



Grafton Medical Partners Macmillan Way

103 MACMILLAN WAY, LONDON SW17 6AT | 020 3883 5800

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Last week, Matt Hancock, the Health Secretary, made headlines suggesting all GP consultations should be 'virtual' (i.e. by telephone or video), before hastily backtracking and saying "patients who want to be seen face-to-face, can be."

At Grafton, due to COVID, we have adapted swiftly to the necessity to switch to a 'virtual' world, where we triage all patient requests,

but PLEASE be assured that we are open for business and, should your problem suggest a face-to-face consultation is needed, you will be seen in surgery.

We need to ensure all our staff and patients are safe so, if we ask you to come in, we will aim to minimise contact time in the surgery (e.g. by speaking to you ahead of an immunisation slot to give advice,

or taking a full history by phone in advance of an appointment to examine you).

We ask all those attending surgery to come alone wherever possible, to minimise the number of patients in the practice at any one time. We ask you to only arrive at your exact appointment time. Our staff will meet you at the door and will take your temperature.

If this is greater than 37.8 you will not be allowed to enter until your case is discussed with a clinician.

Staff seeing you face-to-face will wear PPE and our reception desks are now screened off. In this way we hope to keep everyone healthy and ensure routine essential work such as child immunisations, blood tests and smears continue safely.

All patients are requested to use hand sanitiser at the entry point and obey social distancing rules in the building. All patients over 5 are requested to wear a face covering.

Please do not attend if you have any symptoms which could possibly be related to COVID-19.

If you have any suspicion that you, or a family member,

may have COVID, please ring NHS 119 to arrange a test and to receive further medical advice.

Immunisations

Prior to COVID there was evidence that cases of Measles were increasing in south west London. We strongly urge all parents to ensure their children's vaccinations are up-to-date. Our staff review outstanding vaccinations weekly and if you are contacted you can be assured it will be safe to come in.

Older adults at risk of pneumonia (e.g. all over 65 and those with chest problems or immunosuppression) should have a pneumococcal vaccine.

This prevents bacterial pneumonia which kills many people each year, particularly in winter.

If you are recalled for this vaccine, PLEASE use the summer months to get this up-to-date.

Pregnant women should have whooping cough (pertussis) vaccine at between 16 and 32 weeks' pregnancy. This year, with the threat of COVID ever-present, this is more important than ever.

Flu

It seems incredibly early to be writing about flu but the Government, concerned that flu and COVID potentially circulating together this winter will be a dreadful combination leading to many excess deaths and hospital admissions, are launching a campaign to encourage all over 65s and those in 'at risk' groups

(pregnant women, diabetics, those with COPD, asthma, kidney and heart problems and those who are immunosuppressed) to have their flu vaccine this year. These groups will be given priority when our vaccine arrives (hopefully mid-September). Later in the year, there is a plan to extend the programme to all those over 50, but this will depend on sufficient vaccine stocks being available.

Social distancing and traditional flu clinics do not go together, so we are discussing other ways of ensuring we vaccinate as many patients as soon as possible yet keeping everyone safe. We expect to have more details in September. **Please be assured - if we invite you to surgery, you will be safe.**

Vitamin D

Early theories for excess death in Northern Italy due to COVID earlier in the year suggested a link with this area having the lowest vitamin D levels in Europe. This has not been backed up by further studies but we do know that vitamin D seems to have a role in protecting us against infection.

From late March/early April to the end of September, most people should be able to get all the vitamin D they need from sunlight. The body creates vitamin D from direct sunlight on the skin when outdoors. Between October and early March we do not get enough vitamin D from sunlight. Vitamin D is found in a small number of foods, including oily fish (salmon, sardines, herring and mackerel),

red meat and liver, egg yolks and fortified foods such as cereal and some fat spreads.

To ensure that you have enough vitamin D, a daily supplement of 1000 units (available from all pharmacies) is worth considering this winter.

COVID-19

COVID-19 is here to stay for some time. There are potential vaccines on the horizon for later this winter but it seems that any vaccine could not be delivered with the flu vaccine so, until it is available, some key messages:

- Do not be complacent. Keep social distancing and wash hands regularly.
- Get fit and up-to-date with other vaccines

There is still much research to be done into COVID morbidity and mortality but early data shows those who are overweight fare significantly worse.

The UK has a weight problem and one of the reasons cited for our poor outcomes for COVID is obesity. A recent survey showed that a third of the population gained half a stone during lockdown while official statistics suggest that a third of adults in Britain are overweight and almost 30% obese. The average adult body weight in the UK increases by half a kilogram every year between the ages of 20 and 60.

Gaining weight can be linked to a host of health problems including cancer, heart disease, strokes, dementia and type 2 diabetes. With COVID, those who were clinically obese had almost twice the risk of dying compared to those who had a normal weight. Please see our websites or ask at reception for local resources to help you to manage your weight.

Diabetes

Diabetes appears to also increase the risk of dying from COVID. We are actively recalling our diabetics for blood tests and diabetic checks again. It seems those with poor control are most at risk, so the importance of controlling blood sugars and weight and increasing exercise cannot be overemphasised.

There are some new, innovative courses on **Book & Learn**, which is a free NHS education platform for diabetes (www.diabetesbooking.co.uk). These are free and will help to improve your control. All Book & Learn courses are currently virtual and easy and convenient to access at any time. One particular course, **Second Nature** (www.secondnature.io), offers access to a dietician, free weighing scales and an exercise tracker. There are other courses for those with different diabetes education needs and we strongly recommend using these websites.

Mental Health

Inevitably, during this unusual period where many have lost loved ones (often unable to visit them in hospital or hold a funeral), lost jobs or struggled with social isolation, our mental health has suffered.

Our in-house **Wellbeing Service** continues and we want all of our patients to be aware of it. Whether you are undergoing mental health support currently, or you are experiencing new levels of distress, worry or anxiety as a result of what's happening right now, please know that help is available.

Appointments with our experienced counsellors, Ali Zarbafi and Verenia Rajaloo, are directly bookable. Please see our website or ask at reception for further information.

Talk Wandsworth (Talking Therapies/IAPT)

(www.talkwandsworth.nhs.uk) is a Wandsworth-based counselling service accepting self-referrals from those aged 18 years and over. This service can help if you are experiencing anxiety or stress, depression, bereavement or loss, sleep difficulties, anger issues, obsessive compulsive disorder, phobias, eating disorders and many other everyday problems. For more information, or to refer yourself, please visit their website or contact the service on 020 3513 6264.

The **Orchid Mental Health Emergency Service** at Springfield Hospital (0800 028 8000) is a service for patients with mental health problems who, previously, would have had to go to A&E. This was set up at the onset of COVID and has proved so successful that it is continuing and is a safe environment away from the main casualty.

As we approach winter, it is essential that everyone gets 'COVID-fit', up-to-date with vaccines and does not forget the basic rules. This virus has not gone away and the only way to beat it, ahead of any vaccine, is simple – social distancing, washing hands, testing if you have any symptoms whatsoever, quarantine if asked to do so, and to get yourself in shape!

Best wishes
Dr Penelope Smith
(Senior Partner)