

Dr M H Darch & Partners

at

TOTTON HEALTH CENTRE

Newsletter Autumn 2008

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With the autumn evenings drawing in, it's business as usual at the Health Centre - a surge of coughs and colds, ongoing chronic disease management, nurse led clinics ranging from travel advice and immunisations, to leg ulcer care and minor illness advice not forgetting, of course, doctors coping with the day to day management of acute and ongoing illnesses and the new extended opening hours!!

Dr. Alveyn continues to enjoy his sabbatical in New Zealand, but we are fortunate to have Dr Cathy Davies working as locum during his absence.

This newsletter is a snapshot of the various activities going on within the practice and aims to keep you updated with changes that are constantly happening within primary care. Many of you will have been asked recently to fill in a survey of your thoughts and experiences of the surgery and we are grateful for your responses. It helps us tailor our service to better serve your health needs. Indeed, the one area where patients felt in the last survey we "could do better" was offering the flexibility to book appointments in advance. Hopefully, we have taken your wishes on board and amended our system accordingly (see next article).

Our website and patient information system in the waiting room are good sources of information for you – please take time to look at them to help you access the care you need.

Tel: 023 80 865051

www.tottonhealthcentre.co.uk

Access to your doctors and nurses

Demand for access to the doctors and a nurse at the health centre is at an unprecedented level.

A recent, and not unusual, morning for the ‘duty ‘ doctor, who deals with the emergencies during that day, numbered 48 patient contacts – that requires a lot of decision making and careful management - and all before home visits and lunchtime. We are aware that we, as a practice, offer many more appointments than comparable practices in the New Forest locality.



Clearly, we do try to manage a patient’s needs and expectations and if someone requires urgent attention, that problem will be highlighted and dealt with appropriately. That is, of course, only right and proper.

What is more difficult to prioritise appropriately are those problems that are not so acute. We are constantly reviewing our method of dealing with these problems and we will continue to try and ensure your access to the right person at the right time.

Our routine doctor appointments are now accessed in 2 ways:

1. Booking up to 2 weeks in advance.

This allows patients to plan their diaries and have flexibility when they can book

2. Booking on the day

A certain number of appointments are reserved for appointments on the same day and are aimed at those problems that are not urgent, but would benefit from being prioritised either by you or by us at the health centre.

Balancing these 2 appointment strategies aims to provide a better service for all. Despite making improvements to the telephone system, we appreciate the phone lines become busy, particularly in the morning ‘rush hour’. Be assured, however, that we are trying to balance demand and expectation with a good patient healthcare service.

Extended Opening Hours

We have recently started a system of extended opening hours – this is predominantly aimed at those working people who find conventional opening hours difficult to accommodate into their diaries. They are booked only in advance.

We now offer a Saturday morning surgery once a month and early morning surgeries, together with later evening surgeries on 2 days per week.

Extended hours surgeries are covered by the doctors on a rotational basis. However, these doctors are able to access your notes and see your latest medical contacts to aid continuity of care. Please note that routine services (picking up prescriptions, nurse appointments) are not available during extended hours. The time is reserved for booked GP appointments only.

Emergencies

Emergency medical problems are dealt with by the practice 'duty' or 'emergency' doctor within the working day (8 a.m. - 6.30 p.m.). Emergencies arising outside this time have to be dealt with by the PCT arranged Out of Hours Service – even if there is an extended hours session happening at the surgery.

If you are unsure whether a problem needs urgent attention, the staff will help you obtain a consultation with a doctor or nurse.

Health Promotion- osteoporosis



Although much of our work involves diagnosing and treating illnesses, we also try to encourage healthy living and provide advice to try and prevent illness.

As we get older, the density of our bones decreases, resulting in a loss of strength. This can be a problem as we are more likely to break a wrist or fracture a hip if we fall – or even suffer from a vertebral collapse in our spine, which can be very painful.

To prevent this, it is important to have an adequate diet rich in calcium and be exposed to the natural sunlight to build up our Vitamin D stores that are important in bone metabolism. Those people that are less mobile or suffer from certain conditions are more prone to this condition e.g. those with rheumatoid arthritis or inflammatory bowel disease. Smokers and those drinking large amounts of alcohol are also at risk.

Tablets can be prescribed to provide the necessary calcium and vitamin D; alternatively, a local rheumatologist gave some additional advice – he felt that 2 cod liver oil tablets and a glass of milk daily would suffice!

We have recently been asked to participate in a study looking at women aged between 65 and 80 years to see if screening them with a questionnaire, to identify those at risk from the disease, will be more accurate at picking patients up. We hope you will read the letters that are being sent out to you if you are in this age group and agree to enter this interesting and potentially very useful study (the SCOOP study).



Minor Illness Management

Cystitis (Urinary tract infections)

Symptoms of burning and stinging on passing urine, going to the toilet frequently or lower abdominal pain on finishing passing urine, can indicate a urine infection. Drinking plenty of fluids and cranberry based products (juice or tablets) can be helpful. Please arrange a telephone consultation with the practice nurse who can advise you if the symptoms are ongoing.

Coughs

Cold viruses are much more common at this time of year. Not infrequently, following on from cold type symptoms, a cough may develop. The natural history of a cough is that it often lasts for several weeks – the average duration is 4 weeks!

This can result in broken sleep, aching chest muscles from the coughing and exhaustion. Often the root cause of these symptoms is a viral infection, which the body will fight itself. Unfortunately, antibiotics do not help against viruses.

Antibiotics may be appropriate if you suffer from another underlying chronic condition such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or the cough is associated with a fever, there is green/brown sputum produced or the cough is carrying on for more than 4-5 weeks.

Steam inhalations, plenty of fluids, simple paracetamol or ibuprofen and warm drinks of, for example, honey and lemon often are very helpful. If in doubt, a telephone consultation may help you manage the symptoms.

Diarrhoea and Vomiting

Infections that upset the gut are common. It may follow contact with someone else who is suffering from a similar problem, from eating food that may have not been prepared or cooked properly or may occur with no obvious cause.

Usually these illnesses do settle spontaneously. Again, viral causes are often the culprit. The most important message is that you need to keep hydrated – even if you are vomiting. Small and frequent amounts of water are very important. In the acute stages in adults, milky foods should be avoided. Bland foods e.g. plain toast, plain biscuits and white fish, are best when recovering before returning to a more varied diet.

Those suffering from diarrhoea on returning from abroad may again have contracted a viral gastroenteritis. Ongoing profuse watery diarrhoea and not being able to tolerate any fluids are reasons to contact the surgery for advice.

Earache

Earache associated with a cold or sore throat is common. Simple regular pain relief is important and may well be all that is needed. Paracetamol and ibuprofen can be taken together quite safely. Ear ache associated with a discharging ear, a fever or with other ongoing symptoms may require further attention. Antibiotics are not always required as again often the root cause is a viral one. One of our nurses in the Minor Illness Clinic will be happy to advise you.

Important Immunisations

FLU IMMUNISATION

The annual flu immunisation is recommended for patients over the age of 65yrs or those in an 'at-risk' group. These include those with chronic respiratory diseases including asthma and chronic obstructive airways disease, chronic heart, liver, renal or neurological disease, diabetes, immunosuppression e.g. patients on methotrexate or prolonged steroid treatments or patients without a spleen.



Flu clinics are currently being run in the surgery – please enquire at reception.



PNEUMOCOCCAL IMMUNISATION

This is to protect against a bacteria which commonly causes pneumonia. It is a single immunisation given to those patients who are also targeted with the flu jab (see above list). Please book a nurse appointment for this.

MMR VACCINE

There has been a recent increasing incidence of mumps, measles and rubella; in July alone, 100 cases of mumps were recorded in Hampshire.

The government has introduced a national programme to ensure that all children aged 18 and under have 2 MMR vaccines. Please respond to the letters which have been sent to you - protecting against these illnesses prevents a lot of suffering and anguish.



CURRENT SURGERY OPENING TIMES

Surgery Opening Hours

Monday – Friday 8.30 am – 6 pm

**(Except Monday lunchtime 1 pm - 2 pm
When we are closed for staff training)**

Extended Hours

**Early morning, evening and monthly Saturday morning surgeries available
Please ask the Receptionist for details**

Emergency on call Doctor

available from 8 am - 6.30 pm

Home visit requests

please phone before 12 noon

Blood or other test results

please phone between 9.30 am – 12.30 pm

Repeat Prescriptions

**Require 48 hours to be processed (Saturday and Sundays do not count).
We do not accept prescription requests over the telephone,
unless the patient is infirm or elderly**

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