

Message from the Practice Manager

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter, which we aim to publish quarterly in 2019 to complement the information on services, events, plans and personnel that is available on our website at www.nortonmedicalcentre.nhs.uk

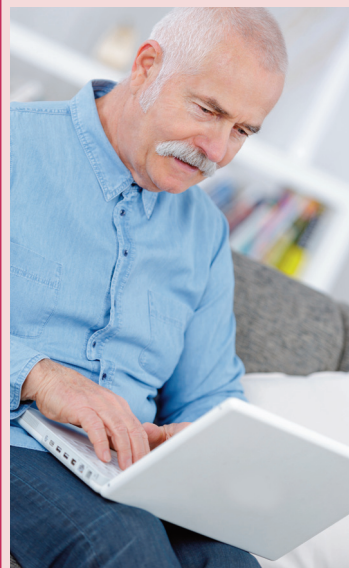
This newsletter features brief updates on issues such as our telephone system, extended access appointments available from our Hub Sites out of hours and online access to medical records. As the 4th largest Practice in the Stockton-on-Tees area, our aim is to provide our 17,600 patients with a high standard of service. To that aim constructive feedback is always welcome whether good or bad and can be provided through our Family and Friends survey available at

www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/LE7O7/ (printed copies available from Reception). Although the survey is anonymous anyone who would like a response is welcome to provide their details.

Our practice is extremely fortunate in having an effective Patient Participation Group (PPG) operating under chair, Mark Coleman, and vice chair, Jacqui Taylor. Mark has reviewed the PPG's activities in 2018 and previewed its plans for 2019 in this edition and both have agreed to lead the publication of this Newsletter as a way of communicating with the wider patient population. The Practice is very grateful for their efforts.

Chris Malloy
Practice Manager

ONLINE ACCESS TO YOUR MEDICAL RECORD



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PATIENT ONLINE SERVICE

Our online service has gone from strength to strength as patients opt to access their medical records online. Many patients have signed up for this service as a convenient way of ordering repeat, but it may also help patients manage their medical conditions better and can be accessed from anywhere in the world if medical treatment is needed while on holiday abroad.

Patients who opt for the service use a unique password which, if kept secure, ensures they alone can access their records. Alternatively, patients who wish to grant access to a family member or carer can sign them up for proxy access. Once registered, they can go online to perform tasks ranging from booking/cancelling appointments and ordering repeat prescriptions to viewing test results.

Opting for the online service is entirely up to individual patients and the quality of care they receive is identical whether they join or not.

Further details are available at www.nortonmedicalcentre.nhs.uk/online-services.html

New Phone System Cuts Average Waiting Time

Since the suppliers of our new telephone system resolved the technical problems that created queues of frustrated callers for several weeks after it was first installed, there have been significant improvements in performance.

Reports generated by the system enable us to rigorously monitor performance and establish that the majority of calls are now being answered within a minute, with an average waiting time usually of

between 60 and 90 seconds.

However, while the overall improvement continues, there are still significant and inexplicable statistical variations from day to day so there are still times when patients wait longer than we would wish.

We thank callers for their patience and apologise for any inconvenience they experience. We will continue to monitor and assess the system until we are sure it is achieving its optimum performance.



EXTENDED ACCESS SERVICES

It is now just over a year since we have been able to offer our patients "extended access" evening or weekend appointments with doctors, nurses and healthcare assistants at 'hub' sites at Stockton, Ingleby Barwick and Hartlepool.

Designed to provide extra capacity, these appointments can be particularly beneficial for patients with long term conditions who struggle to attend review appointments during normal surgery hours. This extended access service is

available for anyone willing to visit another site for a consultation with a health care professional. Of course patients are under no obligation to accept the offer of an extended access appointment if they would prefer to wait for the next available appointment at Norton.

Surgery hours Monday to Friday: 08.00 to 18.00 (Closed except for urgent calls – Thursday, 12.00 to 15.00)

PPG annual report 2018

During the course of 2018 the Patient Participation Group has purchased a number of items useful to different members of the team at NMC, for example:

Pharmacy Fridge;

A Dermatoscope (a device for examining skin lesions to distinguish malignant ones);
2 x Ambulatory Blood Pressure monitoring systems.

Funds used to purchase these items come from legacies from patients or on behalf of former patients combined with occasional fund-raising activities we undertake.

Members of the team have been involved in different healthcare issues. These include support for cancer sufferers and their carers, those with diabetes, the Patient / Leader programme and several others. Our aim is always to improve communication between the practice and patients to give maximum benefit.

If you are a patient of the practice and are interested in finding out more about the group and perhaps joining, please let the reception team know. You will be asked to consent to them passing on your contact details so that we can contact you. We are keen to recruit younger patients who can attend, to give us the widest possible range of viewpoints.

HAVE A HEALTHY HOLIDAY

Anyone planning a foreign holiday should bear in mind that vaccinations may be advisable to protect against the risk of disease at certain destinations. As a course of vaccines may sometimes be recommended, we suggest you seek advice as early as possible and definitely no later than 6-8 weeks before your departure date.

To help ensure a healthy holiday, just collect a travel health assessment form from our reception, fill it in and leave it for our nurses to look over, then ring back a few days later to get their expert advice and - if necessary - book into a travel clinic at the surgery.

You can also go online to investigate the disease and travel risks at your planned destination at

<https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>

Self-Referral Made Simple

A dedicated website enables people with depression, anxiety, stress or other emotional / mental health issues to refer themselves to psychological therapists who can help them overcome their problems.

Mental health services are a key priority for Hartlepool and Stockton on Tees Clinical Commissioning Group (www.hartlepoolandstocktonccg.nhs.uk/about-us/mental-health-services), which has set up www.wecantalk.org/ to highlight the benefits of psychological - or 'talking' - therapies.

The new site provides visitors with all the information needed to



select the most appropriate local provider and refer themselves to it for treatment. If they need help more urgently, they can call **0345 045 0620** to find out which organisations are best qualified to offer them support.

MAKING THINGS HAPPEN AT BILLINGHAM MAN SHED

The restoration of a traditional street knife grinding machine is one of the flagship projects nearing completion at Billingham Man Shed - a venue that offers young and old alike the opportunity to build friendships, develop and share skills and knowledge and enjoy the age-old garden shed pursuits of making and mending.

An Involve Tees Valley project, Billingham Man Shed is masterminded by Kevin McCabe, who runs a bicycle renovation business and issues a standing invitation to anyone who wants to connect, share ideas and make friends to spend time at his workshop at The Grange Business Centre on Belasis Avenue. He can be contacted on **07591 129166**.

BREXIT? KEEP TAKING THE TABLETS

There is no need to change the way that you order prescriptions or take your medicines because of Brexit. There are enough medicines and medical products to meet current needs and GPs will continue to prescribe medicines and medical products as normal.

*Au Revoir Kath.
Hello Lynn*

Lead Nurse Kath Sobolewski, who has been a stalwart member of the nursing team at Norton Medical Centre for 20 years, has taken well-earned retirement, though she will be weaning herself gradually off the work habit by helping out during holidays and staff shortages.

While she will be sorely missed by colleagues and patients alike, we have at least secured a first class replacement in Lynn Johnston (pictured), who came to us in September 2017 having previously worked at Woodlands Medical Centre in Stockton.

