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From: Barnabas PPG <barnabas.ppg@gmail.com>
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To All Barnabas PPG Members ...

[Printed copies to those PPG members without email]

[If you can't read any of the attached documents, or want printed copies of anything mentioned, please contact me and I'll try to send you a copy.]

Welcome to the February bulletin for Barnabas PPG members.

Coronavirus

As someone commented the other day on Twitter "I am getting tired of being part of a major historical event". I'm sure you are too!

There is a continuing flood of news on Covid-19, and often conflicting news too. In fact there is so much that I'm not even going to try to summarise it all here for you. I'm trying to keep up with the overview of what's happening, and often take a deeper look at some of the science, so if there is something I miss mentioning that you want to know about then do ask and I'll try to help.

The vaccination programme is continuing, much as the government says. At the full PPG meeting on 20 January Matt reported that the Practice had more or less completed inviting the over-75s for vaccination and would soon be starting on the over-70s. As I have only just turned 70 I expected a wait, but the very next day received my invitation by text message. The text contained a link, which I followed and booked my appointment at Ealing Town Hall. If you want to read my detailed report it is on my personal blog at <https://zenmischief.com/2021/01/horrible-times-17-surreal/>. Suffice it to say that I was very impressed by the organisation and smoothness of the whole operation.

One thing to know is that the Practice are inviting patients by text message (where possible, otherwise by phone or by post); the text message contains the link which will allow you to book your own appointment. The NHS (centrally) is also sending letters to patients inviting them to book an appointment. Whichever of these communications you receive first, please act on it and don't wait!

Please also note that there is an email around which invites you to book a vaccination appointment and asks for a fee for doing so. **This is a scam; it is not an official NHS communication and you should NOT respond to it.** The NHS has been quite clear that there are no circumstances under which patients will be asked to pay for Covid-19 vaccination.

Please also be aware that there are two vaccination centres in the borough: Ealing Town Hall and the Dominion Centre in Southall. For administrative and logistical reasons vaccinations are not being given at the Practice, nor at any Ealing GP practice.

There are some common questions and answers in the minutes of the 20 January PPG meeting (see below).

If you are going for your vaccination and need transport, a local London black cab driver (Paul Williams) is offering local people fixed price return trips to vaccination centres. He takes you, waits and brings you back. He quoted me a price for Ealing Town Hall which was probably less than the standard black cab fare for the return journey with no waiting time added. He's certainly doing trips to the Town Hall and Dominion Centre, and maybe others as well. Black cabs are a good option at the moment because of the screen between passenger and driver; and Paul is pleasant and friendly. This is obviously providing him with some work but he also sees it as a public service. He's contactable on 07793 738 626 or cabitalcitytourslondon@gmail.com and he's advertising on several of the Facebook, Nextdoor, etc. local groups (so his contact details are in the public domain).

In the last few days concerns have been raised over a number of the variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, especially that originating in South Africa (SA). While the UK variant is now very widespread, and appears to be about 50% more transmissible, the

general consensus seems to be that it does not cause more severe illness. However the SA variant (and maybe also the Brazil variant) is more of a worry; it does seem to be more transmissible and it may be less susceptible to the current vaccines; although again there appears to be little evidence it causes more severe illness. This SA variant is not (yet, we hope) widespread in the UK and the government has introduced action to try to prevent its spread – including pre-emptive testing in parts of Hanwell and West Ealing. There's more information on this at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-55534727> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-54872039>. And there is information about the local testing at <https://www.ealingccg.nhs.uk/newspublications/news/2021/02/residents-living-and-working-in-parts-of-hanwell-and-west-ealing-are-advised-to-get-a-covid-19-test.aspx>.

Please, please, please be sensible, stay at home, and follow the rules.

Although it looks as if the number of new cases is falling, they are still above the levels seen last April and we are far from out of the woods yet.

There is a lot more information on the Ealing Council website, including how to get a test even if you don't have Covid-19 symptoms, at https://www.ealing.gov.uk/info/201262/coronavirus_covid-19.

PPG News

PPG Meetings

The minutes of our full meeting on 20 January are attached. Please read them as they contain useful information.

The next full PPG meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 17 March at 1330. This will again be held on Zoom. You should have received a meeting notice. The link for the call is:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83096234598?pwd=UStkWEZyc1INZXdTRzd5WXlnR3k1UT09>

The next informal contact video call is on Friday 19 February at 1100. Again it is on Zoom; the link is

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7279594414?pwd=VmYwODdoWGg2eTFvTlVjVlZyRmhSQ09>

Local Facilities List

As promised I have finally managed to complete the revision of our *Local Facilities List* and have sent it to Matt to be uploaded to the Practice website. I also attach a copy.

PPG Plan for 2021-23

As you'll also see from the meeting minutes, I am starting to consider our plans for PPG activity for the two years beginning 1 April this year. While any plan has to be realistic, taking into account both the number of us available and the Covid-19 situation, it is important to document (a) what we would like to do, (b) what the Practice would like us to do, and (c) what we can reasonably expect to be able to do. My hope is to be able to bring some draft ideas to the March PPG meeting, and then a proper plan to our AGM in May. If you have ideas about what we should be doing, please let me know.

Practice News

Practice Phones

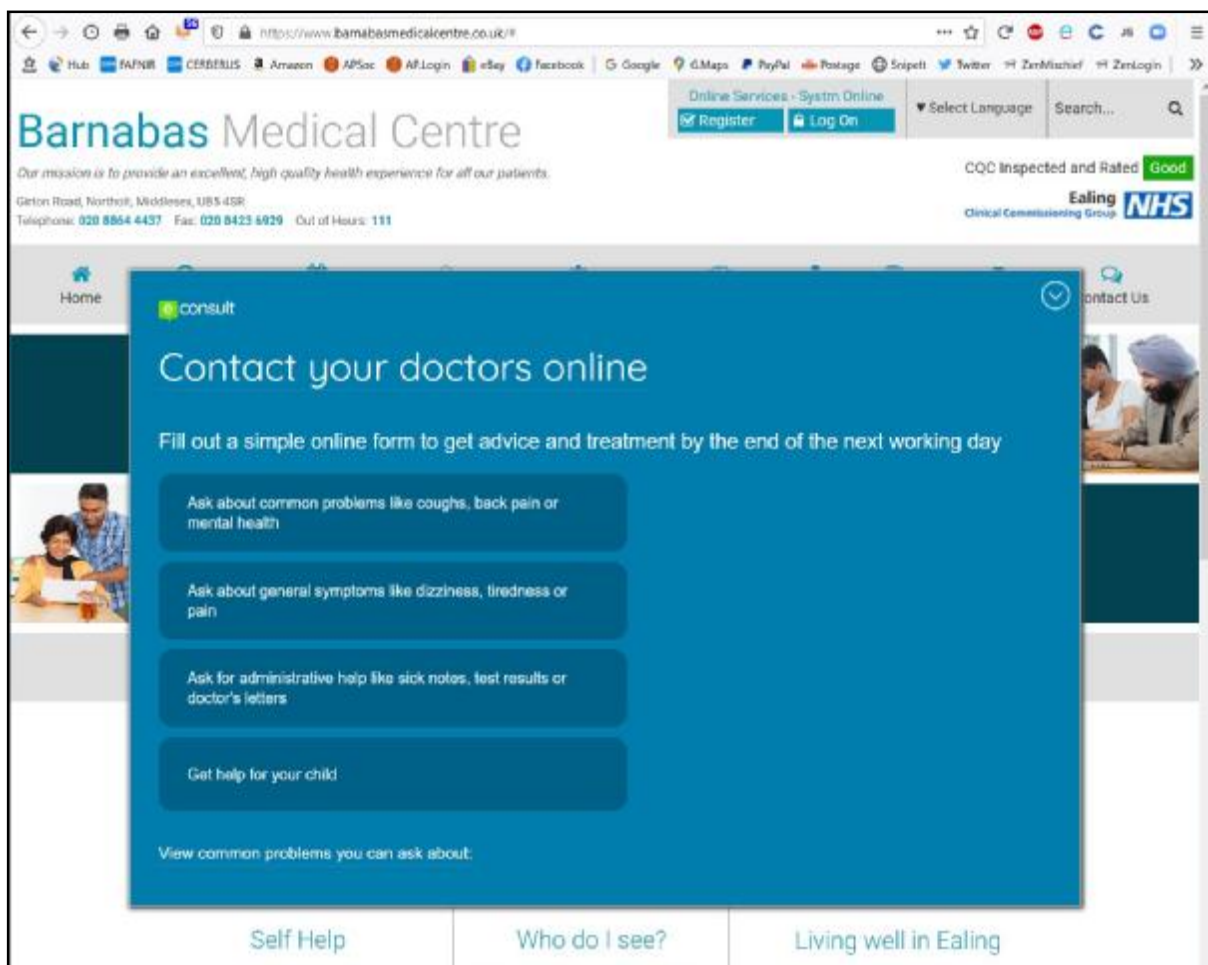
Shortly before Christmas the Practice installed a new "cloud-based" phone system as the old one was life expired. Unfortunately one side effect of this has been us patients spending long periods on hold listening to music and waiting to talk to someone – but you now never get an engaged tone.

This is because of the way the phone system works – it is not a deliberate ploy with a hidden agenda! What happens when you phone is that your call is always put in the queue: the lines are never full, so you never get an engaged tone. Because of this you are queued with everyone else who would also previously have got an engaged tone. Hence the long waits.

The Practice are aware of this – and know it is far from ideal. Like all new systems there are things which need ironing out. I don't know what the plan is, or even whether it is possible to change this. However the PPG meeting on 20 January asked that at least the phone system should tell us where we are in the call queue – whether I'm number 3 or number 97 in the queue might make a difference as to whether I choose to continue holding. We also asked for some other changes; the details are in the meeting minutes.

eConsult

If you have internet access you can avoid the phone queues by using the eConsult facility on the Practice website.



In my view eConsult is incredibly helpful, although it does seem to be very long-winded – that's because it is trying to ensure (a) that you have nothing which needs emergency attention and (b) to provide as much information as possible for the doctor. My wife and I have used eConsult a number of times and always found it an effective way to communicate with the Practice, especially for things which are not obviously immediately urgent. On every occasion we've used it the right person (doctor, nurse, pharmacist) has called us within a couple of hours. If, after a phone discussion, the doctor needs to see you, they will ask you to go in to the Practice – as they did once with my wife. The other advantage of eConsult is that you can use it at any time – like on Sunday evening – and then you're immediately in the doctors' queue as soon as the Practice opens; no hanging on the phone the next morning!

Local Healthcare News

I've not picked up anything specifically local which isn't covered elsewhere in this bulletin. However if you do ever spot anything which you think may be of interest to the group, please let me know – and if appropriate I'll include it in the next bulletin.

General NHS News

GP Contract Update for 2021-22

I've been having a quick look at some of the changes the government are making to the GP contract this year. Although there isn't a lot of change due to the current pressures, I did spot the following on provision of the patient-facing GP online digital facilities.

- The agreement defines the 'core digital offer which all practices must provide to patients':

- They must offer online consultations that can be used by patients, carers and practice staff on a patient's behalf to gather submitted structured information and to support triage.
- They must have the ability to hold a video consultation. Practices are expected to 'use them ordinarily', the agreement says.
- Two-way secure written communication between patients, carers and practices
- An up to date accessible online presence, such as a website, that links to online services prominently
- Signposting to a validated symptom checker and self-care health information via their website, such as to nhs.uk
- Shared record access, including patients being able to add to their record
- Request and management of prescriptions online
- Online appointment booking
- Patients must be able to inform their practice of a change of address, contact details or of their demographic information, including ethnicity electronically.
- A new contractual requirement for more timely transfer of patient records when patients move between practices will be introduced.

Newsletters

As usual I've received a few newsletters which may be of interest:

- NW London Covid-19 Update (from early January) is at <https://nhsnorthwestlondoncollaborationofccgs.newsweaver.com/ahpgh0vdg3/1g9t0el053n1t5ilb7epuk>
- NHS In Touch #112 – copy attached
- CQC Survey Programme – copy attached

That's all for now. More next month. Meanwhile please be good and stay safe!

Keith

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