



THE VINE MEDICAL CENTRE

Welcome to Newsletter No 2.

Since the first edition, the Patient Participation Group (PPG) has been working diligently on your behalf at our meetings held every 2 months.

We meet to discuss developments in the NHS generally and, particularly, how these changes affect all of us - the patients!

It seems that changes are happening at the speed of light and in an incessant flow that makes keeping up very difficult – for the doctors and staff as well as us.

Progressive cuts in funding from central government to the GP network, coupled with an ever increasing population and the closing of GP practices in Maidstone have imposed an intolerable burden on the partners of The Vine which has made essential the changes that were put in to place on the 3rd September. We are all grateful to the Partners that they listened to the PPG who had made their opinions very clear on the proposed changes and which resulted in the compromise that has now started. We all need to participate in these changes and enthusiastically embrace them for the good and future ease of access for all patients in the future.

Of course, like all groups, we are always very keen to welcome new members to the PPG; if your particular interest is in promoting the wellbeing of us all and you are interested in what happens not only now but in the future, please email me and come along to see and hear what we do – you may just be surprised and enthused.

Thank you for your continued cooperation over these challenging times.

Gareth Owen, PPG Chairman

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“Oh the Times they are a-changing....”

The theme throughout this newsletter seems to be “change”. Unfortunately, change has been brought about in a rather precipitous way as a reaction to significantly changing circumstances – some cash led others the needs of the ever growing population.

We have all been happy with our Surgery for years but the situation has to be faced that we accept change or run the risk of losing what is near and dear to all of us.

We are more than fortunate to have retained the accessible morning clinic; lots of patients of medical practices would dearly love to have this luxury so we must all treasure it and do what we can to preserve it.

To help the practice, 2 significant changes have been made and both of these changes can only truly succeed with our help and participation – basically, we all need for them to work.

Medical Assistants

To help the partners (Doctors) with work loads, medical assistants will work between the receptionist and the doctor as a form of Triage system. You will remember elsewhere in this newsletter that mention was made of the need to give the receptionists as much information as they require so that this new system can operate effectively. The medical assistant will decide if a full consultation to the Doctor is essential or, as in most cases, the matter can be effectively dealt with by them. These medical assistants are professionally trained administrators working to a strict protocol who are capable of making judgement calls.

Care Navigation

Again, the essence is careful management of routine medical matters away from the Doctors so that they can give the urgent and serious matters their full attention – after all, Doctors deal in life and death matters.

It is all different from what we have generally been used to but nonetheless essential. “Care Navigation” really means finding a pathway of care that is appropriate and suitable to the needs of that patient. It may well be that the services of Age Concern, as an example, may be more appropriate to a patient’s needs; good evidence shows that up to 10% of GP consultations would be better aimed at the Citizens Advice Bureau, Age UK etc. We all know that very often a doctor will be consulted by an elderly patient for something non-medical as he is a trusted person and, very often, somebody who the patient has known for very many years.

I am sure that you will now have grasped the direction of travel of these changes.

We must all embrace these changes and do our utmost to make them work well for the Doctors and for us patients.

New appointment procedure for patients

The Vine has grown constantly since its opening in the new premises some 5 years ago as the population of Maidstone has grown through indigenous and external factors.

At the same time the number of GP's available has diminished due to retirement and other factors and also to the fact that several have handed their contract back to NHS England.

Throw into the pot that the students who are now qualifying have a very different outlook on life generally from that of say 40 years ago and that seems to be the exact recipe for a service (and especially The Vine) that tries to do its best for more people with less assets – doctors and medical staff.

An additional ingredient in this poison chalice is the demography of the ME16 postcode where the population is generally ageing and this also places additional stresses on the system.

After last winter, it was apparent to all who observed that things could not go on- it was accepted that the open surgery of last year meant that Doctors were vulnerable (yes, I mean vulnerable) to increasing numbers of patients to be seen. This was not healthy (sorry about the pun) as excessive numbers leads not only to mistakes – we are all human- but means that the quality of each appointment was diminished owing to the pressures of numbers in the waiting room.

It is for these reasons that the new rules came in to force on the 3 September, We in The Vine are still the fortunate patients in Maidstone in that **WE CAN STILL HAVE A CONSULTATION APPOINTMENT WITH THE DOCTOR OR OTHER APPROPRIATE PERSON ON THE DAY IF IT IS NECESSARY.**

It is important that we all embrace this change. It is important that The Vine remains a viable and efficient GP practice for us all not just for now but for the future.

We in the PPG have been consulted by the Partners and have agreed that the changes had to be made but feel that the changes have been acceptable in the circumstances and should result in the “open surgery” continuing for the future, al be it in a more controlled way.

The Vines Surgery has extra help so that patients stay well

The Vines Patient Participation Group is very pleased that the Vines is one of five GP practices in West Kent to benefit from help with social, emotional or practical needs that can often affect their health. This will start in the New Year 2019.

Involve Kent, in partnership with NHS West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group, is one of 23 organisations across England that will receive a share of a £4.5 million government fund to test different ways to support people and find out what works best.

Involve Connect for Wellbeing have appointed a specialist member of staff at the Vines who will be supported by volunteers, to advise and support patients to get involved in community activities, volunteering, or accessing community services.

They will have access to hundreds of non-clinical services that can help patients in a wide variety of ways – from boosting their mental health to help with meeting people and making friends.

This will use ‘social prescribing’ to help people improve their health and wellbeing. For instance, some people can feel low because they are isolated. With their support, practice staff will be able to use Involve Connect for Wellbeing so we can link our patients up with a voluntary service or social club.

This early help is good for patients as it helps people to do things they enjoy, and puts them in control. In the long run it can mean their health and wellbeing improves, reducing their need for NHS services.”

UK studies have estimated that around 20 per cent of patients consult their GPs for social problems or welfare advice. Without support, negative consequences can build up, such as depression, anxiety and social isolation.

Research shows people using social prescribing schemes tend to use health services less often, with their attendance at GP practices dropping by an average of 28 per cent, at A&E by 24 per cent, and some reduction in hospital appointments too.

There will be liaison with community groups, charities and voluntary organisations across West Kent to ensure those who wish to attract new members and users are signed up and listed on Connect for Wellbeing. Look out for future announcements from us and for information about joining the team to deliver this exciting new project.

A member of Involve Connect for Wellbeing in the practice on Fridays. Reception can help you to access this service.