

## Sothall and Beighton Patient Forum

### Minutes of the meeting Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2021 at 6:30pm



**Chair:** Michael Lyall (Practice Manager)

**Practice staff:** Dr R Welch

**Minutes:** ML (We would really like a forum member to take on this role)

**Members Present:** JW, AF, JM, DR & SR

**Members joining through MS teams:** CA, CF, SS

**Apologies :** MK, DH, TS

ML opened the meeting by thanking everyone for attending and confirmed the group's agreement with the content of the minutes of the previous meeting (there had been an email update 14.9.2020 in lieu of a meeting, due to Covid restrictions)

#### **1. THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR VOLUNTEERS**

Michael wanted to say a heartfelt thank you to the volunteers who were essential in managing the vaccination site at Beighton who worked through all weathers and faced some challenging sessions. The Forum members present also formally offered a vote of thanks to the volunteers and stated how impressed they were with the entire set-up at Beighton. Michael explained that it has really boosted closer working with local practices and forged relationships with other practice staff and volunteers that would have taken many years to build. We are currently looking at a similar solution for 'Phase 3' which is the booster Covid vaccination and the 2021-22 Flu campaign. This is in early stages and no details are available at this stage.

#### **2. HOW WE'RE MANAGING THE CURRENT PANDEMIC**

Covid numbers in the local area at the time of this meeting are the highest they have ever been [Interactive map of cases | Coronavirus in the UK \(data.gov.uk\)](#). Michael explained how we are managing the practice through the current pandemic:— A decision was made around 3 weeks ago that, regardless of government guidance on 19<sup>th</sup> July, in order to ensure patient safety and working capacity when there are staff shortages due to self-isolation after covid contact "pings", we would retain all of the current Covid precautions. Staff and all visitors / patients should continue to wear face coverings, socially distance wherever possible, attend surgery without family members unless necessary and regularly wash and / or sanitise hands. Screening of all patients and visitors at the door via the intercom would continue, to ensure they do not have current covid-19 symptoms and have not been in recent direct contact with symptomatic patients. Since making this decision the Government have also mandated these measures within all health service settings including GP surgeries. We asked the Forum members how they felt. Unanimously they agreed that this was the right approach and they felt safer knowing that these measures were in place

#### **3. STAFFING CHANGES OVER THE LAST YEAR**

- New Staff: - July 2020 Charlotte new Pharmacy technician, August 2020 Dr Nash (salaried GP), January 2021 Joel (HCA covering Hannah's Maternity leave). Dr Gane also returned from maternity leave in May 2021.
- Leavers: - September 2020 Dr Brynes (salaried GP), Clara (Physician Associate Preceptorship).
- Pending staffing; - Dr T Williams is leaving in August and Daniel Garcia will be starting at Sothall in August, Daniel is a very experienced Physician Associate.

We explained that the practice staffing 'feels' stable at the moment; we are as well staffed as our budget allows and feel our current staff make up a fantastic team that can provide the high-quality healthcare we strive to give.

#### **4. IMPROVING ACCESS**

In early 2000 we introduced Dr Link to allow patients to book various services online.

Unfortunately, shortly after setting this system up we were forced to disable some of the functions to ensure Covid compliance. This system required patients to download an app. Feedback from staff and patients was generally poor; the company were not proactive or supportive and for these reasons we have replaced this system.

Our new online offer does not require patients to install an app. Patients simply visit our website [www.sothall.net](http://www.sothall.net) ; we have a tile on the website marked 'Contact us online – medical – administrative – Prescriptions'. This takes you to a secure site where you are able to email the practice [Florey \(accurx.com\)](mailto:Florey@accurx.com) . There are some generic warnings about emergency care and information suggesting that we will get back to you within three working days. We feel this solution allows patients to access our services without being restricted to office hours whilst also allowing our staff to manage demand and ensure that appointments are used as appropriately as possible. Feedback from patients and staff has been overwhelmingly positive.

We also discussed the many tools which AccuRX provide Sothall MC. These include a text system which allows our staff to send information to patients via text. Some of these texts include links to information and videos. This allows us to share large amounts of information very quickly and efficiently with the most appropriate patients.

AccuRX was also used to book patients into the Covid vaccination site in Beighton. This allowed our staff to book thousands of appointments in a very short time. Clinical staff are also using AccuRX for video-calling patients and to allow patients to send photographs where appropriate. More information on this system is available here [For Patients \(accurx.com\)](http://ForPatients@accurx.com) .

#### **Conventional non-digital methods of contact and communication are all still available!**

We are aware that patients biggest grumble with the practice is the telephone access, we have recently installed a system which allows our reception manager to monitor in real time the number of patients holding to be connected, how long they have been waiting and how many reception staff are actively answering calls. Our reception staff have a variety of other tasks to complete during the day (such as dealing with prescription requests and queries, correspondence and test results). This telephone software will help ensure that these tasks are only completed when phone waiting times are shorter.

#### **5. MERGER UPDATE**

During the pandemic, the situation changed with regards to the proposed merger with Mosborough Health Centre. This is no longer something which we were actively pursuing. However, we are now working more closely with the practices in our 'Townships1' Primary Care Network. These practices are Sothall MC, Birley, Mosborough, Hackenthorpe, Crystal Peaks and Owlthorpe. We have all worked closely together to manage and staff the vaccination centre at Beighton. We explained how this has improved relationships significantly. We are employing Network staff who can be utilised across the network of practices. Currently these include: - paramedic, pharmacist, physiotherapists, pharmacy technicians, a "frailty" occupational therapist and various social prescribers. We feel these staff will help us to support patients with more complex needs which need addressing, but which often translate into GP's appointments which could or should be addressed by other clinical staff.

#### **6 THINGS WE MAY WISH TO KEEP POST - PANDEMIC**

As things stand, even after the government proposals to end most of the restrictions, Sothall Medical Centre decided to retain all current Covid precautions. This has now been mandated for all healthcare settings.

It's important that all patients know **we are OPEN FOR BUSINESS**, providing all the aspects of General Practice care, and we are continuing to see patients face-to-face whenever this is clinically indicated. However, patients will normally be offered an initial telephone assessment; the clinician will then decide if a face-to-face appointment is required. If attending the surgery, patients are required to wear a face covering (unless they are unable to for medical reasons) and wherever possible to attend appointments alone.

At this point in time, we don't know which precautions will stay long-term. However, it does seem wise to continue to use caution in how we bring potentially infectious patients into the surgery. Video consultations are proving popular with patients and most clinical staff.

The practice therefore may look relatively empty, but clinical staff are actually having consultations with ('seeing') more patients than pre-Covid. The Forum were asked how they felt about this: the group agreed that these were all sensible measures and they do help patients to feel safe when they do need to attend in person.

## **7. WHAT COULD WE DO BETTER?**

We asked the Forum if they felt there was anything we could do better? Everyone attending seemed very happy with the services we are providing and how we are providing these. One issue that was raised was the waiting times and difficulties that some patients have found collecting their prescriptions from Weldrick's Pharmacy. We explained that the Pharmacy is completely independent from the Practice; they have had a challenging time recently, there is limited space to operate within the pharmacy and they are dealing with many patients. Dr Welch agreed to communicate the Forum's concerns.

## **8. EXTENDED HOURS**

We explained that prior to Covid the surgery had operated outside our normal hours. We had early (07:30) starts on Monday, Wednesday & Thursday and a late finish (20:00) on a Tuesday. We were planning to re-introduce extended hours in some form. We have, however put this on hold whilst we explore a possible Primary Care Network solution. We are in very early stages of this but will share details as and when we have more information.

## **9. PATIENT DEMAND**

Over the previous few weeks coming out of lock-down the demand for GP services has been extremely high. We do however have the same limited capacity and have therefore taken the following steps to ensure the safety of our staff and patients; -

- Callers later in the day may be directed to 111 or Local walk-in centres [Sheffield Walk-in Centre - One Medical Group](#)
- Maximising use of other Network staff: there are some additional resources across our network
- Promoting self-help: we have added a lot of self-help resources to our website's Self-Help information tile [Patient Portal - Self Care Forum](#)

Dr Welch explained that we are doing whatever we can with the resource we have and are also trying to ensure our patients have their share of the alternative Network resource available. The Forum were able to understand the pressures we are facing and agreed with our solution.

## **10. UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER STUDY**

Around 18 Months ago many of our Forum group attended a meeting with a research team who were investigating how practices are utilising staff other than GPs to manage patient care, and the impacts of the increasing mix of clinical staff types. The findings were shared with the Forum prior to this meeting. Dr Welch gave a description to the Forum of the findings of the benefits and complexities the increasing skill mix creates.

## **11. 2021 GP PATIENT SURVEY RESULTS**

Prior to this meeting we shared the link to this review [Practice Overview \(gp-patient.co.uk\)](https://gp-patient.co.uk) We have reviewed this survey and are generally very pleased with the results, although it has provided us with some areas to concentrate our improvements on. Some highlights are -

- 91% of patients found our reception staff helpful: this has improved year-on-year for the last four years
- 99% had confidence and trust in the healthcare professional they saw or spoke to during their last appointment
- 97% were involved as much as they wanted to be in decisions about their care and treatment during their last general practice appointment
- 43% find it easy to get through to this GP practice by phone – this is an area we have constantly worked to improve. We are hopeful that the current online option [Sothall Medical Centre](#) and a recent telephone management improvement detailed in item 4 will help improve this situation
- 86% describe their overall experience of this GP practice as good

We explained that we feel that we are doing well in the most important areas and working on other areas where there is scope for improvement. The forum agreed that we should be pleased with these results and they have seen improvements over the last few years

## **AOB**

We were asked about opting out of NHS data sharing and discussed how members felt about this. Michael & Dr Welch explained that there has been some media information around recent NHS plans to share anonymised data. There have also been some concerns raised internally regarding how this has been managed. General Practice Data for Planning and Research (GPDPR) is NHS Digital's proposed new system for collection of GP data which supports vital health and care planning and research. But it had been introduced at short notice and many people are unhappy with it and wish to opt out. The process has been deferred from September 2021, with no announcement yet about a new implementation date. More information on this and how to opt out can be found here; - <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/data-collections-and-data-sets/data-collections/general-practice-data-for-planning-and-research> and [Make your choice about sharing data from your health records - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/your-nhs-data-shares/your-nhs-data-shares) We explained that as a Practice we don't have a preference either way and would like patients to choose as they wish. We would ask that patients who do wish to opt out follow the guidance on the link above, which will avoid adding the administration burden to the practice

There being no further discussions, the meeting closed at 21:06

**Next Patient Forum (provisionally) Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021 18.30 at Sothall Medical Centre with an option to join virtually via Microsoft Teams (register on our website to become a forum member to receive an invitation for this or pass a message via reception for inclusion in Patient Forum communications).**