



Summer 2022



Newsletter

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

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Vaccine clinic appointments will be made soon. Please wait for a text message from the Surgery

WELCOME from the Stoke Road Patient Participation Group

...to what is our Summer Newsletter. The effects of Covid on all of the NHS, from GPs to hospital services, could certainly be described as long. The stress being felt at our local surgery is echoed across the country. As a result of this we don't have our usual content for you in this issue, and it is later than we had hoped. However, I am sure you will find what is here very interesting.

We have a bumper collection of Q&A plus the first part of what we expect to be a small series of articles on what goes on behind the scenes at the surgery. Also we bring the great news that our Afternoon Teas have restarted, so here we tell you about them and how to find out more.

We have held four Listening Place sessions over the year. Feedback from patients has been generally positive but there is no doubt that the old days of directly booking face-to-face appointments are missed by many. The pandemic has hastened a revolution in the way our surgeries operate that otherwise would have appeared more slowly and been better tolerated. Despite this most patients are very happy with the care they get.

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 in your inbox please send us an email requesting just that. As always, if you have any comments, questions, or contributions for a future issue, please send them to us. We would love to hear from you -

ppgstokeroad@gmail.com

Ian White Chair, PPG Stoke Road Surgery

Q & A

with thanks to Dr Whybrew...

Can you tell us about the winter flu vaccine and will it be combined with the covid jab?

The flu vaccine will be offered at the same time as the covid autumn booster in the clinics we are running at the surgery in October, mainly on Saturdays (as soon as our flu jabs have been delivered). The clinics will be at Stoke Road Surgery, so our patients will not have to travel into Cheltenham to get them at the fire station. The clinics will be set up to give both jabs on the same day. We will offer separate clinics for people who are eligible for flu jabs but who are not eligible for covid boosters.

Will the covid vaccine used be one of the newer ones targeted at the omicron variant?

The covid vaccine we expect to be available to us for boosters in Cheltenham will be either the Moderna bivalent vaccine or the Pfizer bivalent vaccine. These bivalent vaccines cover the original and the Omicron variants. They are suitable for use as a booster rather than a primary course and may not be licensed for people aged 17 or under. Anyone under 18 who needs a covid booster may need to get it elsewhere (there will still be some special clinics at the fire station for children and young people). If anyone has not had their first two doses, or is aged under 18 and due any dose, please contact the surgery for advice. At any given clinic, there will not be a choice of vaccine, and we may not know in advance which one we will be giving.

Is everyone who is eligible for a flu jab also eligible for a covid jab?

No, if only it were that simple! Everyone over 50 is eligible for both, and all the usual risk groups are eligible for flu jabs as normal. However, eligibility for the covid boosters is different. The largest group with differences is the people with asthma. Anyone who has asthma needing steroid inhalers is eligible for the flu jab, but only people who have been admitted to hospital with asthma attacks in

the last 2 years, or who take steroid tablets every day for their asthma (or have had 2 shorter courses of steroid tablets for asthma in the last 2 years) are eligible for the covid booster.

I should say that we don't make the rules! The full list of who is (and is not) eligible for covid boosters can be found in tables 3 and 4, (on pages 19 and 26) of the "green book", which can be found here: <https://bit.ly/covidgreenbook>

In view of recent detection of the polio virus in sewage is the surgery going to chase up those who have not been brought up to date with vaccinations?

The polio in the sewage was found in London, and a catch-up vaccination campaign has been organised there. No polio has been found in sewage outside of London, and there is no catch-up campaign elsewhere. We have very high vaccine uptake for childhood vaccines (including polio), and we already chase up parents of children missing childhood vaccines to make sure they know they are due.

Is the pneumonia vaccine available and if so who to?

Yes, the pneumococcal vaccine is available to adults aged 65 or over as a single dose which does not need repeating unless you have problems with your spleen, or severe kidney disease (including those on dialysis), in which case it is repeated every 5 years. There are some people in certain risk groups who are younger than 65, where pneumococcal vaccine is also recommended, for example people who are about to start chemotherapy, or to have their spleen removed.

What is the current policy about wearing masks at the surgery?

At the moment, the legal situation is that people only need to wear a mask or face covering if they have any symptoms that could be due to covid, or if they know they have covid infection. We are still encouraging people to wear masks in the waiting room, because many people who have covid do not realise it and may pass it on without knowing. As you can see below, the government guidance no longer recommends self-isolating even if you

test positive. However, if you do not have symptoms then it is a matter of choice. The clinicians are no longer testing themselves twice weekly, so if we catch it and have no symptoms, we will not know about it either! If you are vulnerable to covid and are concerned about this, please let us know when booking an appointment, so we can make arrangements for you to wait outside if you prefer, and we can make sure your clinician is also wearing a mask.

Is the surgery waiting room open now?

Yes, the main doors are open and the waiting room is functioning as normal. The self check-in screen is turned on again. The only difference is that we are much more flexible about people who wish to wait outside, or even to be seen in the car park, if that is their preference. This is sometimes of help to people who are less mobile, and have skin problems on the face or hands, or ear problems, where they can easily be examined in the car, and do not have to walk in to the building at all. This has been a popular option to have available and will continue to be offered.

What are the latest guidelines about isolating and symptoms?

If you have symptoms that may be due to covid, listed below, then you should stay at home if you have a high fever or do not feel well enough to go to work. The advice is to avoid anyone who may be at higher risk of serious illness from covid, and to go back to normal activities when you feel well enough. If you are in a very high-risk category or immune suppressed then you need to do a test, as you may be eligible for antiviral medicines.

The symptoms to look out for are:

- a high temperature or shivering (chills) – a high temperature means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)

- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste
- shortness of breath
- feeling tired or exhausted
- an aching body
- a headache
- a sore throat
- a blocked or runny nose
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea
- feeling sick or being sick

Is the surgery independent or part of a chain?

The surgery is independent and is owned and run by the partners. We do not have any connections with any GP chains.

Will physician assistants be used at Stoke Road?

We certainly hope so! We are trying to recruit more clinical staff, and physician associates (as they are now called) are one of the groups we hope to be able to employ. We would envisage them helping the doctors and nurses with managing some of the same-day urgent problems, as well as some of the long-term condition management. There is a national shortage of GPs, and in spite of government plans to increase the numbers, they have gone down. We are really pleased to have the opportunity to embrace the skills of other professionals to help provide care for our patients. The role of our nurses has expanded enormously over the last few years, and we have also welcomed pharmacists and social prescribers to the team. Physician associates are likely to be the next group of professionals working with us, and we will be delighted to include them in our team.

Behind the scenes at Stoke Road Surgery

Have you ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes at the surgery? Why are there so many people in the glass office, and what do they do all day?

This is the first in a series of articles to help explain what goes on behind the scenes, which you may not be aware of.

Let's start with something very simple, like a request for a prescription. Sounds pretty straightforward really. But it may turn out to be a bit more complicated than you think. For every request, one of the team has to open up the notes of the patient, and check if the medicine requested is on their repeat list, when they last had it, and whether it is within the review date. If everything is in order, they can issue it, and send it to the doctor to be signed.

However, a large number of the requests are not so simple. Roughly a quarter will need extra checks – for example, if the review date has been reached, a message will be sent to the GP to look into it. If it is not on the repeat list, or has been issued more often or less often than would be expected, or if it is a new medicine that has not been issued before this will also need extra checks.

The GP will then need to look at the notes, make sure that blood tests, blood pressure measurements, and any other necessary checks have been done, before deciding whether the request is appropriate or not – or if the patient needs to speak to us or see us before it can be reissued. If a blood test is needed, a form must be generated on the computer, and a message goes back to the admin team to ask them to contact the patient and get a blood test booked in. For blood pressure checks, the message may be asking the team to contact the patient and ask them if they have a blood pressure machine at home, and if they do, to do some home readings. The admin team will also then generate and print off a form that the patient can collect and fill in.

If the patient has a mobile phone number on the system, we can send text messages to arrange these things, but if they do not, then it may take

multiple phone calls to catch people when they are at home.

Usually each of these queries does not take very long to deal with by itself, but when you realise that we issue an average of around two thousand prescriptions a week, all of these little bits of time certainly adds up!

How about something else seemingly simple, like letters? We get hundreds of letters coming to the practice every day (it actually averages at over a thousand letters per week). Some come in electronically, and some on paper. The paper ones need scanning – each one takes up to a minute or two to scan. Once scanned, they then need to be matched with the correct patient's notes, and then actioned. (And the electronic letters also need matching and actioning)

Some may just be for information, and can be simply filed in the notes. Many will be sent to the GP's inbox for the doctor to read, and to take any necessary actions. This includes highlighting anything that needs to be coded, checking lists of medications to make sure they are updated, or contacting patients if necessary. Some will need to be sent to the pharmacy team, and they will do a lot of the medication changes on the GPs behalf. However, the person scanning the letters needs to read them all, in case there is anything there that needs urgent action. At the end of a busy day, the routine letters waiting to be looked at by a GP will often be left unread for a few days, and we need to make sure nothing important is missed.

Most letters resulting from hospital appointments will have a diagnosis on them, which will need to be coded, or a letter may need to be written back to the hospital, or the patient may need to be contacted to make sure they understand any changes, or to implement the hospital suggestions. These messages all go back to the admin team, who will put the codes in the notes, and arrange any appointments necessary.

There are also a large number of letters for other things – such as requests for insurance reports, DVLA medicals, fit notes, and many more. Each of these takes time to process, and it may be more complicated than you realise. For example,

something as simple as a request for a fit note (sick note).

When we receive a request for a fit note, we need to check the patient's records and ascertain if they have seen us about the problem already. Sometimes, people request a note when they have not seen us, and in that case, we may need to speak to them – this appointment needs to be arranged. Sometimes, they are asking for a sick note when actually they need to see a GP for urgent medical help – this happens more often than you might realise! We get lots of requests for sick notes for people coming out of hospital, or having had surgery. As the discharge summaries and letters from the hospital may take weeks to arrive, we may not know that an operation has been done, or even that the person has been in hospital. For this reason, we may suggest contacting the hospital team to get a sick note (they should issue one, for the full time they predict the person is likely to need to be off work). If we don't know why the note is being requested, we may need to try to contact the patient to ask them – and if it is a continuation note, we may need to speak to them anyway, to see how they are getting on. This may mean a lot of back and forth messages to the admin team if we can't get hold of the patient immediately (and this is another way in which text messaging is hugely useful).

This is just a small amount of the unseen work going on behind the scenes at Stoke Road Surgery – the tip of the administrative iceberg!

General Practice



The work of a GP

and their team



Our Award Winning* Sunday Afternoon Teas are back

The PPG are very pleased to announce we are once again holding our Sunday Afternoon Teas.

We started the teas some four years ago and we hold them at Stoke Road Surgery in the waiting room, which we turn into a very nice venue for afternoon teas. This is well supported by our GPs and is run by members of the Patients Participation Group and a host of volunteer drivers, as well as cake & sandwich makers who help to serve our guests on the day.

The teas are run every 2nd Sunday in the month and were set up to provide company for people living alone who may be lonely at weekends, for people who are mainly over 75 years and people who do not get out very often. Usually, our guests are patients of Stoke Road Surgery.

How to become a guest

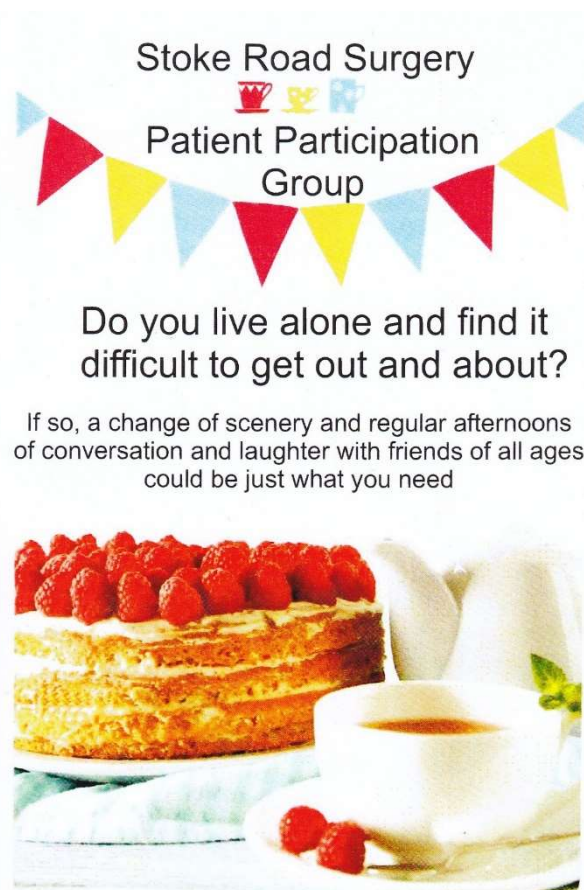
You can ask at the Surgery to be referred.

Mainly you are referred by a Doctor, Nurse, OT, or a Social Prescriber. Once a Guest is referred to us one of the volunteers will visit and get to know you and your needs. We can then arrange transport for you on the day.

This is a fantastic opportunity for older people to get out on a Sunday and enjoy the company of others. We start at 3:00pm and take our Guests home around 4:30pm.

We look forward to welcoming more new Guests in the near future. If you find contacting the surgery difficult then please don't hesitate to get in touch with the PPG if you, or a relative, may be interested in joining us. Our contact email address is on the front cover of this newsletter.

* The Corkill Award 2018 – the award notice hangs in Stoke Road Surgery reception area



Do you live alone and find it difficult to get out and about?

If so, a change of scenery and regular afternoons of conversation and laughter with friends of all ages could be just what you need

Company, conversation and a cuppa

Stoke Road Surgery Patient Participant Group arrange afternoon teas for people aged over 75 or over, across the Bishops Cleeve area.

On the 2nd Sunday of every month we meet up for tea, cake and company.

We look forward to welcoming you at Stoke Road Surgery between 3:00pm and 4:30pm.

Our volunteer drivers will accompany you to the tea and make sure you get home safely.

