**SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FROM THE PPG MEETING ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2021**

We welcomed three new members. When asked what alerted them to the meeting, two saw the notice on the HHMC website. Their particular areas of interest were (a) how to get an appointment (the telephone process can be long and stressful) and (b) finding out what happens 'behind the scenes' at HHMC. The topics covered at this meeting were:

**Appointments**

Quite apart from Covid-related queries and the usual day-to-day issues that patients need help with, a lot of people have held back on contacting the surgery about on-going conditions and new concerns during the pandemic and all of this has meant a huge rise in the demands on HHMC.

c600 GP appointments are now being conducted each week, compared to the recommended 400pw for a surgery of this size (65% are conducted remotely and 35% face-to-face) and 300 appointments per week are conducted by other healthcare professionals attached to the surgery (nurses, pharmacist, social services, mental health services etc.) The surgery are currently putting in place 50% face-to-face and 50% remote consultations, as we speak.

* Every day there is a dedicated 'emergency' GP to handle urgent cases. These urgent, same day appointments have to booked by telephone or in person at Reception and will be triaged by a healthcare professional to ascertain the best course of action (who/where/when) to help with the problem
* The surgery receives 200-300 calls during the peak time of 8.30-10.30 each morning! In spite of having up to 3 administrators answering the phones at any one time, the waiting time can be up to 20 minutes some days. The fact that patients no longer know how many are in the queue has added to their dissatisfaction with the process (this is due to a recent change in service provider, who charges a very high amount for including this facility)
* The high number of people ringing for an appointment means that people with a genuine emergency may not be able to get through, and it also puts an unacceptable level of pressure on the admin staff who answer all the calls (especially during the peak period of 8.30-10.30)

HHMC wants to make it easier for vulnerable, elderly, and urgent-case patients to get through on the telephone. What can be done to improve the way that the appointment booking system works while also ensuring that patients can communicate with the surgery in the most appropriate way?

There is now a wide range of options available to patients, in addition to phoning up:

* Patients can book a GP telephone appointment online, but it may not be for that day (availability varies) – they can do this via Patient Access (but, currently, cannot log two different types of appointment, eg nurse as well as GP).
* They can also book appointments with other medical practitioners (nurses, pharmacist, mental health advisers, health and wellbeing coach, etc). A newsletter will be put together by HHMC on the services these practitioners can provide.
* The practice pharmacist is able to provide advice and support on a wide range of conditions and issues, involving a GP or a nurse if necessary
* Patients can opt for a remote appointment if this suits them better (saves time and avoids the need to sit in the waiting room), which could be particularly useful for on-going conditions and minor ailments

There are other ways to get help:

* The reception desk is now open again or patients to put requests and queries in person – but is NOT a way to get round the rules of the appointment system!
* Doctorlink can be very useful for self-triaging less urgent conditions and suggesting the best route for getting help (eg it might suggest your child has Norovirus/winter vomiting and propose ways to help you/them through it) and will also indicate when you need to seek urgent help – and how to do this
* 111 Online or calling 111 can advise on how to manage symptoms and, as necessary, can put patients in touch with local medical services, out of hours
* The walk-in/urgent treatment centre at Teddington Memorial Hospital is open from 8am to 8pm
* Repeat prescription requests can be made online, using Patient Access or the NHS app; some pharmacies will make the request for you; you can drop a written request into reception or through the letterbox
* Patients can always write to HHMC with comments, queries and non-urgent requests using the “Contact” button on HHMC’s Website – messages are monitored throughout the day

The 8.30 rush to get appointments could also be eased by:

* Promoting the support and advice that can be provided by the pharmacist (at the practice and also in the local pharmacy) – on the website and maybe via a poster in the waiting room and also Reception?
* Clarifying the methods by which patients can get a non-urgent message to the practice
* Changing the phone message to eg advertise the benefits of telephone appointments, warn about how long the wait could be for the call to be answered during peak times, promoting the use of Patient Access and the NHS app
* Looking at the call data to better predict the demand (volume and type of request) and thus the type and quantity of resource that may be needed on a typical day and at particular times
* Ensuring that ALL practitioners know how to attach letters to texts – and use this approach wherever possible (obviously not suitable for some patients)
* Advertise the fact that patients should predict when their repeat medication is required rather than putting in a last-minute, urgent demand!
* There needs to be a way to raise a quick and simple query without phoning in – promote the use of “Contact” button on the Website for this

**Vaccinations**

Patients will be texted when their turn comes. Those without mobiles will be telephoned. House-bound patients will be vaccinated by our visiting nurse practitioners

**Flu jabs** – under-65s are already being vaccinated; there is a different vaccine for people who are 65 and over and these are likely to start later this month.

**Covid boosters** – at the time of writing, the schedule for these is not known but an announcement has just been made that over-t50’s will be eligible along with those who are medically vulnerable (and those who live with them)

The next PPG meeting will be on Saturday 27 November 2021