

Falkland PPG Newsletter



Autumn 2021

Welcome to the latest Newsletter for Falkland Surgery Patients produced by the Falkland Patient Participation Group (PPG).

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Falkland surgery is open and seeing patients!

Contrary to what you may have been led to believe by some national newspapers, Falkland Surgery, like others, is open and seeing patients, as it has been throughout most of the pandemic.

If you'd like to receive future copies of these newsletters and other occasional emails or provide any general feedback (specific, individual issues should go straight to the surgery) please email: falklandppg@gmail.com

So what's the fuss about?

Well, it is true that there has been a fall in the number of patients being seen face-to-face, [from 71% to 60% in the year to January 2021](#), at Falkland, 80% to 58% nationally. But there are still more consultations face-to-face than over the telephone. And yes, you are now encouraged to use the 'e-consult' facility on the surgery website to get an appointment.

So why is this happening?

It's partly due to Covid and partly a trend that was already underway. Covid is still dangerous: currently killing more people than, say, traffic accidents and many forms of cancer, so we still need to take care. So, you don't want a group of vulnerable people huddling together in the waiting room if you can help it.

... But there were already moves to make better use of technology and people before the pandemic. That change is even more essential now because there are more requests from patients for help, and fewer GPs to provide it.

Between November 2020 and August 2021, there was a 23% increase in GP activity - not just direct contact with patients - but all the work that goes with it such as letters to and from hospitals, checking lab results and signing off medications.

The number of patients on GP practice lists in Berkshire has grown by 186% since 2014.

Nationally, there has been no progress in the 2016 promise to increase the number of GPs by 5,000 in five years, or the 2019 promise for an increase of 6,000 by 2024-25 ([Nuffield Trust](#)), and in fact numbers have fallen ([British Medical Association](#)).

Falkland GP staffing is now back up to workable levels, but we are still vulnerable to illness, holidays, and staff changes.

How do we solve this?

Sometimes, when more people need to consult with a doctor and there are not enough GPs to see them, you need ways to deal with that. The first thing is to make sure you don't miss the really urgent cases, so doctors assess the requests through the Triage system and decide who should be seen first.

Then the GP needs to make contact in the best way for that patient. For some people, a phone call is the best option. This is ideal for something minor, to ease their mind about a symptom or talk through some test results. It also avoids travelling to, and waiting around in, the surgery. But if it can't be dealt with over the phone, or if there is any doubt or concern, the GP will ask the patient to come in for a face-to-face consultation.

The third thing is that there are now more different types of health professionals at the surgery.

Often one of these people – whether it be one of the nurses dressing a wound or giving an injection, the pharmacist studying your medications, a physiotherapist getting you moving or a social prescriber* – might be able to help you better than the GP could.

**Recognising that people's health and wellbeing are determined by a range of factors, social prescribing seeks to address people's needs in a holistic way and can involve a range of activities that are typically provided by voluntary and community sector organisations. Examples include volunteering, arts activities, group learning, gardening, befriending, cookery, healthy eating advice and a range of sports which encourage patients to take greater control of their own health.*

So how should we respond to these changes?

Please don't take it out on the doctors, patient services advisers or other staff. Often, they are finding their way round a new system too and these arrangements aren't any easier for them to administer. There are reports, in Falkland as elsewhere, of staff being harassed and abused, which as well as being extremely unpleasant, means people leave, and this can make the staffing situation even worse.

We know the e-consult system can be a pain. Unfortunately, it's a national system, so the practice can't change it. There will always be things that could be better. It needs the patients and the practice to work together to spot problems and come up with solutions which suit our community.

If you are genuinely worried about a medical difficulty, please calmly explain this to the Patient Services Advisors (the 'receptionist' role, re-titled to recognise their training and responsibility) at the surgery and they will help you.

The patient services advisers are highly-trained professionals, who will ask for the nature of your symptoms to best guide you to the most appropriate service. They are used to hearing about all sorts of symptoms and will deal with your query with the upmost confidentiality, respect and empathy.

And if you'd like to be involved in the way your surgery runs and keep in touch with what's happening at the practice, email falklandppg@gmail.com to go on our mailing list for early updates. We look forward to more people getting involved!

Open Evening – 1st November 2021

We are holding an 'Open Evening' for all patients and surgery staff on Monday 1st November at 7pm.

This will be a 'hybrid' meeting – with some bookable limited face-to-face spaces, plus Zoom attendance. It should be an interesting programme:

Practice Manager, Mark Betkowski will give an update on developments at the surgery and a chance to ask questions.

We are also really pleased that one of our GPs, Dr Leigh Williams, has chosen to give a talk on "The Prostate - what's it all about?", aiming to dispel some of the myths and fears around the many common issues that arise in relation to it. We hope this will be an informative and reassuring session to the many men on our practice list and those that care about them.

There will also be a raffle! This helps the PPG to raise funds for any little extras the surgery may need.

Sadly, again because of Covid, we won't be providing tea or coffee this time, but do please feel free to bring your own!

To protect as far as possible against Covid, maximum attendance is limited to 25.

The seating will be socially distanced, and the room will be well ventilated - so wear appropriate layers!

You are encouraged to wear a mask (except when speaking) and, if possible, to take a lateral flow Covid test before you come to the meeting. If you have any Covid symptoms or suspect you may have been exposed to it, you should not attend in person.

All registered patients of Falkland surgery are very welcome to attend once they have booked. For an invitation and Zoom link, please email us on falklandppg@gmail.com and say whether you wish to attend in person or on Zoom. Only those who have received an invitation to attend in person will be admitted to the surgery waiting room on the evening.

This will be the first time we have held a 'hybrid' meeting (on Zoom and face-to-face) so please bear with us while we try to get it right!

Increase in satisfaction with the surgery

Despite national media coverage and one or two comments on social media, patient satisfaction with appointments at the surgery is increasing, reflecting the improvements made by the practice in response to the challenges it faces.

The proportion of those saying they had a good experience of making an appointment has risen from 45% to 61% in the year to January 2021.

That is just one of a number of results from the National GP Patient Survey which takes place every year.

Areas in which the surgery was above national and local averages include:

- support for managing long term conditions (80%),
- being given enough time by the healthcare professional they last saw (90%)
- being satisfied with the appointment they were offered (83%).

However, it was below average on:

- being able to speak to their preferred GP (37%),
- satisfaction with general practice appointment times available (54%)
- finding it easy to get through to the practice on the phone (58%).

Even though there is increased satisfaction with getting an appointment, over four times as many people are telephoning the practice as going online.

The proportion of people getting an appointment on the same day has risen from 31% to 38%, between 2020 and 2021, with 33% getting one within a few days, while 17% had to wait a week or more.

The survey is commissioned by NHS England and run by Ipsos MORI. You can see the full results for the surgery at

<https://www.gp-patient.co.uk/report?practicecode=K81017>

Staff changes

There was a recruitment drive for two new GPs over the summer, after two very long-standing partners, Dr Titcomb and Dr Walter, had left the practice earlier in the year. We were very fortunate that, unusually in the current climate, there were a number of applications, and two new GPs were appointed.

Dr Helen Walters has joined as a GP partner and Dr Lorna Berry as a salaried GP. Both come highly recommended from their previous practices. Dr Walters is working Monday, Wednesday, and a half day Friday. Dr Berry is working Monday, Tuesdays, and Fridays.

Flu clinics and Covid booster jabs

The surgery has now held two drive-through flu clinics at Newbury College, as last year. The first clinic saw over 1,500 people aged over 65 given vaccinations. The second included those over 50 and over 2,500 jabs were given over the two weekends. Staff involved described it as “a great team effort”. Patients have hailed it as “brilliant,” “really efficient” and “so quick!”

Reviews posted on social media were very positive, describing it as “an efficient, well-run day”.

By the time you read this, the new Covid booster jabs should have started up.

The Surgery has negotiated for the Covid booster clinics to be nice and handy at the Rugby Club.

The surgery is being supplied with the Pfizer vaccine which must be stored at very low temperatures and that, along with all the other problems at the moment with the ‘supply chain’, mean it’s all very complicated.

Please be patient as the Surgery will telephone patients when it is their turn, as with the original Covid jab.

The first to receive it will be the clinically extremely vulnerable, then by age group with the oldest first. Please note you must wait six months after your second jab before you can receive a booster.

National blood bottle shortage

Blood tests have been restricted and delayed because of a national shortage of the tubes used for collection. This is affecting hospitals as well as GP surgeries.

At the end of August, [it was reported](#) (see link) that one of the largest suppliers of the vials, Becton Dickinson, was experiencing supply chain problems, including issues of transportation capacity and UK border challenges. There has also been an increase in demand because of testing Covid-19 patients and tests which had been delayed during the pandemic.

It is expected that it will take some months to clear the backlog of tests needed. The surgery will keep you posted if this affects you.

Physiotherapy available at the practice

The Practice is now offering on-site physiotherapy on Fridays. Patients who contact their GP or our musculoskeletal specialist, Sarah Carter, with an issue which would benefit from physiotherapy will be offered this in-house service (or the usual referral to the West Berkshire Community Hospital) as an option.

'Under the bonnet' – Changes in the NHS

NHS Re-organisation

The latest top-down reorganisation of the health service in England is well underway, with the Health and Care Bill currently working its way through Parliament.

The controlling bodies – the ones that set the strategy and dish out the dosh – are changing from a 'Clinical Commissioning Groups' (CCGs) to [Integrated Care Systems \(ICSs\)](#).

Our [Integrated Care System \(ICS\)](#) instead of just covering the West of Berkshire will now cover Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West (BOB).

This inevitably means staff changes including a national process to appoint Chief Executives and Chairs for the 42 ICSs across England. While this will inevitably cause some disruption behind the scenes, hopefully it should not affect day-to-day healthcare services.

Social care funding

A rise in National Insurance contributions is to be used to pay for more health and social care (see the [BBC report here](#)). National insurance is to be raised by 1.25 percentage points from April 2022 and from 2023-24 it is to be rebadged as a 'health and social care levy' and extended to pensioners in work. Tax on share dividends is also to be increased by 1.25 percentage points.

Much of the £12bn a year will initially be spent on reducing NHS waiting lists with £5.3bn out of the expected £36bn raised in the first three years going on social care.

Care will be funded completely by the state for those with assets of less than £20,000 with the contribution gradually falling as assets reach £100,000. There is to be a £86,000 cap on total care costs over a person's lifetime, but this is just care costs, not the costs of food and accommodation. According to the independent [Institute for Fiscal Studies \(IFS\)](#), it is likely the bulk of the money will be swallowed up by the NHS.

And finally ...Getting involved with your surgery

The Patient Participation Group (PPG) acts as the voice of the patients, feeding people's views to the doctors and managers and passing information back.

If you'd like to receive emails from the PPG, or join our small committee, please email falklandppg@gmail.com or sign up on the [surgery website](#).

We are very keen to welcome more members onto the PPG committee, particularly younger people, and families.

All it involves is joining in a meeting every 2 months. Additional roles include fundraising, taking minutes, marketing and communications and potentially undertaking surveys. There is a lot more we could do if we had the people!

The current members of the committee are: Adrian Barker (Chair), Linda Ling (Vice-Chair), Bettine Bly (Treasurer), Adrian Edwards, Phil Barnett, Bob Hills, and Mark Betkowski (Practice Manager).

We hope you've found this interesting.
Thanks for reading, and keep safe!