



UnityHealth

AUTUMN 2020

## PATIENT NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Autumn issue of the Unity Health Patient Newsletter, compiled by the management team, together with the Patient Participation Group (PPG).

We hope that you find it full of useful information to help you access all you need to support your health and wellbeing in these difficult times.

### FLU CLINICS

Our flu vaccines are being delivered from the 29<sup>th</sup> September and we are finalising a significant number of clinics for the following two weeks, with more to follow aligned with further vaccine deliveries. There will **NOT** be the usual drop-in clinics – you will need to book a timeslot to ensure social distancing can be maintained throughout. As soon as they have been finalised we will make timeslots available both on-line and via reception, sending texts to let everyone know. The first clinics are **ONLY** for those over 65, shielding patients and those who live with them or those under 65 with a Long Term Condition. Nationally there is a pause on vaccinating the 50-65 age group without a long term condition. Further details will follow nationally on this.

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To reduce the risk of transmission of the virus and to maximise the number of patients we can vaccinate, we need to minimise the time taken for each flu appointment so would please ask that you do the following:

- Only the person being vaccinated to attend if possible (unless a carer needed)
- Although we are scheduling timeslots there may be a short amount of queuing outside – please come prepared particularly if it is raining
- Please wear clothes that are easily removed to be able to expose your arm quickly
- Please follow the instructions of those managing the queue
- Please walk to the appointment if possible

**Note:** Copies of this Newsletter can be found online at:-

<https://www.unity-health.co.uk/about-us/patient-participation-group> or by personal request to Pipla Dewan, (Practice Manager-Interim), on 01844 238284

## COVID-19

At the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, all GP practices were told by NHS England (NHSE) to stop providing many of the routine services usually provided to patients and focus instead on dealing with Covid cases to keep patients at home and to minimise the risk of spreading the virus. During this time, we introduced a complete telephone/video triage appointment system for all GP appointments (compliant with the national mandate). We also minimised face-to-face appointments with our nursing team. However, throughout the pandemic, we have always continued to see patients face-to-face when this was needed and have worn PPE during these appointments to protect both staff and patients.

The latest guidance from NHSE is that we need to start to move back to more normal services as far as possible. We still need to prioritise preventative activities such as immunisations, cervical smears and health checks. At all times we need to be aware of the reduced capacity, particularly amongst the nursing teams, since the guidance around PPE means that appointments are longer than was needed prior to Covid since it takes time to put PPE on/off and clean the area. We, therefore, need to continue to prioritise the work that we do and to focus on providing a safe service for the maximum number of patients.

The following are the key areas/points being targeted:

- National priorities are cancer, cancer prevention and high risk long term conditions. We encourage you to always contact us if you have any concerns or symptoms.
- There could be a second COVID-19 spike in winter which may mean we need to change priorities again.
- Routine cervical smears invitations have resumed through the central recall system so numbers are increasing.
- We have re-started coil fitting clinics for contraception but now have more limited capacity. Once appointments are filled, patients will be referred to other local NHS providers.
- We intend to re-start sending out invitations for preventative NHS Health Checks for those people aged 40 to 74 who do not already have cardiovascular disease and have not had a health check in the last 5 years.
- For all patients with a long term condition please book your normal Health Care Assistant (HCA) appointment for blood, foot and other routine checks in the month corresponding to your birthday. For this year only, we would ask that you do not book the follow-up nurse Care and Support Planning Appointment. Should the HCA results indicate the need for a follow-up GP or Nurse appointment you will be contacted. By doing this, we are able to focus on patients whose condition is not as well controlled or do not routinely attend for reviews. Where possible we will carry out these reviews by phone or video to avoid a visit to the surgery.
- We are encouraging patients to increase the use of screening questionnaires prior to your annual review. This has a two-fold benefit in that it gathers essential information for discussion but requires less time in the surgery.
- We would very much appreciate those patients who are able to purchase their own blood pressure monitor doing so and sending in their results for us to monitor. We are unable to use the b/p machines in the waiting room at the moment so sending in your b/p results is very helpful.
- Routine blood monitoring for medicines such as anti-psychotics, thyroid and methotrexate continues.
- We do not have capacity to carry out any hospital blood test requests except those for oncology. We ask that you attend the hospital phlebotomy service for hospital-requested blood tests please.
- We have stopped taking prescription requests over the phone (errors have been made and Covid levels are now lower allowing us to revert to previous methods). We would encourage

you to order your medications using the on-line service (please ask reception if you are not already registered) or using the repeat request slip of your prescription.

- Please remember that you should NOT attend any appointment if you have any Covid symptoms and should, if possible, wait outside the surgery for your clinician to collect you. If this is not possible please observe social distancing in the waiting room and use the signs on the chairs, showing which chair(s) has been used and is in need of cleaning.
- At the moment we are experiencing high levels of demand for services, particularly for HCA/blood appointments. We have increased the number of appointments but each now takes longer than previously to allow for PPE and cleaning, resulting in longer than usual delays to see an HCA. We apologise for this and are trying to reduce these times.

Having painted the picture of what we have had to change in order to continue to provide a service to all our patients within the restrictions of Covid-19, everybody at Unity Health would like to thank you all for the way that you have so readily accepted the restrictions and changes required of you.

Unfortunately Covid-19 is not going away with the same speed that it arrived. We must, therefore, continue to be diligent in all our actions, to ensure that it does not spike out of control, causing a second major lockdown.

Until there is a tried and tested vaccine available we must continue to stay alert and follow the guidelines that have at least allowed us to start to enjoy some semblance of the life we were all enjoying. To ensure this can be maintained, we absolutely must remember to:-

- Keep our distance from people outside our household or support bubble
- Comply with the 'rule of six' (or any other restrictions that are introduced locally or nationally)
- Avoid casual face-to-face meetings, particularly with people unknown to us
- Make sure that we continue to wash our hands regularly
- Avoid crowded places wherever possible
- Keep indoor places well ventilated
- Continue to work from home where this is mutually convenient to you and your employer
- Avoid public transport wherever possible, particularly at peak times.
- Walk or cycle whenever you can
- Maintain social distancing (a distance of 2 metres apart), when at car park machines, bus stops, public toilets and when requested before entering a shop or business
- Wear a face covering in those places decreed by the government excluding children under 3 and those people who would find them difficult, e.g. people with breathing difficulties)
- Wash clothes regularly
- Get a test if you have symptoms, i.e. a high temperature, a new continuous cough or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste
- Tell all those that you have been in close contact that you have developed symptoms and download the NHS COVID-19 Track and Trace App if possible
- Should you develop symptoms, do not leave home, immediately self-isolate and call 111. Please do not visit your GP practice

We are quite sure that you have often seen these, together with many other do's and don'ts over the last six months. Unfortunately, we will not overcome this virus without continuing to pay attention to everything humanly possible that needs to be done to stop it returning. This virus means that we are living in a constantly changing situation. Listen to or watch news programmes for up-to-date information, and visit: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> if possible.

## PATIENT SURVEY

Each year an annual independent survey at all practices is run by Ipsos MORI on behalf of NHS England. The survey is sent out every January to March to a sample of patients regardless of whether or not they have attended the surgery and is published in July. The results for 2020 can be found at:-

<https://www.gp-patient.co.uk/PatientExperiences?practicecode=K82047>

These results will be discussed at the next PPG meeting in October but it was felt that in general Unity Health performed favourably in respect of both the national and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) averages.

Taking the results of the entire survey into account we are very pleased with the overall results. We are particularly proud of having scored significantly above the local and national averages in respect of the following questions:-

- 80% of patients said that they found it easy to get through to the practice by telephone where both national and local CCG averages are 65%.
- 81% described their experience of making an appointment as good which is higher than both the national and local CCG average of 65%.
- 91% of patients with long term condition/s said that they were well supported by local services and/or organisations during the last twelve months. The local CCG average is 78% whilst the national average is 77%.
- 93% find receptionists helpful, compared to the CCG average of 87% and the national average of 89%

We were also pleased that we scored well on the questions of healthcare professional's recognising and/or understanding any mental health needs they may have during their most recent appointment; Unity scored 92% compared to the national average of 85% and CCG average of 86%. This is also seen in the project we recently undertook for our mental health patients which is reported in more detail on page 6.

Everyone at Unity Health is very pleased with the survey results and believes that they reflect the improvements that have been made within the practice during the last year.

We also carried out our own annual patient survey recently. The results will be discussed at the next PPG meeting in October and published on the website and in our next newsletter.

## SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

This is a recently introduced service which we are now offering to those patients in need of help with their mental wellbeing and/or physical health. We fully appreciate that from time to time people need a little help in dealing with the things that life throws at them, but often do not know where to turn for help and support.

Social Prescribing Link Workers take a holistic approach to health and wellbeing, spending time with patients to focus on 'what really matters to you'. They act as the connector between individuals, services and activities available locally, working with you to connect you to and gain support from the most appropriate service(s).

If you would like to make contact with a Link Worker, a referral can be made by a GP, nurse, other healthcare professional or a member of your practice team. A Social Prescribing Link Worker can help you with:-

Social Isolation and Loneliness

Getting Active

Healthy Eating

Mental Health

Education and Learning

Housing

Financial Support

A Link Worker may not have all the answers to your questions but they will know where you can find relevant help, information and will support you in accessing it.

We are very pleased to be able to introduce this service, which is available to all Unity Health patients. If you feel that you would benefit from speaking to a Social Prescribing Link Worker please call one of our friendly Receptionists who will be happy to arrange this for you.

If you are interested in finding out more about social prescribing generally please see the *NHS England Social Prescribing webpage* where you will find links to further information.

Information about the support and activities available locally can be found by visiting either the *Bucks Online Directory* or the *Thame Community Directory*.

## **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT PROJECT**

In the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic Unity Health became aware that patients with severe and enduring mental health problems would be finding life particularly difficult as their normal support and coping mechanisms were not always available.

Whilst NHSE had invested resources in checking patients at severe risk of physical complications from the virus, those with mental health problems were unlikely to be included in this list, meaning that their specific physical and mental health issues would not be addressed.

Unity Health wished to enhance the support that the 120 patients on the register received. The Friends of Thame Community Hospital were able to provide additional financial support by increasing Unity's budget to enable the secondment of a mental health worker.

During the first weeks all patients on the severe and enduring mental health register were called to see how they were coping during the lockdown, ensuring they had plans in place, taking into account their level of contact with the mental health and care teams, the risks being faced, a review of all medications and psychological factors.

Appropriate resources were also provided, such as coping with anger and anxiety, distraction techniques, increasing concentration, reflection skills and improving low motivation.

Of the 120 patients on the register, this meant more than 90 received direct contact and support in a timely manner.

The practice is very grateful to the Friends of Thame Community Hospital for their support to enable us to create and provide this service.

## **MENTAL HEALTH HELPLINE**

During the pandemic the Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Mental Health Helpline is available 24 hours a day. It can be called to access support from mental health professionals for a variety of mental health problems such as anxiety, low mood, feeling stressed and/or worried, difficulty with relationships, crying often, feeling helpless and/or confused, hallucinations or hearing voices.

Instead of dialling 111 or calling your GP why not call the Mental Health Helpline:-

Adults: 0800 783 0119 or 01865 904997

Children and young people: 0800 783 0121 or 01865 904998

Further information of all the services offered can be found on the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust website at:

<https://www.buckinghamshireccg.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/MK-Helpline.docx>

## **CANCER SERVICES AT THAME COMMUNITY HOSPITAL**

A leaflet describing all the services available at the Thame Community Hub will shortly be available for you to pick up at all our surgeries; meantime here is a summary of the services currently available.

A community hub is a place where different health and social care services can work together, in a way which is best for the local population. They are designed to provide rapid, local care to the people living in the area. Following a thorough assessment by the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Team, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust will be reopening more community services in September.

Temporarily closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, services have been risk-assessed and a number of changes made to ensure the safety of staff and patients, such as adapting our buildings in line with the national guidelines, adopting social distancing measures and increased hand sanitising for all, changing the patient flow through buildings where necessary, asking patients to wear facemasks and checking patients' temperatures before allowing them in. This means more outpatient clinics; paediatric services and the Community Assessment and Treatment Service (CATS) can now be resumed.

Things are well on their way towards a reopening of services at Thame, with re-opening starting on 21<sup>st</sup> September.

CATS will continue as an appointment based service. The Day Hospital service will be also be available as an appointment based service to meet social distancing restrictions, enhanced and supported with telephone consultations. The Pulmonary Rehab service will continue as at the moment with a view to increasing appointments as soon as possible, supported by additional funding due to Covid-19. Care UK Muscular Skeletal and Physiotherapy services will return to appointments as previously. Patients requiring scanning will continue to be seen as they have throughout the pandemic. Health Visitors will recommence seeing patients on an appointment basis. The Podiatry service will move into the hospital building, allowing additional space for use by the Community Teams.

Cancer Care services are planned to re-open as soon as possible.

All Outpatient services will continue to be booked through the Administration service to ensure rooms are available and services assessed effectively. All patients attending will be greeted by the Reception Team staff, with Covid-19 checks completed on entry.

Work on other parts of the site will also enable other service provider's space on site to deliver their services locally.

## SURGERY OPENING TIMES

<b>BRILL:</b>	Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday Thursday	8.30am - 6.00pm 8.30am - 1.00pm
<b>CHINNOR:</b>	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday Tuesday	8.30am - 6.00pm 8.30am - 1.00pm
<b>LONG CRENDON:</b>	Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:30am – 1:00pm
<b>PRINCES RISBOROUGH:</b>	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday Wednesday	8.30am - 6.00pm 8.30am - 1.00pm
<b>THAME:</b>	Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:30am – 6.00pm

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic we are sorry but we have had to discontinue offering any face to face extended hours appointments. We are, however, offering video consultations on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 6.30 pm until 8.00 pm and on alternate Saturdays from 8.30 am until 12.30 pm. Please contact reception as normal to make an appointment.

## TRAINING DAYS

In line with all other practices in Bucks, all 5 surgeries will be closed for essential staff training for one afternoon a month from 1.00pm on the following dates:

Tuesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> September	Wednesday 21 <sup>st</sup> October	Thursday 19 <sup>th</sup> November
Wednesday 20 <sup>th</sup> January	Tuesday 9 <sup>th</sup> February	Thursday 18 <sup>th</sup> March