



Spring 2023

Newsletter



WELCOME from the Stoke Road Patient Participation Group

Contents:

Welcome

This issue of our quarterly Newsletter has been brought out early to explain, in a timely manner, some of the changes being made to make better use of scarce resources at Stoke Road Surgery. The most obvious to patients is the change to the appointment system.

A special message from Stoke Road Surgery – Changes to our Appointment System

The headline article here has been produced by the surgery team to explain what is happening. There are some initial issues, particularly with the telephone system, but these are being addressed. I do hope you will read the article so that you can appreciate the problems faced by the team.

Q&A

Dr Whybrew answers the most common current questions asked of the PPG

We also bring you the latest Q&A. If you have any questions you would like to submit for a future issue please send them to us.

Our regular "A Patient's View" slot features an interesting contribution, which has been sent to us, entitled Living with Lymphoma

A Patient's View

Living with Lymphoma

To complete this issue we have included a little about the PPG, who we are and what we do. If you would like to find out more please get in touch.

Who are the PPG

All our newsletters can be found on the Stoke Road Surgery website and Facebook page. If you would like to receive your own copy of future editions direct to your inbox please send us an email requesting just that. If you have any comments, questions, or contributions for a future issue, please send them to us. We would love to hear from you -

Useful contact information

ppgstokeroad@gmail.com

Ian White Chair, PPG Stoke Road Surgery

A special message from Stoke Road Surgery - Changes to our Appointment System

If you are looking to make an appointment at Stoke Road for the first time since lockdown you will notice some changes.

We had been using a system of "total triage" since the covid pandemic began, which meant that every request for an appointment had to be checked by a clinician before it was booked.

This was necessary during the pandemic but initially proved unpopular with patients as a way to book appointments. Gradually though, people got used to using "eConsult" on the website for arranging appointments, and uptake increased.

In fact it became too popular, a victim of its own success. The volume of requests coming through eConsult had become so large that it had become impossible to assess all of them safely. We had been having such a huge number of eConsults submitted that we had to shorten the times that eConsult was open each day, and have now had to turn it off completely.

We have gone back to asking people to phone for appointments. The medical administrator personnel who answer the phones are not just receptionists – they have extra training so they can help people get to see the right person first time. That person may be based outside the surgery team (e.g. an optician, physio, or community pharmacist), or within the surgery team (e.g. a doctor, nurse, pharmacist, physician associate, healthcare assistant, or social prescriber).

You will need to tell them what the problem is, to ensure that you are booked with the correct person. The team are fully trained in care navigation to make sure you see the right clinician, and all information is treated in the strictest confidence. They will then be able to book directly into available appointments.

By doing this, we will also free up extra doctor time to see patients in booked appointments (as we will not need so many to be reading and sorting out the requests). In spite of the increased

number of appointments available, there may be times when we have reached safe limits, which means we will not be able to offer any further appointments. When we are full, we will advise on what other NHS services are available.

Before calling for an appointment, please consider if you could self care (there is information on our website), visit NHS 111 online, NHS choices, or consult a pharmacist for advice first. We are not an emergency service, and if you have an immediately life threatening problem, or serious emergency, please call 999 or go straight to A+E.

For administrative queries, you may find it easier to use the website, but please do not use the website to try to request an appointment - you will get a reply asking you to call to make an appointment.

The other change we are making at the same time is that almost all appointments will be offered as face to face unless you prefer them to be phone appointments. If you would prefer your appointment to be by phone, please say so to the medical administrator in reception, and give a number you can be contacted on, at the appointment time (or thereabouts). There will be a few extra slots that are for phone calls only, but the vast majority will be face to face.

Currently, when you try to contact reception by phone, you may find that you hear that the line is engaged. We know this is frustrating but we have a limited telephone line capability at the moment. We are working hard with our suppliers to improve this and when that is done you will be placed in a queuing system and kept informed of your position.

We are very aware that the number of GPs nationally is dropping, as the population increases in number and also gets older. One in four GP practices nationwide is at risk of closure, and many have already closed. Our focus is on providing high-quality care for our patients in a sustainable way which helps keep our staff operating safely and efficiently.

We feel very privileged to work in such a great community and we are grateful for all your support.

Q & A

with thanks to Dr Whybrew...

Is Stoke Road still taking on new patients?

Yes, our practice list remains open. However, we have roughly equal numbers of patients registering and leaving, and the numbers are fairly stable overall.

I waited at an empty desk in reception with no way of letting anyone know I was there. Is it possible to have a bell of some kind?

Sorry that you had this experience – if there is nobody at the desk, it is either because they are helping someone else (this may not be obvious if you see nobody waiting – they may have asked to talk in a private room), or they may have gone for a comfort break. We request your patience, as they will be back out as soon as they are free.

I had an accident at home but treated the wound myself. Next day I was concerned that it was worse so asked if I could come to the surgery to have it checked but was told this wasn't possible. Why is this?

For minor injuries such as wounds, we request that you contact the minor injuries unit, or visit a pharmacy. These services are provided so that GP surgeries can see the people with problems that cannot be managed elsewhere. We are doing our best to see everyone who needs to be seen by us, and are not able to accommodate people for whom other services are available.

Why can you only ask about one ailment at each appointment? I discussed my problem with the doctor and wanted to ask if another problem I had could be connected to the original, I was told that they could only deal with one query at a time and to make another appointment.

Now that the vast majority of our patients are asking for their appointments to be face-to-face,

trying to keep to time has become more of an issue again. If you have more than one problem, or if you think there may be a related problem, it is important that you say so at the start of the appointment. If most of the appointment time has already been taken up with the first thing, then there may not be time to deal with another issue and you will be asked to rebook. If you say at the start that there are several things that may be connected, then the clinician has a better chance of identifying what is the most important to deal with first, and what could be related. It can be really helpful to write a list of things you want to talk about, but please show the list to the clinician right at the start of the appointment!

Will there be covid booster vaccines again this year?

There will be spring boosters offered to everyone over 75 and everyone who is immune suppressed, for example because of chemotherapy, or a transplant, or who lives in a care home.

Will the spring boosters be offered at the surgery again?

Most of the spring boosters for patients of Stoke Road Surgery will be done at the Cheltenham East fire station. There are facilities there to vaccinate people who are disabled or find it difficult to walk – the disabled parking is easy to access and the staff and volunteers are always extremely helpful. It will be by appointment only, and appointment invitations will be coming out in April. We will not be doing any clinics at the surgery for the spring campaign.

What if I can't get to the fire station?

The clinics at the fire station will be offered on weekend days, to make it easier for people who rely on relatives to bring them, who may be working in the week. If you are eligible and invited, please make every effort to get to the fire station. Later on, we will be visiting the bedbound patients at home.

I told the surgery that I didn't want my medical records shared but now I find that it limits what I can see on the NHS app. Can I change my choice?

Yes, please contact the surgery via the website to do so.

How can I cancel an unwanted appointment if I can't get through on the phone to reception?

The easiest way to cancel an appointment is online, either through the NHS App (which you can download and register for on your phone at home without visiting the surgery), or by registering at the surgery for online access. To register at the surgery, you will need to visit in person, and bring some photographic ID with you. We can then generate a password and the initial login details for you.

How can I access my records online?

You can access your coded records online via the NHS app, or by registering for online access. This

will give you a lot of information, including diagnoses, medicines, appointments, and test results that have been seen and filed by a clinician. If you would like access to your records, including text written in your notes, and hospital letters going forwards, you can send a message to us via the website, or in writing. We will give you a consent form to fill in. This confirms that you understand what is and is not possible. For example, you may see results or letters before they have been seen by a clinician, and it may not be possible for a clinician to speak to you straight away if you see something on your records that you find worrying or upsetting.

Is it possible to check if my results have come back without phoning the surgery?

Yes, if you register for online access you can see your blood results once they have been filed – and any attached comments from the clinician

**The Patient's View
Living with Lymphoma**

It was the summer of 2004. I was reaching 70 years old, decided to retire, was looking forward to travelling to Rio de Janeiro with my husband and having a long holiday in the company of my brother and sister in law.

I have been swimming early in the morning for the last 20 odd years. In trying a new swimming costume I felt a lump in my right groin. After few days observing that it wasn't going away, a visit to the GP resulted in a consultation for a possible biopsy of the lump. This took a bit of time, and the procedure brought surprising results and a sense of disorientation. I had been diagnosed with Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma, high grade!

After a scan I was contacted by my consultant oncologist, early one morning to tell me with a sense of relief that the Lymphoma was localised, and that radiotherapy treatment would start as soon as I returned from my travels. They encouraged me to visit the family (the plans of a long and exciting holiday now cancelled) and the gap would give the doctors time to organise radiotherapy sessions. I was introduced to the literature about my type of Lymphoma, understood from the beginning that there was not going to be a cure, just careful control, treatment and hopefully remissions. All this I learnt with the very caring help of the team, the consultant being caring and at the same time objective and containing. They have remained like this in all the instances I have needed them.

What I also learnt was that what I had been feeling in my last weeks of work: tiredness, losing a bit of weight, sweating at night, a bit of itching, had nothing to do with the hot summer or the end of my work. Those were the 4 symptoms encountered by patients with Lymphoma!

From then onwards, and fortunately, many years have passed, I had the radiotherapy, a period of remission, followed by a new diagnosis about the cancer now spreading to all the glands, chemotherapy, remission, new stage of being very weak, new chemotherapy treatment. In the meanwhile, my body which never revealed allergies, reacted to the main drug of the treatment. My sessions were long, very long, till the body began to accept the drug. A new period of remission was followed by what was called Maintenance. The culprit drug now came as an injection applied on the belly for just 20 minutes! What an incredible change. It has been

working and I now have 6 monthly consultations and scans for control.

The team has been keeping me going and I respect their work very much. I have forgotten days and the exact times of all the treatments. I never know what comes next but have learnt throughout the years to consider the importance of being aware of what is happening in my day to day. I have been greatly helped by a support group at Maggie's cancer support centre. I worked as a volunteer for many years, and I am constantly curious and interested in learning new subjects.

My family and friends are important in my life and I hope I can be equally of value to them. Old age brings different problems and apprehensions, but the experience of living sustains us.

Léa

Who are the Patient Participation Group

A Patient Participation Group (PPG) is a group of patients, carers and GP practice staff who meet to discuss practice issues and patient experience to help improve the service.

Since April 2015, it has been a contractual requirement of NHS England for all GP practices to have a PPG and to make reasonable efforts for this to be representative of the practice population.

At Stoke Road we have an active PPG. All patient members are volunteers and currently we have nine active members and one student member. We meet with the surgery team four times a year.

One of our purposes is to listen to patients and feedback their comments, complaints and praise, to the surgery. All feedback is anonymous and we do not discuss any specific medical issues. One way we do this is by holding sessions at the surgery which we call Listening Place events. If you see us there please come along and talk to us.

We also host Teas for patients who are unable to get out and are lonely. Of course, we also produce a regular Newsletter.

We carried on our efforts throughout the course of the Covid pandemic and several members stepped forward to marshal at the vaccine clinics held at the surgery.

If you are interested in joining us and would like to learn more please get in touch. We would particularly welcome members still of working age as this expands the feedback we can get. The full meetings are held in the evening and we understand that people in work are not able to participate in some of our events. Nevertheless you could bring your experience to our group and help in other ways.

We would love to hear from you -

ppgstokeroad@gmail.com

We have put together some websites and telephone numbers which you might find useful...

NHS online www.111.uk or call 111 for 24 hour, 7 days a week medical help

NHS Better Health www.nhs.uk/better-health for healthy living advice from the NHS

Young Minds www.youngminds.org.uk text YM to 85258 or call 0808 802 5544

Silverline www.thesilverline.org.uk (helpline for older people) or call 0800 4 70 80 90

Gloucestershire Carers Hub www.gloucestershirecarershubs.co.uk or call 0300 111 9000

MIND www.mind.org.uk for help with mental health

Domestic abuse (Refuge) call 0808 2000 247

AGE UK (advice Line) call 0800 678 1602

SAMARITANS 116 123