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**Bridges Medical Practice**

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**Practice Newsletter**

Dear patients,

The last few months have been eventful, and the covid19 pandemic has meant changes to the whole NHS, as you're doubtless aware. As a result, much routine work has been deferred, a lot more done by phone and there have been many delays in the hospital system. With that in mind, we thought we'd answer some of the more common questions that we've heard, both here at Bridges and nationally, and answer them - if anyone wants to ask anything we don't cover here, please ask us:  
  
**1) Q: Is the GP surgery closed?**  
A: No, and it never has been - we've been working throughout the pandemic, including on bank holidays, to ensure that care is provided to all our patients. At weekends and at night care has been provided by GATDOC, as it has been for the last couple of decades (and some of our staff do shifts in out-of-hours also).  
  
**2) Are all appointments phone appointments now?**  
No - we are bringing to the surgery people who:  
- have been assessed on the phone and the GP has decided they need to come in for further assessment  
- need blood tests that cannot safely wait (eg. people on certain long-term medication)  
- need smear tests, as the risk of delaying these is a higher risk of undetected cervical cancer  
- need immunisations, as the risk of preventable deaths from infectious diseases would be greater if we did not do these  
Those things we can deal with remotely, on the

phone or via video link, we are doing in order to minimise patient numbers in the waiting room and therefore the risk of patients passing covid19 between each other or, worst-case, our staff passing it to you (as there is risk of us contracting it from patients, and then passing it on without any symptoms).  
  
**3) Have I got to wear a mask or other face covering?**  
Unless you're a child or have a disability that prevents this, then yes - not just in the surgery, but when in the shops or on public transport, ideally - if everyone wears face coverings, then transmission risk is vastly reduced.  
  
**4) Are you seeing suspected COVID patients in the surgery?**  
No - we refer these to the hot hub and visit services, which have been set up to enable us to safely see 'cold'/non-COVID patients in the surgery when necessary. This reduces risk to our patients, and enables those who might have COVID to be seen by people wearing appropriate PPE. Our staff participate in the Gateshead hot hub/visiting rota, but see these patients elsewhere.

**5) I need to be referred to hospital - can this be done?**  
Yes - when COVID peaked, then referrals were turned off by QEH and RVI. However, they are accepting referrals again, though there will be delays as they catch up with a backlog of clinical referrals. They are also doing much work by phone initially. Any suspected cancer referrals will not be delayed and you should expect to be seen within 2 weeks if your GP thinks you likely to have cancer.

**6) What happens to my prescriptions?**  
We are sending all prescriptions that can be sent electronically by these means - we send it and the chemist has the order near-instantly. This works well as it prevents lost prescriptions. All chemists should be able to see the order straight away, though it is worth being aware that some insist on 48hrs to prepare the prescription - this is their policy, and any issues with it should be addressed to the relevant chemist.  
  
**7) Are you doing E-Consultations?**  
Yes - an E-Consultation will be answered by email or by telephone if further clarification is needed with the doctor.

**8) Will flu vaccinations be going ahead as usual this autumn?**  
Yes, and it is even more vital than usual that those eligible for the NHS scheme have them, ideally at the surgery (as this enables us to keep accurate records and also supports the ongoing delivery of other services), as a combination of influenza and COVID in the community this winter has scope to cause many unnecessary deaths. In partnership with our neighbours Millennium Family Practice, we have a plan that will enable those needing flu, pneumococcus and shingles vaccination to receive these in a walk-through clinic. We will let patients know when we have a delivery date for these.  
  
**9) What services aren't you providing at present?**  
On the advice of NHS England and the BMA, we are not bringing patients into the surgery when the risk of doing so outweighs the benefits. We stress that this is an extraordinary measure taken in extraordinary times (ie. a pandemic which has already killed tens of thousands in the UK). It is not done lightly, and any services affected will be resumed when it is safe to do so  
  
**10) is there going to be a second wave/peak of COVID-19?**  
We don't know - plan for the worst and hope for the best. In the meantime, please look after yourselves, and others, and do what you can to maintain social distancing, wear face coverings and generally limit transmission.  
  
**11) My employer needs to know if I'm safe to return - what do I tell them?**  
We are happy to provide, free of charge, a summary of your medical history that you may share with your employer if you wish, in order to help them make risk assessments. If they have any specific questions for us, we will be happy to liaise with them/occupational health directly, if you consent to this.  
  
**12) We want to say thank you to the practice for care we've received - how best to do this?**  
If you're particularly happy with the care you've received, we'd be delighted to know. If you wish to give a gift, whilst this would be very kind, please consider a donation instead to the Gateshead Food Bank, who are doing a fantastic job of helping people avoid going hungry at a time of great need - unfortunately we're all too well aware of the hardship lockdown has caused to many of our patients and the area in general.

**Staffing**  
As a further update, we have had some changes in staffing - we say goodbye to Dr Conlan, who has decided to move to a practice out of our area, and Dr Wright. Both worked at the practice for several years and will be missed. However, we welcome Dr Fiona Steedman, who has worked for us as a locum since last September and has decided to stay, Kerry Barnett, who is an ANP (Advanced Nurse Practitioner) and will be adding an extra session to our Monday offering, and Drs Helen Godfrey and Helen Marsden, who will be working for us longer-term on a locum basis (rather than using lots of different locums). Our aim is to have continuity, quality and stability, as well as being able to cope with a growing list size, and we're always grateful for your thoughts on how we're doing.

**Immunisations**

Whilst Bridges Medical Practice are committed to helping prevent the spread of COVID-19, we know that it is very important and best practice to maintain good coverage of immunisations, particularly in the childhood programme. In addition to protecting the individual, this will avoid future outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases that could increase further the numbers of patients requiring health services.

We have been prioritising the following:

1. Routine childhood immunisations, from 8 weeks up to and including vaccines due at one year of age, including first MMR and hepatitis B for at risk infants;

2. Whooping cough (pertussis) vaccination in pregnancy;

Pneumococcal vaccination for those in risk groups from 2 to 64 years of age and those aged 65 years and over.

**Social distancing within the building**

With services resuming within the health centre social distancing measures will have to be implicated. We are currently working with the other departments on how to do this and to provide a service in a safe and efficient way. Please when attending the surgery remember to keep a 2m distance, if this is not possible then please wait outside the surgery doors until safe to do so.

**Patient Participation Group – PPG**

The first Patient Participation Group was set up by a GP in 1972 and many general practices in England now have a PPG. Generally made up of a group of volunteer patients, the practice manager and one or more of the GPs from the practice, they meet on a regular basis to discuss the services on offer, and how improvements can be made for the benefit of patients and the practice.

If you would like to be a member of our PPG then please fill out the form below and email it over to [NGCCG.BridgesMedicalPractice@nhs.net](mailto:NGCCG.BridgesMedicalPractice@nhs.net)

 If you are unable to view/fill out this form, please contact the surgery on 0191 300 9889.