

November 2020 circular email/briefing note to Northway PPG members

Hello PPG members – really really long time, no see!

So just to recap: after we tried the PPG meeting via Zoom all those months ago - without having a license we were restricted to just half hour and I don't think we were particularly comfortable to do formal PPG meetings by that means. We agreed that in lieu of our meetings I would keep in touch with the group every 6-8 weeks and pass on 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.

Until further notice the days of the week are now called, thisday, thatday, otherday, someday, yesterday, today and nextday!

Ask Dr Pritchard ... Questions, Issues, Comments Raised by PPG Members

Thank you all for your responses to my email last week in which I asked you to let me know if there are any questions, issues, comments to raise on behalf of patients so that I could liaise with Dr Pritchard and feedback his replies in this circular.

You'll see below that I've grouped your questions under three main headings. I think the number of the points around COVID and statistics reflect that our patient group do want to be informed – a genuine interest in how the pandemic is playing out locally. In the past when we had meetings around the table, it's the type of information that we might have gleaned conversationally with Dr Pritchard as our 'local expert in the know'. I think that was one of the things our group really valued (our USP) and made it more successful than other PPGs where the GP doesn't attend.

NB: There are excellent daily summaries of local infection rates and statistics that you can access via <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/search?postcode=DY33QY> (change postcode to suit)

COVID 19 :

You asked ...



By The Crown pub in Sedgley

- Covid cases – the number of cases in Dudley (and surrounding areas) has gone up a lot. Does Dr Pritchard have any insight into why this has happened?

Unfortunately, Dudley has one of the highest Covid infection rates in the Black Country. The reasons for this are probably complex and can be attributed to population density, population behaviour and socio-economic factors, but possibly the fact that other areas were tier 3 when Dudley was tier 2 is important.

- How many patients at Northway surgery have (had) a positive Covid diagnosis? Is there any analysis available of number by age? How many of these have needed hospital care? How many have died?

We receive Covid results on a daily basis. This was initially three or four a day, but we now see as many as 30 a day. We have noticed an increase in positives tests (about 10%). These tend to be in younger people and whole families.

I'm not sure how many patients have needed to be hospitalised because of Covid. These patients are often admitted directly to hospital by contacting 999 and 111.

We have indeed sadly lost some of our elderly patients due to them contracting the Covid infection.

Have any of the staff at the surgery contracted Covid 19?

As far as I am aware, we have had no positive Covid tests for our surgery staff. Prior to widespread testing, two or three staff members went into self-isolation with suspected Covid or contact with a suspected Covid infection.

- *If a patient has a positive Covid Test what happens then? Is the surgery automatically notified? Do patients have any treatment from the surgery or do they just self-isolate and hope they recover or else wait until they can't cope and get admitted to hospital?*

Patients are notified of the results directly. The surgery is also automatically notified. We try to follow up vulnerable patients with a phone call. There is no community treatment for a Covid infection. Patients are advised to self-isolate but if their symptoms get worse they can contact 999/111 or us (their GP, but obviously if we visit/see a patient with a positive Covid test it could lead to the clinician being off work or worse spreading it to other patients and colleagues or even closing the practice)



- *Assuming the practice is going to be very busy with the likelihood of a **vaccine** for COVID. It will be interesting to hear at some point the logistics and how it may affect day-to-day running of practices.*

We are still working through how the Covid vaccine is going to be delivered. This will probably start in December and be delivered from large, centralised sites. The Black Country museum has been mentioned a lot as has Ladies Walk.

STATISTICS:

You asked ...

- *We hear that nationally the number of people contacting their GP has fallen. It would be interesting to get some feel for the extent of that in our own area. It's really not a good time to be ill.*
- *It would be interesting to have a summary of comparative statistics showing before compared with during the pandemic*

The number of patients contacting their GP has gone up dramatically in the last few weeks, but this is normal for the time of year. (Whoever says patient contact has fallen is poorly informed and I would also say there is never a good time to be ill!).

Northway Surgery has continued to see patients face-to-face since the start of the Covid crisis. The only difference is that all patients are first triaged on the phone and only seen if required. Around 10-20% of patients are being seen face-face. This triage service by phone call is something that we should have started doing many years ago to ensure the survival of General Practice and address the increase in demand for 24/7 access to healthcare. I am quite sure this will continue well after Covid. We do not have the comparative statistics to hand about this.

- **Flu jabs** – *What has been the take up and how does this compare with a typical year? (We've been told that we should have a flu jab if we're vulnerable as if we don't, and we get Covid 19, the outcome will be worse than it otherwise might be). Will the surgery be administering the flu jabs recently announced for all patients aged over 50?*

Protection against the flu is imperative. Developing a Covid infection on the back of a flu infection would be extremely serious. Our flu vaccination programme has been the most successful ever. We started flu jab clinics in September and targeted all vulnerable patients together with all patients aged over 65. We are now currently putting into place arrangements for further flu jab clinics at the surgery for patients aged 50-64.

GENERAL PATIENT MATTERS: You asked ...

- **Phone Lines** - a patient raised concern with a PPG member that they had been unable to get through to the surgery by phone – they said they rang 57 times across several hours before actually getting through.

The idea of someone trying to phone the surgery 57 times is disturbing. I can only assume that it might have been on the phone lines went down for six hours before Virgin Media repaired them. I am worried this person is not aware of other ways of accessing healthcare like 111 (or 999). We are a small surgery and only employ two receptionists so if one goes to the toilet or is tied up with a complex problem there will be only one receptionist available to answer the phone. I am very confident the services we provide at the Northway match or beat those provided by many other practices.

We are currently looking into a call queuing system and other ways to free up the incoming call lines and when the new online Footfall system commences in early December, this will give patients an alternative way to contact the surgery to request appointments, repeat prescriptions etc. This should help to ease pressure on the phone lines so that those who cannot use the online facilities are more able to get through by phone.

- *Why has the bell been moved from the reception window to the front door?*

There is a doorbell on the front door, but this cannot be heard clearly by reception. There is a new (white) doorbell on the reception window (this has replaced the silver intercom). I have also installed a canopy to shield patients at the reception window if the weather gets bad.

- **Blood tests** – has the situation improved to make these more accessible?

Dudley Group assure us that access to blood test has been improved - I am yet to be convinced.
[see note below from Karen re blood test appointments]**

- *Perhaps you could tell Dr Pritchard how well the online prescription system works*

Thank you for your positive feedback about the online prescription system.

The Prescription Ordering Direct (POD) telephone prescription service [01384 465303] is currently going through a redesign and we are fighting hard to preserve the service they provide.

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Blood Test Appointments**

All blood tests at all clinics are now by appointment only. The opening times for the clinics may change from previously advised times as the hospital Trust responds to the Covid situation locally. Check for latest updates via [Changes to blood tests at The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust - The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust \(dgft.nhs.uk\)](https://www.dgft.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/blood-tests/)

- Patients can now book appointments on-line for phlebotomy clinics at Corbett Hospital, Guest Hospital and Russells Hall Hospital. **The online blood test booking system can be accessed 24-7 at:** <http://www.dgft.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/blood-tests/>
- The blood test appointments telephone lines are **01384 244330** or **01384 365155** and the phone lines are open from 8am – 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am – 3pm on Saturdays. (The phone lines can be extremely busy so please be aware there could be a 30-minute waiting time to get through).
- For blood tests at Ladies Walk Clinic in Sedgley, telephone the clinic directly on **01902 575957**

"Footfall" – new patient access system:

As mentioned in my previous PPG circular, the surgery (along with most other GP surgeries in Dudley CCG) is progressing with the new IT system called *Footfall* - which will provide an alternative means for patients to contact the surgery to request appointments, prescriptions, blood tests and find patient information, useful contact numbers, etc. Instead of waiting to telephone the surgery during opening hours, patients will be able to access information and submit requests for appointments etc at any time of the day, 24-7.

Preparatory work is under way on the Northway site, including a review of the information held currently on the practice website so that up-to-date accurate information is transferred through to the new website. Patients are not required to have completed any detailed registration to use the system as it is not directly accessing patient's personal information – it is providing an alternative means of communicating with the surgery and will help the surgery to manage the triage and assignment of patient requests for services. [The Patient Access system will continue to be how patients access their own individual patient record information, repeat prescriptions, etc].

More information and early access to a preview of the new Footfall system will be shared with PPG soon and your feedback will be welcomed. There will also be opportunities for you to participate in short online training sessions provided by the Footfall team.

Patient Events:

I'm attaching an email circular that I have received from Healthwatch Dudley which I found really interesting – it includes an invitation to join in on-line Winter Wellbeing events; an update on Coronavirus, Covid testing, Covid Community Champions; keeping in touch with relatives during hospital stays; involving people with sight loss in planning and influencing services; restarting NHS Dental Services in the Midlands; information on flu jabs in pregnancy, the forthcoming Census, and much more.

Also, as a member of the POPs Group (Patient Opportunities Panel comprised mainly of Chairs and Vice Chairs of PPGs) I have received an internal stakeholder briefing note on the Covid 19 vaccine which I thought I'd share with you in advance of a public briefing note to be created by the CCG in due course.

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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.

I hope some of the pictures I've included have made you smile ...I think we all need a little laughter therapy to get us through these worrying times! 😊

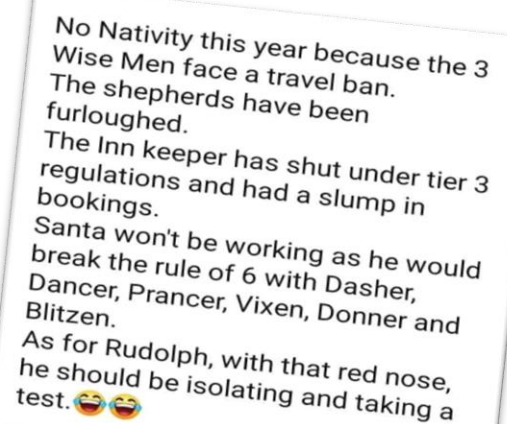
Best wishes

Karen

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No Nativity this year because the 3 Wise Men face a travel ban. The shepherds have been furloughed. The Inn keeper has shut under tier 3 regulations and had a slump in bookings. Santa won't be working as he would break the rule of 6 with Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Donner and Blitzen. As for Rudolph, with that red nose, he should be isolating and taking a test. 😂😂

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