

## Circular email/briefing note to Northway PPG members



### **Hello PPG members – long time, no see!**

In my email circular to Northway PPG members in July I said I would follow up with information from Dr Pritchard about the surgery, and any other news that I have from CCG and other health sources that I think PPG members may be interested to know.

### **Surgery Staff:**

#### **New GPs, Registrars, Medical Student Placements and other Staffing**

Dr Pritchard has provided me with the following update:

“I'm pleased to report that we have employed Dr Achhabra and Dr Ahmed (our last 2 training doctors) as salaried doctors. They will be working for us part-time.

We have also been joined by two new training doctors, Dr Javed Khan and Dr Puranik.

The other piece of staff news is that Sue Bytheway will be retiring at the end of September. The surgery has yet to decide on how we're going to replace her.”

With regard to Sue's retirement, in normal circumstances I'm sure we would have organised a card and small token gift from PPG but I really don't know how to go about this in the current situation where I can't even leave a card and collection envelope at reception for PPG members to pop in and sign, and also given that Sue is working from home ... perhaps you can send your own individual messages to Sue that the surgery can pass on to her?

### **New Ways of Working:**

The surgery will continue to be 'closed' to general walk in access, but patients are still being 'seen'. All appointments are made following an initial telephone triage – where the patient calls the surgery and provides information to the receptionist who has been trained to undertake an initial triage assessment of the nature and urgency of the problem. Appointments with a GP may be offered as telephone consultation, video consultation, personal visit to the surgery for the patient to be seen in person, or a home visit by the GP to the patient if this is the most appropriate. If an appointment is made for the

patient to come into the surgery, they will be asked to telephone a mobile phone number when they arrive at the door for someone to let them into the building: they will be asked to follow hygiene protocols – use hand sanitiser, wear face mask, etc.

As I said in the July PPG email circular, these arrangements are not unique to Northway Medical Centre – all surgeries in Dudley operating in a similar way. I asked whether there could be some kind of information note drafted perhaps by CCG to explain this and I was happy to provide feedback on an early draft of a ‘Doodle Video’ that has been created by Black Country & West Birmingham Healthier Futures Stakeholder Group. The final version can be seen via this hyperlink: [Watch Our Doodle Video](#) . This link to the video is provided in the BC&WB Stakeholder Newsletter which came out in August 2020 (copy attached). I think it would be useful to make it accessible to our patients to explain how and why these new ways of working have come about and to provide reassurance that services can nevertheless still be accessed – just in a different way. I’ve asked whether there could be a link to this video on the Northway Medical Practice Website which could then perhaps be emailed out to those patients whose mobile phone records are held ... If you have any other ideas about how to get the message out there, please let me know?

I have talked with Dr Pritchard about some of the issues that have been mentioned with regard to the new ways of working:

- **Patients waiting outside to be admitted to the surgery:**

Not all patients have a mobile phone to enable them to phone when they arrive to request admission to the building. Dr Pritchard is looking to install a video doorbell whereby the patient can ring and speak to reception.

- **Accessing reception via the side window:**

This has been OK during the summer months, but when it is raining patients will struggle to hold an umbrella open whilst they are dealing with transactions at the window: Dr Pritchard plans to install an awning that will cover the patient standing outside at the window.

- **Telephone lines always engaged:**

There are two lines for patients to call into the surgery: granted there are busy times such as first thing on Monday mornings, but generally patients should be able to get through. Surgery staff try to use mobile phone lines for dialling out of the surgery to keep the main lines free: this is not without problems as many patients have calls barred from unknown mobile numbers and hidden numbers. As more patients move to online transactions to obtain repeat prescriptions and when the new *Footfall* system is introduced which will enable patients to do online triage for appointments, this should free up the telephone lines more. Although it may be frustrating to patients to get an engaged tone and have to hang up and try again, is this not better than being held in a queue and paying for the length of the call? Dr Pritchard is willing to look again at queue management systems if patient feedback is such that this is really required.

- **Repeat Prescriptions**

The surgery is no longer accepting written requests for repeat items. Requests for repeat prescriptions should be made online – for example via the Patient Access app, or patients can register with a pharmacy of their choice, such as Northway Pharmacy or Boots and request repeat prescriptions via the pharmacy (where the pharmacy action the request via the GP surgery and the patient collects their prescription usually 2 days later, from their designated pharmacy).

For those patients who do not have internet access to enable them to use these online facilities, they can register with Dudley’s Pharmacy Ordering Direct Service (POD) - **01384 465303** where the Patient can telephone the service to request a repeat prescription. The POD team will liaise with the patient’s GP and the prescription will be sent directly to the patients nominated pharmacy for them to collect –

the timescale for repeat prescriptions to be available for collection is around 14 days. I am aware that the POD service is only available to a limited number of Dudley GP practices and I am not sure whether it will continue to be viable?

Patients who are unable to access online repeat prescription request methods can telephone the surgery – after 11:00am - to request a repeat prescription – but this of course then ties up the lines for other patients who are wishing to make appointments, etc. *I wondered whether there might be the possibility of the PCN solution whereby a telephone line is set up for repeat prescription request handling for all 8 surgeries in our PCN, thus keeping the practice telephone lines free for other business?*

### **“Footfall” – new patient access system:**

The big news will be that the surgery (along with most other GP surgeries in Dudley CCG) is progressing with the new IT system called *Footfall* - which will fundamentally change the way patients request an appointment with the doctor or any other health professional. (This was previously discussed at the PPG meeting that we had via Zoom on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020 with the presentation slides and evaluation being circulated to PPG members by email on 18<sup>th</sup> June). Dr Pritchard sees a big role for the PPG in helping the surgery to roll this out.

### **Winter Flu Jabs:**

As you will doubtless already be aware from recent national news coverage, the health service is aiming to vaccinate about half of the population (30 million people) with flu jabs this winter to help to prevent hospitals buckling under a combined surge of flu and Covid-19. Everyone over 50 will be offered flu jabs, as well as Year 7 pupils and the families of people who have been shielding: these groups are in addition to those who are normally targeted – over 65s, pregnant women, those with long-term conditions and learning difficulties. Dr Pritchard tells me that the Winter Flu Jab programme for the usual group of at-risk patients who have the flu jab every year will start via the surgery from **23<sup>rd</sup> September**. If you usually have a flu jab – the surgery will be contacting you soon to arrange your appointment.

The logistical planning across the CCG is still being finalised for administering the flu jabs to the extended group recently identified by the government.

### **Phlebotomy Services (Blood Tests!):**

I reported in the July circular that Ladies Walk clinic were trialling afternoon appointments as well as mornings – doubling capacity, which has drastically reduced waiting time for appointments (a great outcome from our campaigning!). **But** although there has been increased capacity at Ladies Walk, and also some appointments available at the Guest Hospital, I have heard that across the Phlebotomy Service as a whole (which is presently being provided by the NHS Trust before it moves into the new contract next April), there are significant difficulties currently in providing the service across the borough due to a number of staff vacancies and staff sickness within the service. Dr Pritchard has confirmed that the CCG are currently looking at ways to address these difficulties.

That's all the news that I've got to share with you for now. Please drop me a line or telephone me if you have any comments or ideas, or questions/issues that you would like me to raise in lieu of our proper PPG meetings with Dr Pritchard.

Again, I hope that you are all keeping safe and well. I really do miss meeting up with you.

Best wishes

*Karen*

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28/08/2020

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Attachment: *Black Country & West Birmingham Stakeholder Newsletter No. 2*