



Minutes of a Meeting held at 7pm on Wednesday 6th September 2023 at Haddenham Medical Centre

Present Barry Lynch (Chair), David Gregory (Vice Chair) Dr Mark Howcutt, Ciar Munn and 30 PPG members

1. The Chairman welcomed members
2. Practice Report – Dr Mark Howcutt and Ciar Munn

Ciar informed the meeting that a Flu Clinic is to be organized on the 7th October between 8am to 12 for patients over 65 and there will be another Flu Clinic organised later. The surgery will not be providing Covid vaccinations as the PCN have decided to focus on offering patient care over the winter instead of concentrating on Covid.

There is no Nursing team at the moment and locums are covering. There will be 2 nurses starting in November. Dr. Morley is leaving, and it has not been possible to replace her and currently we have one GP off sick. Very challenging time with longer waits for routine appointments.

Dr. Howcutt said there is a great shortage of GPs, and this is the first time we have advertised and not had any replies. Every surgery in the area has vacancies for GPs. We will continue to advertise and hopefully have better news next year. We have trained lots of doctors who become locums.

We will get Flu messages out via the PPG and patients will be informed by text. Require volunteers to help guiding patients on the day.

Question from the floor - Can you have covid and flu at the same time?

Yes, it is possible to have both at same time but not in the same dose. We had hoped technology would be developed for this year to have both covid and flu vaccine together but unfortunately this has not happened. Government has made it more difficult for smaller practices to give jobs by constant changes to policy so doctors have said they will not do Covid vaccinations. (Note from Chair – Check on NHS websites for sites that may be able to give both Covid and Flu vaccinations at the same time – normally these will be chemists)

Barry mentioned the SMS message sent out today regarding enrolment into the PPG by Ciar. It will give us the ability to acquire more members for the PPG and enlarge our communication with them. 40 new members have registered already. (Note from Chair – Update 18/09 new members registered is now 271)

3. New Appointment System – patients have commented favourably and have said that this is an excellent link although on some occasions patients do have to wait a few days before a reply from doctor. Many seem to be very satisfied that doctors have tried to contact them on the same day. One patient did not like the fact that you must state where you are going to be in the next week, and you do not know whether you are going to get an appointment. The old method meant only waiting for 1 to 2 days.

Dr Howcutt said there is no perfect appointment system but with patients writing in about a routine problem we can prioritise people with more urgent problems. On the form we ask if there is a time when we should not contact you or suggest a time when it is not convenient. It works better for patients to be able to know when they can be contacted.

David Gregory had seen on Haddenham.net a reference to ICS were in the process of setting up in the Aylesbury shopping centre, a call in unit for people to get guidance or tests like blood pressure etc. Response was that nothing was known about this potential service.

NHS health checks are those that are on offer to patients via their GP. There are suggestions that GPs should restrict their time to dealing with routine problems. For more urgent problems you should go to a different location. i.e., a hub for acute care. Dr Howcutt was not keen on that idea as he believed that continuity is important to help treat patients better.

4. Brian Rogers introduced the new PPG IT Helpdesk. Most of you will have at some time heard reference to one or more of 3 online systems or “Apps” as they are commonly known, used throughout much of the NHS: Patient Access, the NHS App and now, AccuRX. The oldest, Patient Access, was actually developed and launched way back in 2004 and was originally referred to as EMIS-Patient Access whereas the NHS App was not launched until Dec 2018. AccuRX, the very latest system to boggle your minds, was only launched in May last year. One thing they all have in common, in my opinion, is how poorly they’ve been introduced for public use. Additionally, they’ve all been upgraded several times to the point where Patient Access for example, bears little resemblance to the original application software available on your computer, iPad or mobile phone. This has resulted in many patients struggling to use them effectively, especially those who find computer technology difficult even at the best of times.

Now a few years ago, your PPG started a workshop to help people set up and use Patient Access which, at the time, could be used to make GP appointments as well as view test results and in some cases, read historical medical data. The workshops were fairly successful, although we found that many of the problems actually stemmed from difficulties just using computer-based products such as iPads, laptops, Androids and iPhone. But then came the Pandemic and the workshops ceased.

Since the pandemic there has been a significant change in the way that most Medical Centres have had to adapt to the new pressures imposed upon them by Government, coupled with a growing shortage of GPs and other clinical staff. So it’s now become necessary to prioritise face-to-face consultations so that those patients with an immediate clinical need can be seen quickly and the limited medical centre’s clinical resources used far more efficiently than would otherwise have been possible. Hence the removal of the appointment booking system from Patient Access and the introduction of the latest online system I mentioned earlier called AccuRX where requests for medical help can be made by completing a simple form online. The request is then reviewed by the duty GP who decides on the course of action necessary. I should just mention at this point that anyone unable to use the AccuRx system can call the medical centre in the usual way and ask one of the helpful receptionists to complete the form for them.

For those of you who attended the last PPG meeting, you’ll recall the general disquiet at the introduction of AccuRX and my acknowledgement that it was introduced a little too quickly and without any user help so I undertook to write a simple user guide and for anyone who hasn’t seen it, that’s now available and I’ll make sure that a link is provided in the minutes of this meeting so that anyone who wants to use it can do so. (Chair – This is the Link <https://www.dinton.info/pdfs/ContactingtheMedicalCentre.pdf>) But we wanted to do more than just provide a User Guide. We wanted to provide help to those of you who were, and many cases still are, having difficulty using any of the 3 applications – Patient Access, the NHS App and the Accurx medical help form in order that you can gain from the benefits of being able to order prescriptions online, see your test results and your medical history. So we have now set up a volunteer-staffed PPG Help Desk that allows you to click on a link where you can describe the problem you’re having with a particular app. This email will then come directly to me. I then assess the type of problem and enlist the help of a brilliant team of IT literate colleagues to help solve the problem for you, and here it is my real pleasure to introduce Sue, Phil, Mary and not forgetting Barry who comprise the help desk team. By now, I hope that you have all received the Help-desk link from Barry, if not, please let us know but again, the link will be available in the minutes of this meeting. (Chair – This is the Help Desk Link <https://www.dinton.info/ppgithelprequest.php>

So, to sum up, it has been a hazardous journey for many who have found difficulty using the 3 NHS Apps, not helped by the lack of guiding literature. However, it is a fact that everyone will increasingly have to depend on those apps in order to get medical assistance, order repeat prescriptions, see test results and medical history. The intention of the PPG help-desk volunteers is to help you overcome any difficulties you might have with the apps and if the success of the queries we have had so far is anything to go by, I've no doubt that the help desk will enable that to happen.

Lorraine Milmer asked if the PPG would be represented at the Community Fair in October to reach out to people. Barry said we were invited last year but had not heard this year and Lorraine made the invitation. A flyer will be available at reception and you should have received an email with link details about the Help Desk. Link to the help desk also on the back of the agenda and if you cannot make the link work send mail address to Brian whose address is in the same documents.

5. Clarification of online test results – Ciar said from October on Patient Access or NHS app will have access to full patient records including test results. These are first seen by the doctor and when the doctor has filed them, they can be seen online. If you do not use Patient Access or NHS App you can get a form from reception to enable you to get connected. Dr. Howcutt is very keen on patients on having records though apprehensive about complicated language used between doctors with different words meaning different things between doctor and patients. Letters will also be available to view. John Gearing asked if records will be secure and was advised they can only be seen on your login. Barry commented that in the beginning of online systems the test results were limited but they now seem to be more comprehensive, perhaps we will need PPG training session to explain them! Dr Howcutt said there is a risk of people reading details which may cause worry when there is no problem.

6. David Gregory asked for clarification on health checks – he was confused about exactly what is the policy regarding your routine health check.
Dr Howcutt said the NHS offers to all patients 40 – 75 and is limited to blood tests, height and weight smoking and alcohol checks. Health checks for patients with certain conditions e.g., some mental health conditions, get additional invitations for checks, others with specific medical condition such as diabetes, for example, have annual checks. NHS checks were not kept up to date due to Covid and the lack of nurses. The doctor will check your records once a year and may call you in for a check. Some checks are done by the PCN or different parts of the NHS which causes confusion. Sometimes a condition might have been coded and the computer picks this up and this throws up a need for check.

David Gregory asked about people who have not been to the doctor and are well and the answer was that the NHS do not do regular checks if you are well. The general NHS policy on Health Checks is that they should be evidence based. The advice to patients is if they feel they require checks to contact a GP. Blood pressure readings for a normally healthy patient should not be done too often and are recommended every 5 years. Dr Howcutt also advised that it was much better if patients took their blood pressure at home as readings taken in surgery were often higher. The phenomenon is well recognised as “White Coat Syndrome”!

7. Update on future plans of PPG and joint working with the Medical Centre – Barry confirmed that at the beginning of the year the PPG had “Post Covid” talks with the practice and discussed certain ideas that they wanted to work on with the practice. Unfortunately, due to problems such as shortage of staff and sickness this had to be held over until March. March arrived but there was no change in the difficulties experienced by the practice. Subsequently at a meeting in July it was obvious that the pressures on the practice had not eased and therefore the PPG proposed that they would only propose joint projects that gave the practice a positive productivity benefit and minimized the working time required on their side.
The PPG will concentrate on the IT help, vaccination support etc.
We have tried several times to continue to work with our Pheonix Health PCN and we had anticipated having regular meetings with the PCN and PCN practice PPG chairs. This has not happened although the PCN has a new Interim Medical Director and we are going to our first meeting with her next week.

8. Any other business - None

9. Date of next PPG meeting – Provisionally set for 4th or 11th January 2024 date to be confirmed.

10. The Chair thanked the members for their attendance and declared the meeting closed.