

## PPG – MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024

### WAPPING GROUP PRACTICE

#### ATTENDEES

Dr M Farrelly – Senior Partner  
Nayib Ahmed – Practice Manager  
Naym Ahmed – For the Reception  
Vernon Morgan – Chairman  
Anne Palmer  
Jerome Cotter  
Beverly Saunders  
Caroline Crowley  
Kit Chan  
Angela Abeysinghe

#### APOLOGIES

Sally Unwin- Secretary  
Hugh Maloney  
Shai Davies  
Deborah Savage  
Mike Nulty  
Daniel Kruyer  
Angela Orphanou (new member)  
Caroline Crowley  
Grenville Bingham

1. The Chairman welcomed all attendees to the penultimate PPG meeting of the year and briefly noted a lengthy list of apologies for absence. The non-attendance is once again reflected by some members inability to attend due to poor health and others are still abroad holidaying in various global locations.

Some patients had suggested that the meetings move to an online format only, as we could accommodate a wider audience, but the chair suggested this digital format is against the spirit of the government's original PPG brief and deters spontaneous conversation. He felt it excludes members who are not confident with computer connections and the use of modern technology. When we took this route during the pandemic there were usually issues with connectivity, and I no longer have a Microsoft Teams business account subscription. Members agreed unanimously to continue meeting at the practice bi-monthly in a face-to face setting.

There were no matters arising from the minutes of 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024. The document circulated took the form of an information sheet. The scheduled meeting was abandoned as a quorum of members was not achieved due to holiday absence.

#### Practice Report

Dr Farrelly was invited to commence the Practice Report, starting with recruitment and changes in staff:

A new female GP has been appointed - Dr Taslima, who has been assigned 4 sessions, across 3 days per week. Zhanade Roberts and Nahida Jamal Pinky have both joined the expansive practice team, both employed in reception and administration duties. This brings the full compliment of patient assistants back to eight staff members, working to answer incoming enquiries swiftly and minimise patient's wait times.

Nayib confirmed that the Telecommunications contractor had responded with suggestions to minimise the issue of dropped calls. He did acknowledge that individual complaints that come via the chairman, were problematic to investigate, unless the patients give a full history, and authority under GDPR ruling for the call to be traced and listened to. This is the only method of establishing what has gone wrong to cause a complaint to be made. Nayib requires the precise time, date and duration of the call. Without the information it is impossible to analyse with any accuracy or to follow-up with their telecoms contractor.

Speaking for the practice, Nayib acknowledged that the telephone system is not without challenges, and the NHS regularly documents the enormous increase in demand for GP services post pandemic. There is not a GP practice in the country that has not experienced a significant rise in the number of patients accessing appointments and the management of patient enquiries. The Chairman asked if there had been a noticeable reduction in telephone traffic as patients become familiar with alternative methodologies to access GP services and appointments. Patients can use Econsult online or book an appointment with a healthcare professional of their choice (at a mutually convenient time and date) up to 6 weeks ahead, by using the NHS App on their smart-mobile devices. Appointments are also available to book via the Wapping Group Practice website, using the appointment request form.

<https://www.wappinggrouppractice.nhs.uk/services/appointments/>

The chairman reminded patients that it is imperative that if patients no longer require a pre-booked appointment, that they cancel by calling a member of the reception team or if the appointment was booked via the app, use your NHS account ([on the NHS website](#) or in the NHS app) alternatively, reply CANCEL to your appointment reminder text message. This will ensure the appointment is not wasted and is given to someone else.

A PPG member asked if the telecoms system could be programmed to permit patients to semi-autonomously nominate a designated numerical option within the telecom menu and their appointment could be cancelled without having to wait to join the main switchboard queue. This is particularly relevant first thing in the morning, and at busy times when patients will wait for half an hour or more just to cancel an appointment they no longer need. Dr Farrelly confirmed that the new telecom provider advertised their software as capable of achieving precisely this feature, and mentioned it was one of the reasons she committed to the supplier. **Nayib**, to investigate actioning this please.

We discussed self-referral and how this facility will grow over the coming months accommodating more and more disciplines. Self-referral already covers many areas of clinical expertise such as hearing tests, and mental health services.

### **Mental Health Services.**

Crisis support for patients with mental health concerns is now available via NHS 111. The NHS has announced patients experiencing a mental health crisis can now benefit from [support through 111](#), and a special dedicated service.

The change means the NHS in England is one of the first countries in the world to offer access to a 24/7 full package of mental health crisis support. The chairman had been advised that people of all ages, including children, who are in crisis or concerned family members can now call 111, select the mental health option and speak to a trained mental health professional. There was some scepticism voiced during the meeting as to the operational effectiveness, and how 111

would cope with the demand. Particularly when the NHS is suffering unprecedented delays and wait times for patients across all sectors.

We are told NHS staff will be available to guide callers by organising face-to-face community support or facilitating access to alternatives services, such as crisis cafés or safe havens which provide a place for people to stay as an alternative to A&E or a hospital admission. If there is a risk to life, for patients with severe illness, who need support through a hospital setting every emergency department in England now has a liaison psychiatric team available to offer specialist care.

NHS Talking Therapy Services or Counselling are also available for people who need help with other mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder and PTSD. Patients may now self-refer with a simple registration procedure [online via NHS.uk](#) or by [contacting their GP](#). This will initiate an appointment with a trained therapist, commencing with one or more talking therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or CBT. Talking therapy is for anyone who's going through a bad time or has emotional problems with which they need help. **I have offered the links here for online information on the various conditions:**

- [depression](#)
- [anxiety](#)
- [eating disorders](#)
- [phobias](#)
- [addiction](#)
- [schizophrenia or bipolar disorder](#).

Much of the older stigma surrounding these illnesses has been stripped away, and so the NHS wants to improve well-being by talking about what is making patients feel low.

People with long-term health conditions are more vulnerable to depression and talking therapies have been proven to help. Loneliness is a key factor in depression, older patients over the age of 65 are as likely to benefit from talking therapies as everyone else.

Depression in later life, especially over the age of 65, is often dismissed as a normal part of ageing. But this is not the case, and talking therapy can improve your enjoyment of life.

Dr Farrelly has kindly shared the following link: For self-referral to Tower Hamlets Talking Therapies for patients in our borough. If you feel you need help, please explore the online link or by telephone at: **020 8475 8080**.

**For more info:** <https://towerhamletstalkingtherapies.nhs.uk/>

### **Patients Complaints.**

The chairman had received some complaints from several sources regarding lengthy wait times of over 45 minutes with more than 20 people ahead of patients waiting in the queue.

Finally, when they did get through, they felt under interrogation by the reception staff. I know that we have discussed previously in PPG meetings this very issue, that patient's assistants have to strike a difficult balance. Dr Farrelly confirmed that although patients do not have to discuss intimate details with the telephone staff, when they are triaging calls, it might be in their best interest to say what kind of problem they are calling about without too many details in order to be signposted to the most appropriate service for them. However patients are permitted to opt out of explaining in detail their condition, just by making a simple and polite request to the patient assistant taking the call. An appointment will still be made with the relevant clinician. The practice acknowledges that much of the frustration is fuelled by the 45-minute wait, and not by the enquiries made by the practice staff. It is important that patients realise that when they telephone the practice seeking an appointment, staff are required to establish a rudimentary prognosis to signpost them to the correct healthcare practitioner to best assist them. Sports and exercise related injuries, for instance, are often best seen by a physiotherapist, or nurse practitioner rather than a GP.

### **Mpox**

Patients have raised questions over Mpox (previously known as monkeypox) This is a rare infection most commonly found in parts of west, central and east Africa. The risk of catching it in the UK is **low**. Because patients now travel widely with some visiting family members in the African continent there is an increased risk of infection through independent travel. The World Health Organisation are therefore encouraging anyone travelling to any areas in Africa to be cautious and aware of the risks.

There are no government plans to mass vaccinate against this disease despite media sensationalism causing undue anxiety.

### **The NHS has today announced a new partnership with all libraries across England to help more people access online health services and how to use the NHS App.**

The scheme, in partnership with The National Health Literacy Partnership, will officially launch in October 2024 – with NHS England contacting public libraries and NHS libraries in the coming weeks to provide toolkits and information.

Libraries already play a vital role in making online services more accessible.

By providing librarians with the right tools and support, they will be able to play a key part in helping people to use the NHS App to better understand and manage their health appointments and access their medical records via their mobile telephones.

### **Reports on specialist healthcare services inc podiatry, Citizens Advice, physio etc.**

#### **Citizen's Advice Update.**

Wapping Group Practice is currently promoting an important new service that replaces the former Citizens Advice service that has ceased. The new facility replaces the CAB and is known as the Social Welfare Service and operates from the surgery on Mondays with appointments arranged in advance, via our patient's assistants.

Daniel Kruyer and I have liaised, and we have grave concerns for our elderly patients many of whom relied on the Winter Fuel Allowance which has been withdrawn this week following a vote in Parliament under proposals by the new labour government. We will be advertising this Social Welfare service in the hope that they may operate a workshop for completing the application for Universal Credit. This requires a means test for those wishing to try to reinstate the payment under the new Work and Pensions (DWP) criteria. The form I am told is daunting at 58 pages in length. Most elderly pensioners are unfamiliar with making online applications, and as most pensioner households stand to lose £300.00 in the allowance, analysts have suggested that with the energy price increases for an average home estimated to increase by £150 on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024, with a further 5% winter increase due on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025. Economists predict that pensioners will suffer considerable hardship, and there are many who will cost the country more in the long term as they suffer ill-health from poverty, requiring additional NHS treatment. The withdrawal in the fuel allowance, will force some pensioners to choose food over fuel this winter.

The new Welfare Service offers free, impartial, independent advice, on a range of topics, providing help for individuals and families. This includes consumer rights advice, assistance with legal and family law issues, rental Agreements, Housing Associations, Universal Credit advice, and welfare administration. Assistance with Work & Pensions forms and help with completing Disability Benefits applications. Debt advice, pension guidance and general money matters, including credit management and voluntary insolvencies. Supporting court witnesses can be arranged. The service advises on alcohol and drug dependency, and debt from gambling addiction. They profess to offer referrals to specialist groups, including counselling services, referrals to specialist community groups, and volunteering agencies.

### **The BMA instruct general practitioners to take strike action. Will this impact upon access to our GP services?**

Patients will know that I posted in early August that Wapping Practice has so far not been involved in any major industrial action by their GP's, although they are supportive of the action. Working practices have changed enormously for GP's with workloads exceeding those at any time in their history. Although Dr Farrelly did not envisage any major disruption to patients in the short term, she cannot rule out some future disruption if the BMA step-up action. If a work to rule is adopted by the network across Tower Hamlets, there may be an impact upon services at Wapping. I am acutely aware that patients will be more supportive of their GP's if they are told to expect disruption and can plan for it. They will not want to find out when they require use of a service and discover on the day, that it has been withdrawn on a work to rule basis.

### **This is a quote from the NHS:**

“The NHS remains committed to tackling the issues within general practice, and while changes have been introduced to help staff and improve patient access, we know general practice remains under significant pressure and is experiencing record demand, so we will continue to work together with GPs and other stakeholders to support the profession”.

### **Practice Website update.**

The Practice website is an excellent knowledge resource for patients as well as gateway for patients to book appointments, (routine appointments up to 2 weeks in advance.)

Tower Hamlets Council is working to educate and improve nutrition across the borough. They are advertising a mentored cookery programme on the website, run by a specialist company. The project offers families a small supply of free food, delivered to your home, to help start the course which runs over What's app or a mobile telephone call for approximately two weeks. The objective is to encourage healthier diets and improve fitness, assist in reducing obesity and in turn minimise type II diabetes by teaching families to reduce fat and sugar in their diets.

To register:

Call/text/WhatsApp: 0780 739 8181 or Email: [towerhamlets@bagsoftaste.org](mailto:towerhamlets@bagsoftaste.org)

Online: <https://bagsoftaste.org/students/>

[Bags of Taste Flyer](#)

[Bags of Taste Impact Report](#)

The website also has information for parents under: Birth and Beyond and a better health section: 'Start For Life', which give advisory tips for new parents.

### **Bambu.**

<https://www.wappinggrouppractice.nhs.uk/bambu-project/>

This is a link to a new service launched this summer which offers confidential support services to women and children. If you feel have been affected by any form of domestic abuse in your home and require assistance, ring this helpline.

## **2. Chairman's Report**

A new pilot scheme has been launched as part of a public health programme for the over 40's and it will target male-dominated industries to detect warning signs of strokes or cardiovascular disease. (CVD). The free programme will initially involve 130,000 people to introduce fitness and well-being in the workplace. The scheme will target those men and women who do not routinely come forward to the NHS. Some men and women prefer not to seek medical advice until their situation is critical. Over 16 million people were eligible for health checks via their GP last year; current data shows only 40% of invitations were taken up.

From September, employees in several sectors including construction and hospitality will be able to access quick assessments that will determine their risk of developing cardiovascular disease (CVD), which can cause heart attacks and strokes.

The scheme is an effort to increase the number of NHS Health Checks that are carried out. As well as targeting heart disease, the programme aims to detect early signs of diabetes and kidney disease, as well as some early detection of cases of dementia among adults. People taking part will be required to answer a short lifestyle questionnaire; have their height, weight, and waist measured; undergo a blood pressure test; and have a simple blood test to measure

levels of cholesterol and blood sugars. The checks will also record key information including smoking and alcohol consumption; NHS staff will record family history of cancer, coronary heart disease; building a database of hereditary illness.

The project is part of a wider initiative by the government to boost economic growth in the UK by improving healthcare. It is estimated the initiative will deliver one million checks in its first four years and there are plans to then roll it out nationally, alongside face-to-face assessments.

The chairman said that he was conscious that the programme is not compulsory and there will be employees who naturally feel uncomfortable about answering questions to clinicians whom they do not know or trust. The press has picked up on the fact that NHS officers will be turning up at the workplace carrying weighing scales, fat shaming people, which is mercifully untrue. There are however concerns amongst social media and labour union representatives, that undue pressure could be placed upon certain workers who are already marginalised, because of existing health issues. There is no doubt that the new Labour government is focused on improving the health of the nation. Particularly because of the economic burden of treating patients with otherwise highly preventable deceases. When detected early, patients can be guided back to a healthy lifestyle through improvements in diet, fitness and exercise.

The project will target workforces of 20 employees and over, with a preference for 50 employees or more, where testing will not drastically disrupt productivity and become unpopular with employers.

### **3. Information For Patients.**

#### **COVID UPDATE**

Millions of children and adults across England will be offered their flu, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccinations as the NHS sets out plans for protection ahead of winter.

The vaccines provide vital protection to keep people from developing serious illnesses and ending up in hospital during busy winter months.

This year, based on the [latest scientific evidence](#), the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) recommended **adults aged 65 and over**, residents of care homes for older adults and those with underlying health conditions aged 6 months to 64 years will be eligible for flu and COVID-19 vaccinations.

The Government has also decided that, as in previous years, the COVID-19 and flu vaccines will be offered to frontline health and social care staff. The practice will be running flu clinics this year on the 3<sup>rd</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> October, these will be bookable, once the text invites are sent out in a few day's time.

For the first time from September the NHS will offer vaccines for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), a common cause of coughs and colds which can be dangerous to older people and young children. The jab will be available to those **aged 75 to 79**, and it will be offered to pregnant women from 28 weeks, to protect their child.

Flu vaccinations for children will start when the new school year begins in September, to help stop the virus spreading. Pregnant women can also get their jab from 1st September 2024.

**From 3 October**, flu and COVID-19 vaccinations will be available for other eligible groups.

People can start booking their flu and COVID-19 vaccinations in advance from 23rd September, with appointments running until 20 December 2024.

Flu season usually peaks in December and January, so starting adult vaccinations from October will ensure those most at risk are protected during the colder months when people gather indoors, and viruses spread.

For those adults eligible for both, the NHS will make flu and COVID-19 jabs available at the same time, giving the option to get protection from both viruses in one visit. However, it is more effective for people to have the RSV vaccination on a different day from any flu or COVID-19 vaccinations.

### **NHS Data.**

Data figures released by NHS Digital show that NHS staff working in A&E departments experienced their busiest summer ever, with a total of 4.6 million attendances over the last 2 months – higher than any other June and July. The [latest performance data](#) shows that the 3 busiest ever months for A&E staff have all been in 2024 (77,945 attendances per day in May, 76,469 in June and 74,459 in March). Despite the pressure, NHS staff assessed and completed the treatment of more than three quarters (75.2%) of patients within 4 hours in A&E in July, the highest proportion since September 2022, below the constitutional standard of 95%.

Ambulance services responded to 753,384 incidents last month, with 26,514 calls to 999 answered per day – up 6.2% on the same month last year. Average response times for category one (8 minutes:15 seconds) and category two cases, (33 minutes: 25 seconds) Calls were faster in July than in June, but still slower than the standards times of 7 and 18 minutes respectively.

Hospitals reported that the overall waiting list for elective care rose again in June to 7.62 million, up 19,100 on May. At the end of June, 59% of patients had been waiting less than the constitutional standard of 18 weeks, against a target of 92%. Whilst these figures are meant to be generally positive, they record a period of prolonged delay in patients awaiting elective surgery. The figures of 8 million people who have waited for almost one year or longer for an operation continue to escalate, fuelled as they have been through industrial action and pay settlement disputes with the nurses and junior doctors. The GP's negotiation with the recommendations of the government remuneration pay board have broken down and the BMA is seeking a ballot of members on further action which will only disrupt elective scheduling further.

In the last month, bed capacity also remained under pressure in hospitals across the whole country, with only 45% of patients actively discharged when they were ready, leading to an average of 12,326 patients a day spending more time in hospital than is needed. It is a complex sector to organise effectively, but nurses blame capacity and community care providers simply are unable to manage staff in sufficient volumes to cope with demand. The management and reinstatement of patient's care plans, often involving elderly and vulnerable patients who live alone and have no dependents, remains a major stumbling block for the NHS.

#### **4. Community Update**

Unfortunately, Sally Unwin was unavailable to deliver our community updates.

Wapping whilst generally calm has its own problems with Anti-Social Behaviour and the reporting of crime is crucial for the police and their neighbourhood teams to be effective. Thankfully, there has been a noticeable reduction in the cars driving through Wapping at high speed, although there are still isolated cases of mostly young Asian men using Wapping as a drive-through racing circuit.

The chairman discussed the newly installed traffic calming measures on Wapping Lane, (outside the surgery and St Peter's Church) he said we are in negotiation with the Council Highways Department and await their response on rectifying the dangerous situation arising from this installation. The surgery was not consulted regarding the matter, and we are supporting Father Beswick and his parishioners at St Peter's in their understandable concern for anyone who might be exiting the church. There are no protective bollards or balustrades on that side of the road to protect pedestrians leaving the church, if vehicles mount the pavement as they are reported as doing, to overtake stationary buses.

It was reported that the Council have given notice of a decision by Mayor Rahman to hold a drug rehab clinic in Chandler Street on the upper level above the nursery. There is, for understandable reasons, considerable resistance from parents in the locality. The potential security issues with a rehab clinic backing onto a healthcare centre that holds controlled drugs and hypodermic syringes on the premises was noted. As was the possibility of an elevated threat to Tower Pharmacy who were targeted some years ago. The surgery is at greater risk of forced entry because of the rear exit points and fire escapes that back on to the Chandler Street building. Whether or not large stocks of drugs are held at the practice is an irrelevance, individuals with dependency issues may risk illegal entry, to secure illicit supply. These rehab centres should not be sighted in areas without stakeholder consultation. There has also been an objection raised from the Refugee Centre located on Chandler Street. An update will be issued once the parties investigate the proposal and separate the facts from conjecture and speculation.

Wapping Group Practice has run drug and alcohol counselling sessions for many years, with clinics alternating weekly in support of those who are seeking a programme of rehabilitation. It is the location of the Mayor's proposed drugs unit, proposed to be hosted in the same building as an infant nursery, which is wrong and breaches all manner of legislative risk assessments. Residents admire the determination shown by any individual to beat an addiction and dependency on drugs or alcohol and acknowledge that it is a long and difficult journey. Many people with experience of managing substance abuse believe that a children's nursery as a small independent local business and a drug rehabilitation unit should not be located in the same building.

#### **Vehicle emissions & asthma**

As I reported at our PPG meeting in the spring, The London Mayor has invested heavily in technology at points along the Highway, Limehouse and East Smithfield, installing instruments that record levels of harmful NO<sub>2</sub> particulates emanating from traffic emissions. Sadiq Khan as London Mayor, campaigned on cleaner air quality, pledging to improve the health of residents living along one of the busiest arterial routes in London. Tower Hamlets has the highest rates of

vehicle emissions of any borough in London, and unsurprisingly, the highest rates of respiratory illness and asthma in young children. The London Mayor is making his case for “active travel” in the capital. (Walking and cycling). Shifting to cleaner vehicles such as electric vehicles, and vehicle retrofits, introducing road user charging, elevating parking charges and increasing traffic restrictions in the capital.

These are all active Mayoral pledges to enforce prohibitive and punitive charges on motorists who continue to use a car in central London. Khan has long maintained that residents should use the TfL low emissions network of electric trains and hydrogen buses, and the expanding network of newly constructed cycle routes. The Silvertown tunnel, built as a Public Private Partnership opens in 2025. Both the Blackwall Tunnel and Silvertown will simultaneously become, pay-as-you-go - tolled routes to recoup investment. The estimated cost of constructing the Silvertown Tunnel was £600 million in 2016. The final cost will exceed £1.3 billion. Campaigning groups and academics have criticised the project as they maintain it will increase traffic in the area. By default, air-quality in the area will be reduced by an increase in heavy goods vehicles using the crossing points, and emissions will rise on surrounding roads as vehicles navigate to use this new Thames crossing point.

The London Mayor has refused a reduction in these tolls for Tower Hamlets and Newham residents. Costs are currently predicted at £2.50 for each journey with a small car on a one-way crossing. Vans, larger vehicles and HGV's attract escalating prices.

### **Wapping Overground Station.**

Many of our residents struggle with access at Wapping Overground station. The travel limitations are not only confined to mobility impaired or disabled passengers, but parents with infants in pushchairs and anyone carrying heavy luggage, cycles or families travelling with an elderly or vulnerable member are also poorly served. Because the lift does not descend to the platform level, the lower section has to be navigated via a set of steep steps at this location. Attributed to engineer and designer, Marc Isambard Brunel, the stairwell formed part of the former Thames foot tunnel and is heritage listed as a model of Victorian design. This complicates any adaptation of the site to accommodate a simple and compact two person lift.

Many of you know that I headed the long-running campaign for Step Free Access at this location. That campaign continues to this day but, TfL have refused to engage further since the feasibility study was commissioned in 2020. The estimated construction costs were intentionally submitted by TfL to be prohibitively unachievable. They relied upon various agencies, including London Fire Brigade, to maintain two - 12-person lifts, each capable of accepting stretchers in the event of a full evacuation from a train in peril and a fire developing in the tunnel. In this case, passengers would be evacuated via the newly constructed SME stairwell exiting on Cinnamon Street. The cost estimate did not consider interest rate rises, although there were inflationary uplifts built into the proposal. The reconstruction cost would now exceed £100 million, with new tunnelling work necessary. Some engineers maintained the work could be undertaken without the station closure. Others, working for the complex web of rail operating companies, whom operate management of the track or rolling stock, were less cooperative or optimistic, citing the 2004 works when a catalogue of engineering obstacles caused an extended closure for over five years. The width and curvature of the platforms at Wapping provides us with major engineering challenges, and the politics associated with bringing the station up to modern standards is a thorn in the side of the Greater London Authority. Wapping remains open on a special licence, were it to close, it would impact property values in the

locality dramatically. There have been a number of accidents on the stairs with rail passengers suffering serious injuries especially in wet conditions. Without TfL improving access, the annual cost of keeping Wapping Overground operational and keeping the river Thames at bay is considerable. We do not wish to give TfL any excuse to serve notice of a closure. During the pandemic and post Covid period, TfL suffered major losses in revenue streams due to the absence of commuting passengers, residents on furlough and government lockdown restrictions. All factors contributing to the near collapse of TfL. The company culled its workforce, and halted all construction work across the entire network, in a bid to make major cost savings. It was at that stage that Wapping was at its most vulnerable. Because the station now acts as a fire exit point for the wider Overground line on the basis of the earlier description, that may inform the decision to keep the station operational.

## **5. Any Other Business**

### **NHS England will roll out up to six new specialist regional centres by 2026 to provide tailored gender services for children and young people, based on recommendations in the Cass Review.**

Following the publication of a [comprehensive report by Dr Hilary Cass](#) in April, the NHS has now set out how it will deliver gender healthcare services for children and young people. (August 2024)

Two new NHS Children and Young People's Gender Services, led by London's Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) and Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool, have already opened in April.

The NHS will continue to appoint up to six additional new specialist regional centres by 2026 – with the next new service in Bristol becoming operational by November 2024 and plans to mobilise a service for the East of England over the course of 2024/25.

Each of the new services will have a nominated paediatrician or psychiatrist who has overall clinical responsibility for patient safety within the service, as it establishes a fundamentally different clinical model built on the strongest possible evidence base. Following further advice from the Cass Review and final report, the NHS has confirmed after extensive engagement and public consultation, that all new referrals to specialist gender services must be made through mental health or paediatric services to ensure every child or young person has had a thorough assessment of need before any gender reassignment may begin.

The [documents published on 7<sup>th</sup> August](#) also set out the scope for further research, in line with key recommendations from Dr Cass, to evaluate all approaches to inform the best possible patient care. These plans, subject to academic approval, recommend recruitment to a clinical trial into the potential benefits and harms of puberty suppressing hormones for children and young people. This NHS review is expected to commence in early 2025.

Following public disquiet on the subject, alongside children and young people's services, NHS England has also published plans for a review into adult gender services, following the recommendations from Dr Hilary Cass. Transitioning has literally been a life-changing experience for those individuals wishing to access gender dysphoria clinics and those seeking to undertake gender dysphoria. Particularly for those seeking physical bodily change. Many of which will involve intimate surgical procedures, risk infection, and be irreversible. There are concerns surrounding the secondary market, with individuals seeking procedures at overseas

clinics. This is relevant when the NHS has very limited facilities and long referral times. Costs of private clinicians in the UK are deemed prohibitive, overseas clinics or agencies are marketing widely through social media. As more customers travel the risks escalate but the referral rate rises, as more UK patients travel and document their cases on social platforms.

The NHS has seen an increasing incidence of individuals seeking to 'detransition' following previous gender affirming interventions and the absence of a consistent, defined clinical approach for them. This has led to the NHS writing to the CEO's and Chief Medical Officers that provide adult GDC clinics in England to draw attention to the recommendations in the report, to inform on the intention of the review body, and to set out immediate steps to protect and support our young people below the age of 18 years. In addition, to consider how care is delivered to young people and adolescents between the ages of 17-25 years of age.

It is the process of accessing counselling and individual therapists with sufficient knowledge in this complex area, that has been one of the challenges. The NHS has now decided to take over the review from the University of York, as they were unable to complete their study because the GDC' clinics would not engage or share data correctly. Dr Cass's advice is that 'extreme caution' should be exercised on the part of the clinics, before making a recommendation for gender affirming hormones in young people under 18 years of age. This is particularly relevant as data on the numbers of young people seeking de-transitioning will take time to collate. Experts point to trends and the general direction in which young people may be led. Particularly, those in vulnerable groups or those heavily influenced by the algorithms used by social media platforms to target these individuals with gender dysphoria content. There is widespread concern across adult and children's social care that it is not always easy to identify the intentions of corporate organisations. Many of whom are profiting from the trends in gender transitioning.

In ten short years these organisations will have moved to exploit and market a new and possibly divisive trend. Experts will look back at this period in history. Their analysis will consider the profound psychological and emotional damage caused to a generation of young and vulnerable adults.

### **Asda teams up with the NHS.**

The NHS and Asda are teaming up to provide vital advice on millions of toothpaste tubes and mouthwash bottles encouraging people to contact their GP or dentist if they notice any potential symptoms of mouth cancer.

From this month, Asda's own brand of oral hygiene products will now feature NHS advice in over 500 Asda stores across the country.

The guidance will be clearly displayed on the packaging, along with a link to more detailed information about mouth and throat cancer on the NHS website.

The aim of the partnership is to raise awareness of symptoms that could indicate cancer, such as an ulcer that lasts for three weeks or more and encourage people to contact their GP or dental practice and get checked as early as possible.

Symptoms of mouth cancer also include a white or red patch in the mouth that does not heal within three weeks, a lump or swelling in the mouth, jaw, or neck that lasts for more than three weeks, and difficulty swallowing, chewing, or moving the jaw or tongue.

## **Stephen Fry Supports Prostate Cancer Project**

The NHS is joining forces with the charity Prostate Cancer Research to provide unique access to healthcare data for research that could transform patient care and treatment of the disease.

Prostate Progress is a new project launched this summer by Prostate Cancer Research, it has been selected to take part in NHS England's Data for Research and Development Programme. The initiative is the first of a series of 'driver projects' which will support innovative and comparative uses of health data.

The project will provide safe and secure access to the clinical data of prostate cancer patients who agree to take part. The patients directly record the real-life effects of their cancer and its treatment, feelings and emotions that can be compared using Ai language models to analyse and spot trends in behaviour and patterns in treatment plans.

Researchers hope to gain unique insights into the impacts of prostate cancer by combining the two sets of data to understand more about the disease. In addition, to develop new treatments and tests to improve diagnosis, monitor the safety of treatments, and plan new out-patient NHS services. Stephen Fry, who has previously had prostate cancer surgery, is keen to encourage others living with a diagnosis to get involved with the project.

If you or a partner, friend or relative has been diagnosed with prostate cancer, either recently or in the past, you are being encouraged to take part in *Prostate Progress*. You can find out more information and sign up here at: [www.prostateprogress.org](http://www.prostateprogress.org).

## **E-bicycles lithium battery safety issues.**

Following my social media posts concerning E-bikes and safety regarding lithium battery charging, Tower Hamlets has created a video for residents working in the delivery sector. If you know any family members or receive Deliveroo meals, it might be worth pointing the staff towards these videos.

Unfortunately, these workers need to minimise their overheads, and they are forced to buy non branded batteries or worse grey imports from China that have no safety tests. They are lethal in terms of fire risks. There are fires in London every night resulting from batteries left on charge when residents are asleep. If you know anyone who has bought these products or the chargers which are equally dangerous, plead with them to seek advice from a qualified Fire Officer or to replace the battery with a reputable manufacturer. If they insist upon keeping the battery for economic reasons, ensure they do not leave the bike on charge, blocking fire exits or hallways, especially in blocks of flats that if the battery ignites, will in an emergency, impair the exit of those living in the block.

[https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/News\\_events/2024/August/Council-strives-to-support-councils-nationwide-with-e-bike-safety.aspx](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/News_events/2024/August/Council-strives-to-support-councils-nationwide-with-e-bike-safety.aspx)

## **Statement on civil disorder by Mayor Rahman after riots erupt across the country.**

I was pleased to see that the Mayor of Tower Hamlets had praised all the residents of this multi-cultural borough in their ability to live alongside one another with mutually content lives.

South Asian families travelled from Bangladesh following the catastrophic floods in 1951 and 1987 when Britain welcomed them. Many Asian and Caribbean migrants finding work on London Transport. Many others developing their own business ventures. Today, we have second and third generation Bengalis who have been fortunate to understand the value in education and many going on to university to achieve excellence in medicine. Many proud parents have seen their sons and daughters prosper as specialist consultants, anaesthetists, dentists, radiographers and experts within the NHS. Other families studied law and achieved high office as solicitors and some have reached the Bar Counsel, as barristers. Some have taken over family businesses from humble corner shops to vast food manufacturing industries. And we are all richer for their enterprise and integration.

The Chairman said that he had lived in Wapping almost 30 years, and that he had never experienced any ethnic or racial tension. Contrary to media broadcasting, there is no overt racial hatred. We benefit and enjoy each other's culture. In recent years conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan have caused immigration to increase. In recent months we have experienced an influx of migrants fleeing, the perils of war and climate change in their own countries. Economic uncertainty has forced people to risk their lives making the perilous crossing to Europe. Now we are all living alongside one another in Tower Hamlets, we have peoples from more than 25 different countries. Somalia, Eritrea, Yemen, Jordan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Sudan, Angola, Senegal, Tunisia, Libya, Gambia, and many more. The Mayor is making the point that in general, we respect one another and there are no lasting conflicts. He was proud that Tower Hamlets saw almost no civil disorder as riots erupted in many towns in the north of England, especially those housing asylum seekers.

There are many reasons for the disorders we all witnessed. Many people feel marginalised and that the country they once knew is disappearing. They feel their voice is not heard and they slip further towards the grasp of poverty. For centuries Wapping has been at the heart of people arriving on ships from far off lands. Limehouse was an area where Chinese sailors and their families settled and built businesses trading tea, creating laundries and starting the infamous opium dens. There were turf wars and power struggles, as Limehouse remained a settling point for the arrival of new immigrants. Then as now, people learnt to live and work together to create a vibrant and exciting city.

#### **Electronic Newsletter for patients.**

Some patients have asked if the practice could have a periodic newsletter in which we could place articles, and information on health and social care. Guest articles could be written by experts and patients, and it would develop into a social and community diary. I can see the benefits of this and how it could be designed in WordPress and distributed over email at low cost. It is a considerable undertaking and commitment to edit and design, and I know the time involved in collating these minutes of the PPG meetings, and how this has evolved over the past two years as an information sheet for those who do not attend. We will discuss this further at our next meeting.

The meeting concluded at 19:35 hrs.

#### ***Confirmation of next meeting dates, Thursday, November 7<sup>th</sup> 2024, & January 9<sup>th</sup> 2025.***

\*Please note that the Chairman has decided to move the January meeting to the second Thursday in January as the first sits too close to the Christmas and New Year holiday.