

Sothall and Beighton Patient Forum
Minutes of the meeting Wednesday 13th October 2021 at 6:30pm



Chair: Michael Lyall (Practice Manager)

Practice staff: Dr R Welch

Minutes: ML

Members Present: DR+1, JM, AF, CL

Members joining through MS teams: None – unless requested we won't continue this option

Apologies : JW, JF, CA, TS, DH

ML opened the meeting by thanking everyone for attending and confirmed the group's agreement with the content of the minutes of the 21/07/2021 meeting

1. Discussion re Complaints:

We thought we'd share this information to gauge the forum's thoughts on the current situation. There is a well-documented increase in complaints nationally; our practice is no exception. GPs and ML are spending increasing amounts of time responding to increasing numbers of complaints. We are contractually obliged to answer complaints; many in fact highlight issues that we can improve. The number and tone of the complaints we are receiving is having negative impact both on number of available appointments (GP's time to investigate patients' concerns) and staff morale. These in turn have a negative impact on the service we are providing. We are, of course responsible and accountable for the services we provide, but often the complaints relate to queries about medical issues, or dissatisfaction with secondary care or other services such as Pharmacies. The Forum were quick to point out that they believe Sothall has provided an excellent service throughout the pandemic; they fully understand why we are working differently and pointed out that alternatives to face- to- face appointments are sometimes more convenient to the patient as well as often being available more quickly than pre-pandemic when more appointments may have been face- to- face. Dr Welch pointed out that pre-pandemic the government were insisting on increasing remote appointments and were in fact setting targets regarding this. The forum suggested a patient advocate for complaints: whilst this could be a great opportunity, we were unable to work out how this would work in practice with confidentiality requirements.

ML explained that we often include an invitation to join the patient forum in our complaint response explaining that this is a way that patients can actively engage in making improvements.

2. Covid booster and Flu vaccines

We have started to administer Flu vaccines at Sothall on Tuesday afternoons and plan to continue this until we have exhausted our supply.

We are starting to do **Covid19 booster vaccinations** at Beighton Health Centre from Friday 15th October. Booster vaccines can also be obtained at any of the national vaccine sites, Patients will receive invitations directly; they must be in cohorts 1 – 9 (over 50 or having an underlying health condition) and it must be over 26 weeks from their 2nd dose. Most people will receive the Pfizer booster regardless of which vaccine they had previously. We are calling patients in the same order as previously and are planning to run one clinic per week. This is partly to allow us to maintain our usual services but also as it is available in several more centres elsewhere in Sheffield; we are anticipating many people will take up these other options. ML explained that we had hoped to co-administer Flu and Covid boosters, however guidance regarding this was not finalised until we were already well into our Flu campaign

3. Staffing changes since our last Forum update.

- Dr Tom Brynes has returned to Sothall, starting 11th October for 2 days per week (Mondays and Thursdays)

- Dr Howarth is leaving at the end of October. Dr Howarth also works at Sheffield University Medical Centre and plans to consolidate there
- Physician Associate Daniel Garcia has left the practice: Daniel worked in a Network capacity and has now been employed by a practice elsewhere (We do plan to recruit a replacement Network PA)

Our staffing is still relatively stable; although we are experiencing capacity / demand issues we are fully staffed given the available funding

4. Performing General Practice

SMC is currently being supported through a change management improvement initiative. We're currently looking at improving our efficiency around repeat prescription ordering and whether this can be streamlined to provide a better patient experience and to free up reception time, allowing them answering the telephones more efficiently. One of the early areas identified from data analysis is that telephone ordering of regular repeat prescriptions takes, on average, five times as long to process as online requests. There are also many more opportunities for mistakes to happen when taking medication orders over a telephone. Many practices have stopped taking any prescription orders over the telephone for these reasons.

We are planning to look at implementing some improvements over the next few months.

Prescription requesting Online through the NHS App or similar is by far the safest and quickest method of ordering medication for both patients and reception staff. Some of the benefits of ordering through the NHS app (available here [NHS App - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)) are; ordering is extremely quick and easy, patients can see exactly what medication they are ordering; they can see where the prescription can be collected; they have a record of what they have ordered. We've been recommending this app for around 18 Months and not aware of any prescription issues.

Conversely, some issues which do occur with other ordering options are miscommunications leading to incomplete orders, over ordering where patients ask for 'all their repeats' forgetting that some items are not regularly used, items being asked for by brand names that sometimes can't be met leading to delays. Staff are often asked for 'the pink tablets' for example which we are unable to identify safely in this way. Earlier we discussed complaints and a high proportion of these relate to prescriptions.

Within the next few weeks, we will be looking at our appointment system hoping to improve capacity / demand mismatch. Further information will be shared at the next meeting

5. Reception staff we currently have two new reception staff in training and are in the process of recruiting more. They may take a little longer to answer complex queries and this training is also adding to telephone answering time. We ask that patients bear with us during this time

6. Current demand we thought we'd share with you that demand now is extremely high, it leaves us in the uncomfortable position where we are not able to see everyone who wants to be seen and are having to prioritise some patients based on their clinical need. We want to assure you that we are all working extremely hard to make choices that help balance these issues. We have capped the telephone queue at 20 which means that when patients call at peak times, they may well get an engaged tone. We also introduced an online access option recently called AccuRX triage. At the moment the number of requests coming in through this system is also becoming unmanageable. Some practices are intermittently switching this off (patients will see a message stating that it is not available at this time). We are trying to avoid this; however we are finding it impossible to give everyone who requests service through this system what they are asking for. Should demand continue rising at the current rate we maybe forced to manage this system differently. We then discussed if making access easier was partly to blame for the increased demand. If more patients checked the self-help options through the NHS app or our website [Patient Portal - Self Care Forum](#) perhaps this may reduce demand. It was explained that we really do not want patients to avoid asking for help when it is needed, but the self-help pages often suggest very effective self-care or reassurance that the issue will rectify itself within certain a period of time. These are followed by "safety-netting", explaining what other symptoms to look out for that may require medical intervention.

AOB

7. Forum - telephones, the number of pre-connection messages on the telephones was discussed. The group feel there are too many messages. ML pointed out that these are messages that play whilst keeping your place in the queue, they are intermittently reviewed, and we are aware that as more messages are added it becomes somewhat annoying, ML will review this. Having to call back to book essential scheduled appointments was discussed using the example of a monthly INR test. ML agreed that this made little sense and will look to see if these can be made available when attending for this type of appointment

8. Forum - Covid compliance: the group were asking how we were managing the Covid restrictions; one member pointed out that we seemed to have changed some measures, giving the example that waiting room chairs were not cleaned between every patient. We are aware that covid infection numbers are extremely high now. The Infection Control and Prevention guidance for practices has changed and is continuing to change. During the height of the pandemic, we had very few patients in the practice and were quite rightly cleaning extremely thoroughly. There is still far more cleaning than pre-pandemic; chairs and all touch points are all disinfected twice daily. This is in line with the latest guidance which we continue to follow

9. Forum – car parking: one day last week the car park was very full and there was only one staff car in the Belfry car park. We have discussed car parking many times. ML is keen to have a balanced use of the car park and feels that a lot of staff do use the Belfry car park. ML will remind staff that the Belfry is an alternative place to park which improves patient access

10. ML - extended hours appointments: pre-pandemic the practice offered some early morning and late evening appointments as part of the “extended hours” programme. We are now planning to work extended hours as a network with our partner practices (Owlthorpe, Hackenthorpe, Mosborough, Crystal Peaks and Birley). We are planning to do this on a Saturday rather than late / early and will have 1 x GP, one x Nurse Practitioner, one Nurse and one HCA working from 10am – 2pm every Saturday. As this is a network resource, it will be staffed with Sothall and other practices’ staff. We are finalising details now and are still unsure if all these sessions will be at Sothall or we will be alternating between some or all the network practices. Although the detail is not fully in place, we are planning for these sessions to start within the next few weeks.

10. ML – there has been a theme at today’s meeting suggesting that General Practice is facing a difficult time and there do not appear to be any solutions that give hope for improvement. This has been recognised nationally and there is a City-Wide meeting being arranged with all practices, Primary Care Sheffield and the Clinical Commissioning Group on 17th November entitled ‘Primary Care in Crisis’

Post meeting note: - the practice will be closed on the afternoon of Wednesday 20th October when our clinical staff will be updating on Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) training. We will also be closed on Wednesday 17th November to engage in the meeting mentioned in item 10. During this time patients will be redirected to the GP collaborative service or should contact 111

There being no further discussions, the meeting closed at 20:00

The next Patient Forum (provisional) Wednesday 8th December 2021 18.30 at Sothall Medical Centre waiting room. As there were no virtual attendees at today’s meeting I do not intend to routinely offer this option. Should anyone feel they would prefer this method I will reinstate it.

The patient Forum, formally known as the Patient Participation Group (PPG) is an excellent way for patients to engage with the practice and influence improvements. It allows the opportunity for patients to openly discuss issues they feel could be improved as well as providing the practice the

opportunity to discuss these issues. We are always actively looking for new members. Meetings are usually every two months, usually at 18:30 – 20:00 on a Wednesday evening. There is no formal commitment to attend meetings regularly and there is always an opportunity to shape the meeting agenda even if you are unable to attend. The only criteria for becoming a Forum member is that you are a registered patient at Sothall Medical Centre. If you are interested in joining this active, friendly group please visit our website and complete the very simple application form [Sothall Medical Centre](#)