



Letter to Patients from the Chair of the PPG (Patient Participation Group)

Thursday 3rd June 2021

Dear fellow patients,

It doesn't seem long ago since I last wrote an article for this newsletter but so much has happened recently that I feel it important to provide an update for everyone's information.

Over the past 14 months we have all suffered from the ravages of the Covid-19 virus; indeed it has affected some far more than others and many of you will have lost dear family members probably under the most horrific circumstances where visits to our hospital have been banned for visitors. There are many amongst us who never thought that we would witness such a pandemic or that our society in general would be so fragile; but now we know just how fragile we all are!

During this time The Vine, like lots of other GP surgeries, has been under such intense pressure that nobody could imagine it. We have all seen on our televisions the desperate faces of medical staff in our hospital and that anguish has been very real. I am the Chairman of the League of Friends at Maidstone Hospital so I have seen the blood shot and weary eyes of doctors, nurses and all staff there; but things are getting better.

What the media has failed to focus upon is the plight of our GP's and Practice Staff who have been forced to adopt intensive working methods to keep the surgeries functioning, and attend to our many and various ailments, all of which have needed to be attended to over this protracted period. We must all give a big THANK YOU for the way the practice has remained open, albeit in a different form.

At the same time, the computer system in The Vine became out of date and could not be supported by the software firm; replacement was necessary and, indeed, will offer to the staff and patients a better system.

Such is the pressure at The Vine that a few weeks ago **they received 1,400 calls in 1 day.** A possible consequence of this pandemic has been that people have "stored" their ailments where they can, and now, with the apparent relaxation of the pandemic, all of these have come to the forefront. Talk about unintended consequences!

I totally understand the frustration of trying to get through for anything — I have witnessed it myself but The Vine is no different from any other practice in our area or indeed in Kent.

The Practice Staff are just like us — human beings; and all humans deserve their due respect and should be shown such. I find it unbelievable, and totally regrettable, that patients of The Vine could possibly talk to our receptionists the way that they have. But it has and is happening — this is all far too much for anyone to take, and they should not be subjected to such abuse.

I understand that the Reception area will shortly be re-opened and it is hoped that this unbelievable demand will dissipate. In the meantime, I would ask that you ALL think about why you want to ring the surgery and, when you speak to a member of staff, you do so with courtesy and understanding — not a lot to ask.

The Vine has, and always will be, one of the finest general practice surgeries in the County, but it will only remain this way if we all treat it with care and respect.

We all look forward to a return to the old times — and they WILL arrive — hopefully sooner rather than later.

In the meantime, stay well and be good to one another.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gareth Owen". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "G" and "O" being significantly larger and more decorative than the rest of the letters.

Mr. Gareth Owen
Chairman of the PPG