



# Unity Healthcare Patient Newsletter

**Dr David Brandon, Clinical Lead GP**

Locally, none of this would have been possible without the relentless enthusiasm of my fantastic team, and the support of the Suffolk GP Federation. Your support of their efforts has been much appreciated. I think you would all agree that despite the inevitable initial teething problems, this has been a resounding success. Thank you to all those members of our fantastic community who have stepped up to work shifts at the Epicentre, to volunteer, and for a wide range of support to deliver this programme. Thank you to all of the staff from Unity and beyond, for volunteering your precious extra time, despite the pressures of the day job.

Whilst our attention now turns towards the completion of second doses, a NHS England led vaccination centre has opened at the Unity Schools Partnership (no relation, but another collaboration success story!) head office on Park Road to deliver to the remaining cohorts, and can be booked via the NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/>

## Recruitment

We have had continued success with recruitment, and have welcomed a number of new senior clinical staff into our fold. Since last time of writing, we have welcomed Claire Anderson and Andrea Caulkett into our pharmacy team, Tracy Button into the role of Advance Nurse Practitioner Lead for Long Term Conditions, and are shortly to welcome Dr Matt Piccaver into a full time role as a GP and Lead for Education. The people of Haverhill are lucky to have such wonderful and talented staff coming to work here, which is a testament to the optimism that we have for the future and for progress made to date. We will continue to add to our numbers, and please do continue to make new (and old!) staff feel most welcome.

## Dear Patients,

It is with great joy that I pen another newsletter, just as lockdown restrictions are beginning to ease. There is some light at the end of the tunnel, which has us looking forward to regaining more of our freedoms. I for one have been delighted to have had a walk with my dearest friend, have enjoyed a pint in a pub garden, and look forward to the days when I can once again go climbing in the mountains. A haircut has been left for another day, but seeing the (socially distanced) queues round the barbershop has me doubting my conviction that long hair and beards will remain the new normal.

I recognise this privilege afforded to me, and my heart goes out to those of you who have lost loved ones, jobs, or developed mental health difficulties caused by this pandemic.

These returning freedoms are because of the hard work we have been through as a nation to suppress the spread of Covid-19, and through the successes of the vaccination programme. General Practice across the nation has stepped up to the challenge of delivering one of the most ambitious logistical challenges ever faced, rolling out a vaccination campaign that has been effective and consistently ahead of schedule.

## **One question I am regularly asked is “When will surgeries open fully again?”**

We never closed! Throughout the pandemic, we continued to offer as close to a full level of general practice as was possible, and have continued to provide high quality and personalised medical care to our whole population. We are most recently averaging over 1200 consultations per week (combining eConsult, phone & face to face), not even including nursing, long-term conditions and pharmacist activity. We have continued to offer face-to-face consultations when this is needed in order to safely manage the problem. We remain one of the most frequently eConsulted practices in the nation, despite this now having fully rolled out nationally.

We will be running our Long Term Conditions clinics more “normally” this year, so for those of you overdue a review, please be assured that you will be invited for this this (April-April) year.

## **The next question I am asked (often quite angrily) is “When will we get back to normal?”**

This is a question that often bewilders me, and has me wondering what the “normal” General Practice is that people refer to and would have us revert to.

Is it the form of “normal” that has queues of people out of the door, on the phones, all competing for the inevitably finite appointment capacity that we have to offer? Is it an unlimited queue of people “sitting and waiting” in a crowded and frustrated waiting room, applying the level of emotional stress onto a clinical team that has them resigning their roles and leaving?

Whilst the pandemic has nationally accelerated the pace of change, the development of the eConsult triage model is something that we had implemented pre-pandemic and are proud of.

It has now become the new-normal for a large majority of practices nationally.

This has offered us the facility to help a much greater number of people. It gives a focus of managing NEED as the priority as opposed to focussing on those who shout the loudest with WANT. We appreciate that at times this leads to frustration, and we recognise that we (and the eConsult system providers) are still learning and developing. Thank you for your patience as we have travelled this journey with you.

I am grateful for the support that the vast majority of you have given us, and I hope you have noticed the benefits of this improved access to our services whether you can or cannot use the eConsult system. I hope this has given you the confidence that we are here for you when you need us, and that you will not be subjected to a first-come first served telephone lottery at your moment of need.

## **Progress**

We were delighted to be moved out of CQC “special measures” last year. The areas that required improvement (child immunisations and cervical screening) have now progressed over and above the national target, and I wanted to thank all of those of you who have been involved in promoting these vital population health interventions.

All that remains, other than maintenance of progress already made, is improved patient satisfaction which I hope we have mostly delivered. If you have the opportunity to provide us with written feedback, please do so as we need to demonstrate the improvements made with hard evidence. Your feedback is indeed important to us!

## **I wanted to sign off with a top-tip.**

A question I am asked many times every day, is for advice on managing stress, anxiety, low mood and difficulties sleeping. Following these repeated lockdowns, there is now a national epidemic of mental health difficulties. I have not got all the answers, and hope that time will be a great healer to undo the damage caused by this pandemic, but top-tip coming as promised...

Get into running! Old, young, healthy or unhealthy, there will ALWAYS be benefit for you getting into a routine of regular cardiovascular exercise [it doesn't have to be running...].

Exercise (particularly if outdoors) is the BEST medicine, and is far safer and more effective than anything I can write a prescription for.

We in Haverhill are blessed in having some excellent sporting facilities, which are all so excited to be opening up again. ALL abilities are catered for, even those who rarely leave their chairs. We have a growing community of runners here at the practice, who can attest first-hand how this can transform your wellbeing.

**Dr David Brandon, Clinical Lead GP**

# Unity Healthcare Patient Participation Group (PPG)

## Want to have a say in how your surgery is run? Why not become a member of the Unity Healthcare PPG?

We are always looking for new members as we need your help to ensure our surgery continues to improve.

As a PPG member, you can better understand how your practice is run, discuss areas of improvement and give your input on changes.

To register your interest, please ask at Reception or email:

## Contact Us

If you have any questions or wish to share feedback with us, please email:

[wsccg.unityhealthcare@nhs.net](mailto:wsccg.unityhealthcare@nhs.net)

Or call:

**01440 841 300**



To keep up to date with our news, please visit [www.unityhealthhaverhill.org.uk](http://www.unityhealthhaverhill.org.uk) or search for 'Unity Healthcare' on Facebook.

Patients can also join the Surgery's Patient Participation Group. To find out more, please email

[wsccg.unityhealthcare@nhs.net](mailto:wsccg.unityhealthcare@nhs.net)

## Healthwatch Suffolk

You can also share feedback with Healthwatch Suffolk, an independent body set up to shape and influence local NHS and social care services.

Call **01449 703 949** or email [info@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk)