**BALSALL COMMON AND MERIDEN GROUP PRACTICE**

**AUGUST 2020 NEWSLETTER**

**PATIENT CARE DURING AND AFTER THE COVID PANDEMIC.**

While many workers in the UK have been furloughed or unfortunately been laid off, the Balsall Common Health Centre has not been resting at all. In General Practice we have been open every weekday and also working on the bank holidays at Easter and on VE Day. There have also been “extended access” initiatives where phone appointments can be pre booked for the weekend via the Primary Care Network. Our front doors may have been shut at both Balsall Common and Meriden but all the doctors and nurses have been in their consultation rooms either on the phone or conducting video consultations. Some clinicians if they were obliged to self-isolate, have been working from their own homes on laptops so that the number of patient-contacts could be maximized. Unfortunately several of our clinical and administrative colleagues have been ill due to covid but as I write this all are well or recovering satisfactorily. We had a few weeks when we weren’t quite fully booked but now we are very busy again and I think we need to be realistic about what we can or should do.

The “new normal” is still evolving.

So far if a patient has wanted advice, a doctor or nurse has phoned back but we also can hold a video consultation if the patient has a smartphone (or a relative/friend has one)- this is useful to look at rashes, swellings, and some basic examination. We are doing virtual ward rounds at the local nursing home as the nurses there can use an ipad to let us see the patients and the residents there can see our faces while we talk with them. This reduces the risk of passing on infection and can be quicker than driving to the nursing home several times per day.

If we need to examine a patient (for something potentially serious like a cancer or heart problem) we can bring them in to the “amber corridor” at Balsall Common. We have to disinfect the room and equipment between patients so we are limited in the numbers we can bring in, hence we are strictly triaging all requests.

It’s amazing how much we have been able to do by telephone and video. We can deal with larger numbers of patients than before.

It is very likely that going forward the doctors will phone all patients who ask for appointments. Many will be sorted in a 5 minute call and only some will be brought in. This is often called a “doctor-first” system. It aims to triage the requests and concentrate on the people who need the medical care -- often the very elderly frail people with several significant illnesses rather than the “worried well “ who may not need to be seen so often. We need to ensure that in the future we don’t have too many people in the waiting room at the same time so triaging and only bringing in specific cases will be safer for all.

The hospitals have warned us that their out-patient departments, radiology units and operating theatres will be working at a much slower pace, again to keep far fewer people in the waiting areas and now the clinical rooms and XRay equipment are being disinfected between patients. This will have implications for us. Firstly there is a huge backlog of people who were referred before the lockdown and haven’t been seen yet. Those who have been seen and put on theatre waiting lists may need to be reassessed to make sure they are still fit for surgery. Many people who had been referred for scans have had them cancelled and the GPs are to reassess whether they are still required.

It means that we are being dissuaded from referring too much too soon unless it is life-threatening. We are told that referrals should be through an Advice-and -Guidance referral system so the hospital decides whether they will accept a referral or not depending on what test results we may have and what the patient has done for themselves already. This system will also reduce the choice of hospitals a patient has unfortunately.

As I write this we are beginning to start to provide some elective services to low-risk people – procedures such as joint injections, minor operations, family planning services and smears. We need to check over the phone that these patients aren’t unwell at all and we can’t book far ahead as there is a chance of us stopping these services again if there is a local spike in virus prevalence.

Covid won’t suddenly go away. All of us need to behave in ways which lower our risk and protect others. Hand washing, not touching your face, and keeping your distance can reduce the risk of catching it. Weight loss and good diabetic control seem to be two of the most important factors you can alter to help you survive covid if you do get it. Exercising outdoors is helping many people with weight-control and anxiety-management so if you haven’t been taking advantage of a regular walk then it’s definitely not to late to start.

If you are eligible make sure you get your pneumococcal vaccine and your annual flu vaccine. These clinics may be held outdoors this year to reduce the risk of having crowds in our building. The flu clinics usually start in late September early October.

Finally, thanks go to all of you who have sent messages, asked how the staff are keeping, painted or crocheted rainbows for us, sewn PPE or decorated stones. The clapping and cheering has brought a lump to the throat and a tear to the eye. We have lost some very lovely patients and friends in the pandemic- let’s please all work together to prevent further loss.

Dr Aileen Carlile

**FLU VACCINATIONS**

We are currently in the process of scheduling our Flu Clinics.

The appointments will be available to book from Mid-September. Please contact one of our Receptionist’s to schedule your appointment.

**LOCAL HELP**

Balsall Common and Berkswell Community Help Volunteers are ready to:

Collect and drop off shopping, collect and drop off medicine, be available for a chat and perform other tasks within reason.

If you or your family need help during isolation at home and they will arrange to get someone to you.

07515 570 887 bccommunityhelp@gmail.com

If you can help as a volunteer please also contact them.

**UPDATED LOCAL HELP FOR MERIDEN PATIENTS**

**CHANGE TO THE HELP LINE**

Please see the below changes in the way your calls are handled:

Stage 1 - You call the helpline on 07483 371 204.

Stage 2 - You leave a message with your Name, Telephone Number and Request.

Stage 3 - The answerphone is checked by volunteers at 14:00pm on Monday’s.

Stage 4 - A volunteer is assigned to your request.

We are constantly reviewing the way we support all our residents in the response to the Coronavirus outbreak and how we can come together as a whole community when the outbreak is over.

Should there be an isolated local outbreak, or a national lockdown imposed again we will review the service and inform you of any changes we make.

Please see additional help below.

MEDICATION

Did you know that you can have your regular monthly medication delivered to your door by Meriden Lloyds pharmacy? All you need to do is give them a call on 01676 522722 and they will arrange it for you.

OTHER USEFUL NUMBERS

We understand that as you adjust to the new ‘normal’ you may feel nervous or unsettled and we will continue to be here to support you through this.

We have also included some useful contact numbers below for more specialised support.

• Age UK Advice Line - 0800 055 6112 - Free to call 8am – 7pm 365 days a year.

• Samaritans. To talk about anything that is upsetting you, you can contact Samaritans 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You can call 116 123 (free from any phone).

• SMBC Solihull Connect Adult Social Care (Opening hours: 09.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday and 10.00am to 5.00pm on Wednesday) 0121 704 8007

• SMBC general enquiries, information - 0121 704 8001/6000

Best Wishes,

Meriden Community Helpline

**FACE COVERINGS**

Patients are now required to wear Face Coverings on entering the Building.

Please note we will not be able to provide Patients with any Face coverings if these are not brought.

Please ensure you bring your Face covering with you, as failure to bring this will result in the rescheduling of your appointment.

**EXTENDED ACCESS WEEKEND APPOINTMENTS AVAILABLE AT BALSALL COMMON SURGERY HUB**

GP appointments are now available at Balsall Common Surgery Hub for patients at Balsall Common and Meriden Surgeries.

Appointments for this service can be made through our GP surgery reception.

Extended hours:

Saturday and Sunday: 8-11am

**BLOOD TEST APPOINTMENTS**

We are now completing all of our Blood Test Appointments at Balsall Common Health Centre. It is no longer a requirement for some of our Patients to have these completed at Hampton Surgery.

Blood Test appointments can be scheduled with any of our receptionists.

**CHILDHOOD IMMUNISATIONS**

Childhood Immunisations are continuing to be recommended for children, these are currently continuing to take place at Meriden Surgery.

All appointments can be scheduled with any of our receptionists.

**BOOKING APPOINTMENTS ONLINE**

We have continued to temporarily suspend our online appointment booking system.

**PRACTICE NEWS**

Dr Manickam has completed his final examinations and has now Qualified as a GP.

Unfortunately that means that Dr Manickam will no longer be part of Balsall Common and Meriden Group Practice due to his training completion.

We would like to wish him all the best in his future career.

We have currently completed our first outdoor Pneumococcal Vaccination Clinic.

This was completed with great success. The Nurses are currently planning to complete more of these clinics.

Please contact the Surgery for updates.

**PRESCRIPTION REQUESTS**

We are actively encouraging Patients to send their Prescription requests to us via email to reduce the amount of paper entering the Practice.

Please send your prescription requests to bcm.prescriptionrequest@nhs.net

For Patients who are unable to send their requests through as an email, the Prescription Box at Balsall Common surgery has been placed in the Main Entrance.

Meriden surgery paper requests can be posted through the letter box on the Main Door.

**RESULTS AVAILABLE**

Results will continue to be available from 11am at both the Balsall Common and Meriden Surgeries.

**MEDICATION REVIEW DATES**

Patients are often not aware of the date their repeat medication review is due.

This can be found on the right hand side of their prescription or on the counterfoil that is included with their medication when they collect this from the pharmacy. The date is detailed at the end of each medication shown on the counterfoil.

It important that patient’s check their counterfoils when collecting their medication as messages can often be left on these counterfoils from their doctor or reminders that medication reviews are overdue.

Medication reviews are continuing to be being completed during a telephone consultation.

Please contact reception who would be happy to schedule this for you.

**CLINICAL QUESTIONS OR ENQUIRIES VIA EMAIL**

We are unable to respond to clinical questions / enquiries via email.

Please continue to make a telephone consultation with a doctor to discuss your question / enquiry.

**SICK NOTE REQUESTS**

 If you require a sick note please make a telephone consultation appointment with your usual doctor to discuss this. If you have recently attended hospital (which is the reason for the sick note to be issued) the hospital should give you a sick note for the expected duration you will be away from work following the procedure, on this occasion you should contact the hospital for your sick note. Covid 19 Isolation Requests can be submitted online using the Nhs 111 website.

**DOMESTIC ABUSE**

If you or someone you know is at risk of domestic abuse, help and advice is available at:<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-and-domestic-> abuse/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse. If you are in immediate danger, or suspect someone else is, call 999

If you are unable to talk, call 999, listen to the operator and then either press 55 on a mobile, when prompted, or wait on a landline to be connected to the police, who will be able to help.

**If you’re worried you, or someone you know, may be experiencing domestic abuse:**

The Freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline run by Refuge offers support for women: **0808 200 247**

The free Respect Men’s Advice Line offers support for men:**0808 801 0327**

Galop’s free National LGBTQ+ Domestic Abuse Helpline offers support for LGBTQ+ people:**0800 999 5428**

The free Respect Phone line offers support for men and women who are harming their partners and families: **0808 802 4040**

NSPCC helpline offers support for anyone worried about a child : **0808 800 5000**

**TEXT MESSAGING - MOBILE NUMBERS**

We have now started a limited service reminding patients of booked appointments via text messaging.

**SECRETARY ANSWERPHONE**

Prescription and Sick Note enquiries or requests should not be left of the secretary’s answerphone. Any requests left on the secretary’s answerphone will NOT be actioned. This is also detailed on the secretary’s answerphone message.

**NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTION**

If you would like to be added to the distribution list please contact Joanne Hope, Practice Manager in writing or by email to Kaylee.swift@nhs.net

 We will then automatically send you the new newsletter by email, or by post if you do not have an email facility.

**PRACTICE WEBSITE**

Please visit our website at [www.balsallcommongrouppractice.co.uk](http://www.balsallcommongrouppractice.co.uk) for more information regarding the Balsall Common and Meriden Group Practice.