our patients are getting the best attention. There has been an increase in the number of false positives and patients are encouraged to eat as healthily as they can, and also do some physical exercise. In the vast majority of cases there is no need to be concerned unless symptoms are showing.
- e) Earwax: this is a contractual issue and it is hoped that the West Suffolk Hospital will be providing a service in the Healthy Living Centre at some point: we have been waiting 2 years, so far!
- f) Physiotherapy will be returning to the Healthy Living Centre, though it is run from Wymondam. Advice is given over the phone from the Norfolk base and patients can choose where they wish to be seen. If an X-Ray is required then this will have to be done in Norfolk as that is where diagnosis has taken place.
- g) Dental services: dental services are provided on a fee basis and it is up to individual dentists to say whether they are prepared to treat NHS patients. There has been much in the news about a general lack of dentists prepared to do this and the government needs to address this issue before it becomes a full-blown crisis.
- h) Since prescriptions were lowered from a 2 months' supply to just the one, it has seen a reduction in losses, and it seems the less patients have at home the better. This arrangement will not be altering.
- i) The experiment to merge alliance surgery patient groups has not worked out well, though it was worth trying, the individual groups have different vibrancies and though staff are able to work together, we found that patients can have a very different experience.
- j) And finally, Dr Bryson told us that the practice very much appreciates the Patient Group and is looking forward to lots more feedback on issues. We discussed the topic of new members and agreed this an aim to strive for, though it is easier said than done, as time has shown us. Those in work should know that joining us would be good for their CV, and perhaps schools could be approached to find out if the more senior pupils might be interested in having a discussion about their healthcare.

Dr Bryson was thanked for coming to see us, and being able to give us a comprehensive view of how things are going at the surgery.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday 16th June, 7 pm at School Lane Surgery