

Hello everyone,

Thought I'd drop you a summer update about the patient group and because some people are a little uncertain or maybe frustrated about when GP services will get back to "normal". I think the answer is: not for quite a while. Well, not in the way we initially make appointments and first talk to a doctor.

Despite what it feels like, our practice is offering almost as many consultations as before the pandemic, about 90 per cent. These initially are over the telephone but anyone who then needs to be seen physically, will be. That's a promise.

This situation will last for the foreseeable. For unlike the rest of us who were "liberated" on July 19, throughout the health service, Covid-19 protection and disinfection measures have to remain in place as before. In the case of our practice this means fewer patients can be in the building, so that disinfection can be carried out after each person and for staff safety.

**Staff:** Two of our regular doctors, Dr Davies and Dr Muallem, will be on maternity leave until the end of the year, so there will continue to be unfamiliar faces/voices as locums, some regular some less so. Our partner doctors, Dr Drewry, Dr Sethurajan and Dr McGlone, have also been helping to run the vaccination services. At the end of the summer they will join the massive national flu vaccine roll-out which will include more people (eg wider age groups) than ever before. The NHS is currently trialling the best way to combine flu jabs and possible Covid boosters in terms of jab effectiveness and efficiency of administering them. New to the practice is pharmacist Yasmin Khalil whose specialist knowledge will assist with medication reviews. Our new and highly experienced practice manager Vanessa Zahran is now settled in three days a week. She has a particular expertise in quality control.

**Cancer screening.** If you are signed up for tweets from @LBofHounslow or @HealthierNWL you'll be on top of vaccine venues but ALSO the campaign to reinvigorate cancer screening or any sort. Do get screened if invited and do report any unusual lumps/changes to your GP.

Frustrations:

**Getting an appointment.** This is ongoing in that the only appointments available online always seem weeks away. Especially if you want a named doctor. As you know, not all the appointments are put online all at once. Extra ones, for the current and next week, are added most days and there are cancellations. So do check again in the morning. These are the ones the receptionists see. My advice if you are worried is to either call reception and tell them your problem or use e-consult which opens up on the website home page. This offers advice but eventually you get to the part where you share your symptoms and it offers an appropriately timely response. Personally I find it more comforting than booking an appointment a month away. If you are worried about ANY delay dial the NHS number 111.

**Making a follow-up appointment.** If, after your consultation, your GP wants to see you again in a fixed timescale for your health/safety, he/she may make that appointment with you there and then or add this to the notes so that reception can book you. In all other cases, eg for appointments in a couple of weeks or after tests, you'll need to make that

appointment yourself as above. These are anxious times, so do tell your doctor if you feel particularly fearful about "not being looked after" in the interim so you can be reassured.

**Chasing up hospital referral appointments.** Unfortunately, these appointments are totally in the hands of the hospitals and sometimes the silence can feel deafening. You will have been given a contact number for the hospital department's bookings team and they are the only people who can advise/help. Unfortunately, the practice has no "back channel" to the hospital, only the very same number as you! So please do chase your own appointment if you possibly can.

**Ending emails to the practice.** I didn't realise until recently that even an email just replying "thank you" has to go through official (and time-consuming) checking and logging to protect the patient.

**Patients Know Best** (and possibly more than your GP for a while!). Anyone who has signed up with the "Patients Know Best" service at one of the Imperial group hospitals (Charing Cross, Hammersmith, Queen Charlotte, Queen Mary etc) will get their consultants' reports, test results very rapidly by email or app. Our GPs have asked me to explain that they DON'T get sent the information at the same time as it is sent to them via another route (for the time being). They don't like being in the dark but it's another bit of digital work in progress.

With so much going on, I have prepared a little Q&A about a doctor's life this year, which I will attach.

**Changes to the patient group.** We are looking for a couple more voluntary trustees to join the executive committee to widen our demographic, age and skills base, but most excitingly we are looking for some "horses' mouths" we can occasionally turn to for updates/advice on living with various key health issues such as respiratory, diabetes, mental health, carers. This is not about individual "lived experience" but sharing the knowledge that has come from being plugged into support networks for that condition or situation. Patients' views matter!

Full information is to be found on the website (LINK) and I do hope we hear from some of you at groveparksurgerypg@gmail.com

**Patient group AGM** is on September 13 at 7pm, probably by Zoom, while the healthcare restrictions remain tight. We will send out an agenda and Eventbrite link.

I'm writing this from Spain (no floods). The NHS phone app "proof of vaccine for travel" worked seamlessly with my "travel locator form" and I do find it a really useful app for seeing my medical records, booking repeat prescriptions, making surgery appointments and for advice. It's a bit of a song and a dance to set up (for security) but once done it is really easy to use. **NB** The NHS app (download from Google Play or App Store) is a different one from the NHS Covid-19 app you use to log in at venues etc.

With best wishes,  
Liz