

PPG MEETING MINUTES – 11TH JANUARY 2024

PRESENT

Vernon Morgan – Chair
Nayib Ahmed – Practice Manager
Stela Danaj – for the Reception
Rose Edmands
Beverley Saunders
Jerome Cotter
Anne Palmer
Kit Chan
Caroline Crowley
Deborah Savage
Hugh Maloney
Sally Unwin – Secretary

APOLOGIES

Dr M Farrelly – Senior Partner
Shai Davies
Grenville Bingham
Jetinder Lali
Daniel Kruyer
Angela Abeysinghe

1. The Chairman welcomed everyone to this the first meeting of 2024. No matters arising were raised, so the minutes of the last meeting were approved.

The Chair voiced that he was keen to comply with reform directives from NHS England concerning the requirement to encourage a wider diversity and inclusivity in Patient Participation Groups. Following the success of our guest speaker, in November 2023, and to build on the links our surgery has as a teaching practice with Kings College, the chair will endeavour to invite research clinicians to give short talks to the group on various areas of medicine. These talks will be marketed to all our patients and provide an opportunity for involvement in the PPG. The proposed talks will take place over the next 24 months.

Practice Update.

2. Nayib Ahmed advised that there were currently no changes to report on the GP's staffing. The practice has appointed a new physiotherapist: Zuhaid, who has now joined the team. The partners are advertising for a replacement Practice Nurse, with a view to someone being in post by early March. The recruitment of a fully trained practice nurse is not without difficulty in the current climate.

The Chairman emphasised the need for the surgery to be aware that a greater number of patients are experiencing economic poverty. The normal referral process is to book patients to see Citizen's Advice Bureau personnel, or the Social Prescriber who has a greater knowledge of DWP options, and LBTH assistance. Referrals to food banks or assistance with financial insecurity surrounding energy price rises is a complex area, and once again there is misinformation circulating that patients are required to get a referral from their GP (which is not the case,) as they have no mechanism for referral or for issuing food vouchers. Support is available through the borough Council, and this is provided through LBTH Crisis Care to whom emergency referrals can be made. TH also manage their own Outreach teams who work in the community. Vouchers are available for use in Supermarkets. Foodbanks operate across the borough, the nearest of which operates in Shadwell and limited help is available from some local churches. Each food bank operates a different system, and patients are advised to check online for times and dates of distribution of food in the area.

https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/advice_and_benefits/cost-of-living/Help-with-food.aspx

Full details of Crisis Care referrals can be obtained through the Patient Assistants at reception or from your GP.

1. The issue of the practice telecoms was again raised, with a report that people having waited for long periods in a queue are being asked to call back again after 11am, for non-urgent appointments. Or, the system automatically drops the call after a certain time on hold. Patients have complained that it is not always easy to call back if they are at work and have to make a number of lengthy separate calls, to secure an appointment. The practice directed patients to use e-Consult or online booking systems instead of telephoning. Patients cannot currently use the NHS App to book appointments, but NHS England hope to have more and more practices signed up to the software by end of March 2024. Wapping is not yet one of those operational. The practice manager confirmed that the surgery phone lines are now opening earlier, from 8:00am for urgent appointments on that day. During the morning rush, the Practice has up to 9 people manning the phones. It is hoped that by opening an hour earlier that some of the pressure will be eased. Nayib added that there is no criteria for a specific cut-off time for on the day appointments. The practice has a limited number available on the day appointments; once they are taken they are unable to provide more. Patients should therefore ring as early as possible because they go quickly.

There were no reported changes to our specialist multidisciplinary medical teams, such as those delivering alcohol and drug abuse clinics, mental health counselling and podiatry services.

Patients have voiced some concerns from the industrial action taken by Junior Doctors now impacting upon the cancellation of outpatient appointments. This is particularly complex in areas of cancer care where patients are already experiencing cancellations. Patients are also receiving letters by post asking them to rebook Outpatient clinic appointments and the call centres they are directed to are unmanned or have answer phone systems.

Virtual wards will continue to play a large part in the armoury of the NHS this winter as the hospitals fire fight bed blocks and fear being overwhelmed with patients. The reality is that patients will be sent home with a minimum stay in hospital and discharged back to be nursed in the community. This role is increasingly falling on GP's surgeries because the hospitals do not have sufficient community care nurses to cope with the demand. With NHS staff vacancies now exceeding 100,000, it is easy to see that the system is under enormous pressure. Private community care agencies cannot cope, and GP's do not have the resources necessary to look after domiciliary sick patients in the community. Patients who would ordinarily remain in hospital for another 2 or 3 weeks.

Chairman's Review

3. The Chairman reported that tackling the issue of mental health and the resulting demand on patient services - particularly among children, is a major problem for the NHS. 1 in 6 children are seeking mental health referrals, up from 1 in 9 before the pandemic. The failure to attend school is often linked to this issue, with absenteeism, lack of discipline and peer group pressure on social media, all exacerbating these problems. The numbers of parents electing to home school has increased, with pupils citing they feel calmer learning at home and the atmosphere out of school is less disruptive. Children suffering serious anxiety and stress are at risk of developing a number of well documented and debilitating mental health disorders such as: depression, eating disorders, OCD, bulimia, self-harm, and increasingly, - gender dysphoria. Each and every one seeking a referral requiring help from specialist medical practitioners, and counselling services. The most devastating of all - suicide. Children perfecting, their own demise from online sources and websites on the dark web, or in chat rooms frequented by other equally troubled individuals.

What has caused this phenomenon, and how will clinicians deal with the stratospheric rise in treating mental health conditions in both adults and children. These are complex situations; parents are forced to tread very softly around their children's anxieties; the feelings of despair and hopelessness are doubtless infectious for adults, leading to them questioning their own parental inadequacies. The role of social media is doubtless complicit in these disturbing rises in the cases of anxiety and unhappiness in modern living.

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/>

Patients have asked if the practice would support and promote a self-help group for those struggling with mental health problems.

Information for Patients.

4. Record industrial action by NHS junior doctors throughout last week has caused some 90% of outpatient appointments to be cancelled. Early-stage Cancer appointments are also being rescheduled. A further ballot by doctors is scheduled in February for further strike action. So far, 34 days have been lost since action began in March 2023. 150,000 outpatient appointments were cancelled across the NHS in January alone.

With fewer than 70% of over 65's taking up the NHS winter Coronavirus booster invitation, and Covid-19 rates soaring across the capital, the government has decided to licence some retailers. Boots and Superdrug are the first in a trial to dispense private vaccinations in the same way as flu jabs. The fee is unknown at this stage but has been estimated by both Moderna and Pfizer to be in the region of 120 Euros. (£100) per vaccination.

The UK Government offered no free vaccines to adults under the age of 65 years, this winter, trusting in anti-bodies and herd immunity in the wider less vulnerable population.

Community Group Reports

5. The Chairman and Secretary of the PPG were invited to attend a meeting with LBTH officials and other stakeholders regarding the proposed plans for the redevelopment of St George's Leisure Centre, on the Highway. This followed letters from the Chair to the Council requesting a consultation on retaining swimming facilities in the area. Vernon reminded the Council of their obligations in working to deliver primary care. The prime objective of the ICB partnership programme is to work with local authorities to promote health and fitness in the community. We were given assurances that the demolition and redevelopment plan allows for 3 separate pools: a six-lane 25M pool; a learner pool for beginners and a splash pool for any youngsters to get them confident in the water. There will also be a number of dual-use, ancillary rooms in the complex which can be used for a range of fitness classes or creative arts. The PPG has been asked to present ideas for the ancillary spaces, for example how these might be used. Whether for mindfulness groups, Yoga, gym, dance or theatre etc. We would welcome ideas from residents on the types of amenities, sports and facilities you consider a modern leisure centre should offer its community. Please send these to me via email or text message so that we can send them on to the Council Project leaders. The complex will have a roof garden area, which will be used as a centre for community youth work. Preliminary design proposals include a climbing wall, and other outdoor sports facilities. The centre will incorporate a modern café to help create the vibe of this space as a "community hub". The borough desperately needs new housing, and particularly family sized flats containing a

minimum of 3 & 4 bedrooms; 27 of these flats are planned on the eastern end of St George's Gardens adjacent to the new Leisure Centre.

The Chairman was also able to raise the issue of plans for the John Orwell Sports Centre with LBTH staff, which we were assured is safe from redevelopment, and is instead likely to have some upgrades to its facilities in due course.

The Council are installing speed restrictions outside St Peter's Church and the Wapping Health Centre with the aim of slowing down the speeding cars which use the road as a racetrack. It has been noted that there are fewer NOX canisters on our streets, and one particular driver causing problems with noise and dangerous driving has had his car impounded by our local Safer Neighbourhood Police Team.

Lime Bikes discarded in the streets and across pavements continue to be a major problem, which the LBTH has to tackle with urgency. They are a hazard to parents with buggies and young children forcing them off pavements and onto the public highway. For residents with any sight impairment these cycles pose serious trip issues. It is not solely wheelchair users who find the discarded bicycles challenging. Westminster Council has started a successful recovery programme in the borough, impounding the cycles with a punitive release fee payable by the operator, for retrieval of their own cycles. LBTH please take note.

The London Health and Equalities Strategy states that the Mayor's key ambition is for London to have the best air quality of any global city, with progress fastest in the most polluted areas, benefitting people most vulnerable to the effects of air pollution. The strategy highlights nitrogen dioxide and heavy particulate matter as significant concerns for health. The various commissioned Health Risk Assessments commits the Mayor to accelerate the attainment of legal limits for air quality in Greater London, including through the reduction of emissions from London's Transport Network by enabling Londoners to switch to more sustainable forms of travel. The ULEZ is one of a range of measures in the Mayor's Transport Strategy used for reducing harmful air pollution from road transport including encouraging active travel (walking and cycling), shifting to cleaner vehicles such as electric vehicles and vehicle retrofits, road user charging, parking charges and traffic restrictions all of which are punitive for those residents reliant on vehicles.

1. AOB.

- After the excess of Christmas festivities, the NHS has re-launched their fitness & running campaign: - "Couch to 5k". It has gained popularity post-Christmas with 52,000 hits to the website in the first week. The objective is to achieve 5K fitness in 9 weeks with three training runs per week. Full details are on the website here:
<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/running-and-aerobic-exercises/get-running-with-couch-to-5k/>

Visits to the NHS advice pages about eating a healthy, balanced diet and how to manage your weight also increase in January, almost doubling at the start of the year.

The NHS has invested huge sums in providing online access to medical information through NHS Digital: These links may be of interest:

A [healthy weight](#) page and the [eat well](#) page.

