

Update from Woodchurch Surgery - plans for the next month

The last couple of weeks have seen an increase in “normal activity” which combined with vaccinating and cleaning down after appointments has tested our sanity. However, it is great to be seeing people in our refurbished premises and good to have Covid at least nearer the middle of our minds rather than the front. The numbers locally have definitely been low but are higher than they were last week so it is still out there in the community.

We were invited to be involved with the project to vaccinate the under 50's but with the pressure of getting second doses for the cohorts 1-6 and building up normal traffic we had to hit the eject button. We have been talking about pooling our resources Ashford-wide and effectively creating our own Mass Vaccination Site in Ashford. The discussions are very preliminary and reflect that we really want to take part while recognising our limitations.

The national talk this last week has been that the Astra Zeneca remains safe and is the preferred vaccine if you have ever had a very severe allergic reaction to anything and needed adrenaline. There are negotiations being made at a much higher level than I'll ever be party to about the distribution and we only know what is in the press. I'm not sure if Brexit has any role to play in complicating this further for us or not.

Moving forward the Surgery nursing team has been working to get the routine monitoring back to normal as much as possible. We rely on income from monitoring certain chronic diseases which then goes to pay for other services. Early in the first lockdown the government amazingly protected this income and based it on our performance in the previous year which allowed us to divert resources to the vaccination program and respond to the pressures of Coronavirus. We are now expected to resume normal services.

Although we can be very proud of our statistics on the whole reflecting the work the admin and nursing team has done during the pandemic they are not to our usual meticulous standard and so they are leading the charge on getting back to normal with the “chronic disease management”. It may be an opportunity to manage our chronic diseases in a different way and co-ordinate with some of the other local surgeries, or to give people a kind of personal health plan that is shared more formal than previously. Reviews are essential to prevent complications so if you have any chronic illness and have been shielding or been wary of getting tests done at the surgery I would encourage you to re-engage. We have seen an increase in complications in some of these groups that we put down purely to less monitoring during the pandemic which has occurred for a variety of reasons.

The dispensary has been busier than ever and we intend to keep our delivery drivers doing a daily service. We have managed to continue on a 3 day turn-around for routine prescriptions and have had to cope with some supply issues and we appreciate the support of anyone affected by this.

The doctors are getting back to some normality too and as things have picked up to normal we are going back to the more traditional timing of appointments. We have never been fans of a “triage doctor” with some poor soul sitting in a room fielding calls as quickly as possible so we will mix up telephone calls with face to face appointments with the traditional 10 minute appointment slot. It will therefore be important that when making contact with the reception team that you can be clear

that your problem is effectively what you would have previously come in to see the doctor about. If the problem is more admin/medication based then email or econsult is a better way to free up the appointments for more pressing medical issues. If you don't do technology then a really thorough explanation of the issue to the reception team would be helpful. We still get excited by a hand-written note through the door too so despite all the technology there is still space for a pencil.

We have gone from pretty much a waiting time of a few days for routine things to everything being dealt with on the same day during the pandemic. With the change in appointments we will see a little bit of a wait at times for routine things. If a problem is urgent please highlight this and we will obviously accommodate what we can as per "the old days". Our admin team are wonderful, real people who have worked hard and enjoyed your support through lockdown so please continue this even if the first answer starts with a "no". By hook or by crook nothing is unsurmountable so together we will come to a solution to help sort out any matters we can.

Hopefully this gives a bit of an idea what can be expected in the next couple of months. I've just put my Easter holiday back another year having already been put back once. I'm getting used to the idea the same will probably happen this summer - we live in an amazing area so mustn't grumble.

Best wishes on behalf of the Surgery Team

Jack Hickey - GP