Newsletter 2020 - A note from the Doctors

Dear all,

We are aware we haven’t shared a Practice newsletter for a while so we thought this might be a good time for a quick update (or perhaps not so quick looking at the length of this letter!). But it does contain some important information - right through to the end, so please read on.

So far 2020 has certainly proved to be a very challenging year hasn’t it? But we want to thank you all for the amazing support, encouragement and words of appreciation that you have sent to our staff during these unprecedented times. You have been incredibly patient and understanding. We couldn’t have got this far without that support. Thank you.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 coronavirus or at least its legacy and aftermath will remain with us for some time yet. We expect it will be at least next year before we can return to our previous style of working but in the meantime we wanted to let you know what changes you will notice in the coming months. The new mandatory processes outlined below, with which we are sure you are already very familiar, will severely limit our ability to manage the large numbers of patients with which we were previously accomplished.

Social Distancing

As the NHS slowly starts to allow the recommencement of more routine work, we have a duty to maintain the same social distancing rules at the surgery as the rest of the Nation. This will mean limiting the number of patients we have in the building at any one time. Like all other industries, our staff need to work more than 2m apart from each other and we will likely remain on reduced staff levels for some time to come through a combination of illness, self- isolation or shielding. In order to protect you and our staff, we are a long way off being able to return to the previous volume of patients we managed on a daily basis with a full, overcrowded waiting room.

PPE

For your protection as well as ours, all clinical staff (nurses and doctors) will have to wear full protective attire (PPE) for the coming months. Please don’t be surprised when you are greeted by a staff member dressed in this way - we are hard to recognise but will introduce ourselves and make sure you are quite clear who you seeing. To minimise viral spread, the PPE does of course have to be changed and disposed of in the correct manner between every patient and this takes time so please bear with us. It’s also extremely hot to wear - so apologies but we are praying hard that there is no heat wave this summer!

Room cleaning

In addition, for your safety, the doctors are responsible to clean and disinfect the room and all equipment used between every patient. As you can imagine, this significantly slows down our working day.

Primary Care Access Hubs

Also known as ‘COVID-Hubs’ or ‘Hot Hubs’ these newly established GP run hubs operate throughout the week and weekends, from two bases - North Ormesby and Redcar Primary Care Hospital. Out of hours they are staffed by our GP Federation’s already well regarded GP STAR service. Within routine working hours, they are staffed by GPs and nurses from all Teeswide practices who share in a rota to provide cover. Any patients with possible coronavirus are seen in these hubs. This includes any patients who are managing their coronavirus symptoms but have other incidental health needs, and those with a temperature or respiratory symptoms who cannot be managed by telephone or video, but are not so obviously unwell that they need admitting to hospital. It is important to share with you that all of our doctors at Coulby Medical Practice take part in these rotes on a weekly basis instead of their usual surgery, so again this is another factor reducing our workforce and number of available appointments across the week.

Managing workload

On a busy day and working efficiently, it was not unusual for each doctor to manage anywhere between 50-70 patients in any one day. It is going to be a long time before we can offer this sort of capacity again. We expect even half this number will be challenging. For this reason, we ask that you continue your wonderful support and understanding. We need to work together to ensure everyone who needs to access healthcare can do so in a timely and safe manner. Although UK NHS General Practice is now “open as normal”, it is a very ‘new’ normal. At time of writing we still do not have the green light to access routine support services such as X-rays, scans and routine hospital referrals. Urgent referrals have remained unrestricted throughout.

For those who need our help, we’d like to remind you of the several methods through which you can get in touch with us if you need to.

Remote consulting options:

**1. Telephone consultations.**

At Coulby Medical Practice we felt very lucky to have already been well versed with our successful telephone consultation system which has been running for more than 8 years now. Thankfully, we were well ahead of the game when this became an overnight mandatory requirement across practices throughout the UK. This aspect was smooth sailing for us which at such a chaotic time was much appreciated!

**2. Video Consultations**

We’re very proud of how quickly UK General Practice adapted within a week when need arose. Many of you may have already undertaken a video consultation and the feedback has been very positive. Where appropriate, video consultations are likely to be here to stay for those who prefer them, but these too often take time as we help talk patients through the set up the process. And like all IT, remote consultations are at the mercy of connectivity and Wi-Fi problems. We currently use a service provider called [whereby.com](http://whereby.com) which has been approved by NHS England in terms of its privacy and security. You can also download a free **Whereby App** on to your mobile devices which seems to generate a more reliable connection, wherever you are.

**3. eConsult**

eConsult is another new method for you to contact us online for advice or make simple requests. We had just started to roll this out in the weeks before coronavirus hit, so again were delighted to have already got the hard work under our belt before the chaos ensued! This is a secure dedicated email facility and uploads your request directly on to your electronic patient record. It also contains helpful advice links for managing many problems. Through eConsult requests can be made to our admin team, practice pharmacist, or the GP who will respond before the end of the next working day.

**4. Face to face appointments**

After an initial telephone or video consultation with the doctor or nurse, you may be asked to come down to surgery for an old-fashioned face-to-face appointment. These will be reserved for only those situations when it is absolutely necessary. Currently we are asking you wait outside until the doctor or nurse comes to greet you at your allocated slot time, and invites you in. We ask you to attend these appointments alone (except in the case of children; or adults with impaired hearing or vision or memory loss who may be accompanied by an adult carer). We ask you to arrive wearing a face cover of some sort (mask, scarf or snood). All doors will be open and you will be encouraged not to touch anything on your way through to the consulting room.

**5. Drive-through appointments** - Yes. Really.

I don’t think any of our doctors or nurses ever imagined they’d be working in a health service with ‘drive-thru’ appointments! For some these are very useful and even preferable to coming into the surgery. Perhaps you feel vulnerable to coronavirus or are keen to shield yourself and stay in your own little ‘safe’ bubble - your car. Of course these are only suitable if you have something that can be seen through the car window without the need to undress! But so far have proved a great way of quickly checking moles or skin rashes on the face or arms. Sometimes even throats can be examined through the car window.

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So in summary, there are lots of different ways we are here to help you.

For those of you who are suffering loss, mental health issues, cancer or other serious long term conditions please know we are always here for you. We also urge those of you with new symptoms which are potentially serious or sinister to call us and not put off calling.

For other minor or non-life-threatening conditions please consider using all other healthcare options available to you - try our website for links to useful self-care information; ask our experienced receptions to direct you to other services through the already very successful care navigation scheme; remember your local pharmacist can diagnose, advise and sell you treatment for many minor illness and don’t forget the new Social Prescribers aligned to our Practice - Bridget and Sarah - who are there for all your social needs. We also have Calum, our own advisory pharmacist who is available by telephone to deal with all your medication concerns and queries.

**Other Practice News**

We also have lots of great non-covid news to share!

New additions to the Team

We’re delighted to welcome several new permanent members to the team over the past 12 months - including two GPs, a Practice Nurse and a Pharmacist.

* Dr Susan Woodward works all day Tuesday, and during holiday time can often be found helping out other days of the week too!
* Dr Mohammed Ali, previously a part-time GP with us, now works across the whole week in a permanent capacity.
* Calum Plenderleith - Dedicated practice pharmacist. We previously enjoyed the benefit of Calum’s input and expertise when he was ‘on-loan’ to us one morning a week from the North England Commissioning Support (NECS) but are delighted to now have him working every day in the surgery helping advise the clinicians and answering patients medication queries. You can request to have a callback from Calum with any medication concerns.
* Sister Michelle Rouse - our newest team member and highly experienced practice nurse, Michelle has already become a great asset to the team and we wonder how we would have ever managed without her.

Babies!!

There have also been a few new additions to the Coulby Medical family in the past 12 months. Big congratulations to Steph and Sophie from reception and admin who each had their second baby recently, expanding their beautiful little families!

Also good luck and best wishes to Sarah Richardson (practice manager), Mike Corner (IT and admin) and Calum Plenderleith (pharmacist) with new additions on the way!

\* \* \*

All that remains to be said is that with your kind support we will get through this together, and before you know it …we’ll meet again!

In the meantime, please stay safe, keep your social distance from everyone outside your own household (we already know there are thousands of asymptomatic carriers of coronavirus who don’t know they have it) and above all keep washing those hands!!

See you on the other side.

Best wishes from your doctors,

Dr Wetherell

Dr Williamson

Dr Bannar-Martin

Dr Winter

Dr Woodward

Dr Ali

Dr Khan