

Balham Park Surgery Patients Newsletter

ISSUE 33

MARCH 2020



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236 Balham High Road
London SW17 7AW
020 8772 8772

www.balhamparksurgery.co.uk

balhamparksurgery.patientliaisongroup@nhs.net

The Balham Park Surgery Patient Liaison Group (BPSPLG) is here to represent you:

- To discuss general patient concerns and act as a liaison forum between patients registered at the Surgery and the GP, Nursing and Administrative staff employed at the Surgery in order to help the Surgery provide the best possible care.
- To keep up with changes in the NHS and to keep patients informed about the services provided by the Surgery. The group arranges education talks on health issues twice a year.
- To represent the Group at local health meetings.

If you wish to share your views related to these objectives, you can now email the Group directly (see above) or tell Care Navigators who will pass on messages. We regret that we cannot enter into discussions about individual cases or clinical matters, but we can raise matters of general interest at the next meeting, or if you prefer, do come along yourself. Attendance is free and informal, no need to book or to commit to regular attendance. We meet monthly 7pm to 9pm at the Surgery on the second Wednesday of every month (except August). Future meetings for 2020: 8 April, 14 May, 10 June, 8 July, 9 September, 14 October (Education Talk), 11 November, 9 December (Christmas Party).

The Newsletter is usually issued twice a year – speak to reception or email us if you want to receive a copy regularly by email (distribution is managed by the surgery).

Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Important Update to Booking Appointments

Naturally the surgery is taking every precaution to protect and care for patients including seeking licenses for doctors to work from home should the need arise. To assist with booking appointments and to ensure patients get triaged efficiently, online bookings can only be made via Doctorlink until further notice. Up-to-date and authoritative information on the Coronavirus situation is at Doctorlink (see below) or

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Patients who are worried that they may have coronavirus or may have come into contact with someone who has, are asked not to call 111, so as to avoid blocking the service. The NHS 111 online service has created coronavirus pages for advice based on patients' particular circumstances, see <https://111.nhs.uk/service/covid-19>

Results of the National GP Patient Survey

The national GP Patient Survey was conducted in June 2019 and the results were published recently. We fell below the CGC and National average in 6 out of 18 questions, predictably *all* to do with getting through to reception easily and securing appointments. Our lowest score in this area was a disappointing 47% for the percentage of patients who managed to see or speak to their preferred GP (CCG 49% National 48). However, once patients get to see a doctor, the survey indicated a very high level indeed of satisfaction: 99% of patients said they had confidence and trust in our healthcare professionals and a similar percentage (96%) felt their needs had been met. Overall the experience of visiting the practice was rated 91% positive which is a fantastic result. Huge congratulations to our Care Navigators who were awarded a 96% positive rating, a real achievement when one considers all the burden of booking falls on them – they are a remarkable and hardworking team. Healthcare workers got a magnificent 99% approval rating as patients said they had “confidence and trust” in our medical staff. There has been a slight drop by 2% to a still praiseworthy 98% in the approval rating to the question had healthcare professionals offered enough support to recognise and support mental health needs of patients. But it should be noted that the size of the sample was small, so the dip was statistically not at all significant.

Natalie Whyte, the Managing Partner, discussed these results with the patient group which considers there is a lot to be proud of; a closer examination of the statistics shows BPS is doing comparatively well (compared to national and local figures) in meeting patients’ needs. And where we are not, the PG is aware of the strenuous effort the practice manager goes to plug the gaps. Continuity of care is something the Surgery struggles to provide because we only have one full time doctor on the staff as doctors choose to hold a portfolio of jobs or work part time to manage childcare. The Surgery has been active in trying to recruit more GPs, but there is a national shortage and London posts such as ours are tricky to fill. Locums have been brought in to help. Doctorlink (see below) is another attempt to address the shortage of appointments.

For full results and comparisons with other practices go to:
<https://www.gp-patient.co.uk/report?practicecode=H85066>

New Friends and Family Test Brings Greater Focus on Local Issues

A new Friends and Family Test (FFT) will be introduced on 1 April. What’s that, you might ask, a dating app, a pregnancy test, or a DNA test? No, it’s none of these, it is the NHS questionnaire asking patients to rate their experience of using the health service and to provide feedback with the aim of improving quality of care. The test was reviewed last year, and changes have been made. Small changes but with a welcome change of focus from the national to the local so replies won’t get lost in NHS bureaucracy. Feedback is handled only by surgery staff so your views WILL be heard.

Instead of the confusing question, ‘How likely are you to recommend services to family and friends if they need similar care or treatment?’, the question will be, “Thinking about your GP Practice, overall, how was your experience of our service?” and patients (or others on their behalf) will be asked to rate the experience with options between “extremely good” and “Don’t know.”

Practices have been given more freedom to ask questions tailored to local needs and issues with free text space to give patient the chance to give feedback directly to the people who can do something about their concerns. The patient group welcomes this move and is working with the Surgery to set specific questions to encourage feedback across a wide range of topics, not just on the obvious problem of getting GP appointments.

The Surgery and patient group are considering ways of being more inclusive and reaching out to hard-to-reach groups.

The responses to the questionnaire will be anonymous so, as now, you won’t get a personal reply to comments on the supplementary questions, but the managing partner remains committed to responding publicly to all comments and taking rapid action.

In the past, it has been difficult to get patients to respond. The patient group urges patients to take up this opportunity to respond and suggest how services can be improved. But also

remember we are trying to capture a snapshot of services and positive feedback would be just as useful as constructive criticism – and would be appreciated by the Surgery's hard-pressed staff.

The patient group will be monitoring the feedback closely to follow up on suggestions and to ensure the results are more widely publicised in the waiting room and elsewhere.

The patient group is looking at ways of ensuring the FFT receives due attention without taking up too much resource. To this end we are looking for ways we might build on best practice. Anyone with statistical expertise or has an interest in improving services and has a little bit of time on their hands would be welcome to work with the patient group on this project which is specifically geared towards making improvements.

For more information on the FFT see <https://www.england.nhs.uk/fft/>
<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/about-the-nhs/friends-and-family-test-fft/>

Doctorlink: A New Online Service: How to Get on Top of Booking Appointments.

" I don't feel well. Should I call 111, use one of the many apps such as MyGP or Patient Access, call the Surgery and speak to a Care Navigator to book an appointment or request a call from the on-call doctor? Hang on, I've tried the app and there are no appointments available online; there never are any appointments; 111 is for emergencies, isn't it? No, but they don't know me. It's midnight and there is no one at the Surgery and I won't get through tomorrow when the line is busy and I am trying to get to work. Shall I go to A & E? Mustn't overload the hospital. I know, I'll try Doctorlink."

Doctorlink is the new NHS digital platform to direct patients who are feeling unwell to the right care in the appropriate timeframe. It is an online triage tool which allows the patient to check the symptoms they are currently experiencing, find out what could be causing the symptoms and get advice on how quickly they need to see a GP, if at all. It is not a telephone consultation with an unknown GP - there is no one on the other end. Patients log onto Doctorlink and respond to a pre-programmed set of questions about their condition. They then receive advice based on this information.

It is a tried and tested system, developed over quite a few years by a team of healthcare experts including GPs. It can be accessed 24/7. Using it is easy. So in future when you don't feel well, here's what you do:

1. Register on-line via the app on your phone or Doctorlink website.
2. Check symptoms – a multiple-answer session online that usually takes less than 5 mins to complete and will then deliver a possible diagnosis and advise on the correct timeframe for an appointment.
3. You will be directed to the medical service most suited to your condition – your GP, other healthcare practitioner, A&E, a pharmacist, or self-care.
4. If an appointment is necessary, book directly online with a GP or clinician at BPS in the appropriate timeframe, that day if necessary. Otherwise follow the advice.
5. Your symptoms will be logged onto the BPS system, saving time when you are seen. If no appointments are available, Doctorlink will send a message to the practice who will then contact you directly to arrange your appointment.

For more information, and to register, see <https://www.doctorlink.com/> It is really clear. Why not register now before you need a doctor, so you are signed up and ready to go?

The advantage of using Doctorlink is that it is more integrated into the healthcare system than the various apps or 111 services we've come to rely on. It is a more efficient triage service. Appointments are reserved by BPS for practice patients using Doctorlink, so it is a good way to get a booking. The objective is to reduce the load on the on-call doctors at BPS who at present take between 100 and 200 calls on average each day (a terrible waste of their expertise), thereby freeing up GPs so they can see more patients face to face.

Doctorlink is designed to be reliable. If the programme is unable to assess your condition through your answers to the questions, then it will not guess what outcome is best. When there is any doubt, Doctorlink, being very “risk adverse”, will suggest you contact the surgery to discuss with the on-call doctor.

Doctorlink can also be used to request repeat prescriptions.

It is worth pointing out that this is the first step towards an increase in digital services and BPS will also soon be offering video consultations via Doctorlink. Also, it is hoped that in the very near future Doctorlink will be integrated into the NHS app so this will reduce the need for separate log-ins into different NHS digital services.

Dr Marston from BPS is the joint clinical lead on a project looking at ways to use digital innovation to improve healthcare. Doctorlink is a big part of this. Six pilot schemes are being run across Wandsworth and Merton. By taking part, BPS benefits by receiving more support for implementing Doctorlink and video consultations. Dr Marston is keen to get patient feedback and questionnaires will be handed out to patients by GPs and made available at the surgery. Several members of the patient group have volunteered to take part in the pilot phase and will be providing feedback. Dr Marston will be looking at patient confidence, ease of access and resilience of the system, and the impact on bookings. It is important that as many patients as possible offer feedback, especially during the pilot stage, since it is an evolving system and patients’ comments are invaluable. We urge you to comment. Dr Marston is looking for volunteers for a focus group which will be held on the evening of Monday 30th March. This will be your chance to offer your perspective as a patient on digital innovation in healthcare, including Doctorlink and video consultations. If you are interested in participating, please email waccg.adminbalhamparksurgery@nhs.net

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, if you are not able or willing to use online services don’t worry, just continue to call the Surgery. You will be given equal access to advice and appointments. There is no question of forcing patients to use this service. This would be entirely against the ethos of BPS.

Other Online Services and Apps Update

As part of the Surgery’s response to the Coronavirus, all online GP appointments booking have been suspended with the exception of Doctorlink since this service offers an effective diagnostic tool. However, when the situation is back to normal, apps such as MyGP, Patient Access or the new NHS app which the Surgery were recently recommending to patients (see Newsletter, July 2019) will continue to be useful. They are an efficient way of booking **routine** appointments for non-urgent cases and have other uses such as providing healthcare advice and managing prescriptions as well as for sending non-urgent messages. Using these apps gives you the option of booking a range of services at a time of your choice. But, as you will know all too well, appointments are hard to come by since many slots are allocated to other services, such as Doctorlink, which saves appointments for the unwell, on-call same day appointments and the 8 – 8 service. The practice is very well aware of the problem and is always looking at ways of improving the situation.

The 111 service will continue to provide urgent out of hours care by telephone. Patients might still prefer to use this phone triage rather than using Doctorlink which is of course a digital triage.

You may have heard of another new medical online service called Babylon. This is available on the NHS, but to use it would require you to *deregister* from your current GP practice and then re-register online with Babylon; your ongoing health care would be provided through Babylon GP At Hand, not through your conventional practice; you cannot mix-and-match. It follows that Doctorlink and Babylon are completely different concepts.

Social Prescribing



'What's that?' you may well ask. The arrival of Primary Care Networks has brought us funding for a Social Prescribing Link Worker or Social Prescriber. She is called Steph Papalaskaris. That's good. But what does she do?

Medicines and surgery, essential tools in the curing of illnesses though they are, are not enough in themselves, and may even be useless if the patient's body and mind are not ready to receive them and respond to them.

In 2013 a medical practice in Frome, a small Somerset town, started encouraging patients to go out and chat with others in 'talking cafés' in the town; and to participate in group activities such as sports, rambling, singing in choirs and much else. Amazingly, this led to a substantial drop in hospital referrals.

In 2018 Balham Park Surgery's patient group set up something similar, and now it has become official NHS policy as part of a plan to personalise care. Your GP may decide that your bodily and mental health would benefit from social contacts and exercise and can arrange an appointment with Steph. What is more, Steph can arrange help with housing, financial or housing issues. She works at the Surgery on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Here is what Steph herself says. Her example is of the latter kind, but recommendations — a less stern word than 'prescriptions' — of the former kind will often be the appropriate and enjoyable ones.

'Social prescribers are a point of contact for patients for most non-medical concerns. These can include housing, financial issues, family troubles or loneliness. Social Prescribers are here to help. If you have concerns, raising them with your GP or nurse will allow them to refer you to your social prescriber. They will give you time, will focus on your matters, needs and emotional support; then increase your well-being by a holistic approach. This will provide you with the appropriate community links and services that can help with resolving the matter at hand. They will also follow up with you, checking that you have received the result you were after, and if not they will find other means to keep trying.'

Still unsure? Here is an example of someone we saw last week. An elderly patient came in, who is having increasing difficulty with stairs and with standing up after sitting down around the house. We got in contact with the housing team at the council to organise a needs assessment, which then allowed for stair railings to be fitted in the home, making things easier and more comfortable for our patient. We had follow-ups to ensure she had heard back and they had been fitted on time.'

Chatting with others, playing sports, walking, singing with them, are health-giving and enjoyable. Steph's example, on the other hand, is of practical and financial help. It is important to note, though, that Steph does not replace Social Services, and she does not deal with crisis situations.

For more information on social prescribing, speak to your GP or see

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/>

Please note Social Prescribing is only available if you are 18 years or over – there is no upper age limit!

Michael Graubart, member of the patient group.

First Contact Practitioner: New In-House Service for Muscle and Joint Pain

'Kudos and gratitude for a very professional service.' *BPS Patient*

Another great new service, First Contact Practitioner, based at BPS, offers direct access to an experienced physiotherapist, Gabi, who can assess, diagnose and recommend appropriate treatment or referral for problems with muscle and joint problems. Please note, this is not a hands-on treatment service. But it does mean you can bypass the GP so you can be seen more quickly and the workload on GPs is reduced, thereby freeing up appointments for others. It is an example of the innovative services we are fortunate to enjoy at BPS and is proving very popular indeed with patients.



Any patient over 16 years of age and above suffering from one of the following can see a Gabi:

- Joint pain
- Muscle pain
- Back and Neck pain
- Osteoarthritis
- Shoulder, Elbow, or Wrist pain
- Carpel Tunnel Syndrome
- Hip Arthritis
- Knee pain or Knee Arthritis
- Sprained Ankle
- Foot or Toe pain (including bunions)

What happens when you see a First Contact Practitioner? The appointment will typically last 20 minutes and during the consultation Gabi will:

- Assess you
- Treat or advise you on the day
- Provide suitable exercise plans, guidance, lifestyle changes and other relevant advice
- Recommend local resources including community exercise classes
- Refer you on to community physios, including physios based at BPS
- Refer you for imaging (X-ray, Ultrasound and MRI (if signed off by a GP) and later review results for you.
- Identify emergency symptoms and discuss with the duty doctor

How to Book an Appointment. Gabi is available on Monday afternoons, Thursdays am and pm, Saturdays 9am to 11.00 am. This is a self-referral service so all you do is speak to Care Navigators at Reception or book a 20-minute slot directly on line.

Regular Meetings for Carers at the Surgery - Kim Fenech, Health Care Facilitator, writes:



If you look after someone, a family member or a friend, who due to illness, disability, addiction or poor mental health cannot cope on their own, *and you are not paid*, you are a Carer. You are an important group of our patient group – research shows perhaps as many as one in ten patients are unpaid carers. We recognise the strain this responsibility puts on you. There's a strong link between caring for someone and your own health. You often simply don't have time to worry about yourself. This worries us and we aim to provide you with additional support.

For the last 2 years, Dr Chana and I have arranged a coffee morning for carers twice a year at Balham Park Surgery. At the coffee mornings we offer refreshments and an opportunity to meet us and other carers. We usually have a representative from the Wandsworth Carers Centre who provides advice in relevant areas. Other guest speakers in the past have included a Dementia Nurse and an Expert Patient programme co-ordinator. Our next coffee morning will be in May 2020. If you want to attend, give me a call beforehand. See below.

We want you to know you are not alone and to bring to your attention the range of support available locally. We'd like to help you become an expert carer and to involve you more fully in care arrangements. We hope to introduce you to other carers in the area – sharing experiences with others in the same situation can be really helpful.

We know carers are often reluctant to come forward, seeing their work as just another part of their daily routine. It is important for us to be able to identify all unpaid carers so that we can be proactive in supporting them. Carers can put themselves down as a carer when registering or they may be identified by the doctors. All carers can ask to see a doctor to discuss their needs.

If you want to know more, call the Surgery on 020 8772 8772 and ask to speak to me, Kim

Education Talks

Earlier this year, the patient group organised a well-attended talk on heart problems delivered by Dr Meenjan. Dr Tulasi Chadalavada's talk on the menopause had to be postponed because of concerns over Coronavirus. We hope to reschedule for another time. Summaries of talks will be made available in the waiting room and on the BPS website.

General Health Reading Suggestions

Friendship: The Evolution, Biology and Extraordinary Power of Life's Fundamental Bond by Lydia Denworth. This is serious science written with humanity and warmth with many personal anecdotes and histories.

Friendimacy: How to Deepen Friendships for Lifelong Health and Happiness by Sash Nelson This is not about finding new friends but about developing the right friendships and enhancing existing friendships.

War Doctor by David Nott – a riveting book about a remarkable surgeon who over twenty-five years took leave to go to conflict areas to carry out humanitarian work.

Your Life in My Hands by Rachel Clarke, a polemical memoir by the doctor whose campaigning led her to confront the health secretary over the Junior Doctors' strike and to remonstrate against the underfunding of the NHS.

Surgery News

We welcome:

Dr Miranda Haggie back from maternity leave.

Dr Rebecca Holland for 5 sessions per week including later evening on Mondays.

Dr Ling Wong - 1 day per week on Fridays.

Dr Siva Balasingam a returner GP who trained and worked in England but went for some years to work in Canada is to be based with us for a few months under Dr Shah as an Induction and Refresher GP (aka I&R) - a scheme providing a safe, supported and direct route for qualified GPs to join or return to NHS general practice. She is due to start this month full time.

We say goodbye to:

Paa Siaw, our Health Care Assistant, has taken up a post elsewhere.

Jenny Williams, Registrar, temporarily only, as she is off on maternity leave.

Dr Kavita Shama, leaving us to move to a new house and be a fulltime mother 25th March.

Dr Rehana Meeajan leaves in May on maternity leave.

Rosa Morales leaves IT in April on maternity leave - Michael Bangura, Care Navigator, will cover.

We are sad to announce that Dr Freda Fleischer, one of the original founding partners at our old 92 Balham Park Road site until her retirement, has passed away. She became ill in December and was admitted into hospital. She was due to be transferred to the Nightingale home, however she did not make it.

Many patients will have fond memories of her and some continued to keep in touch with her as a friend. Her commitment to personalised patient care is the bedrock of the ethos of this practice.

For many of us, our last fond memory was her attendance at the patient party that BPSPLG organised for Dr Bower's retirement on Friday 23rd March 2018.

RIP from all who were fortunate enough to know her.



"Eat Less. Move More."

THANKS TO MONEEB AT CREATIVE DESIGN AND PRINT CENTRE, 6 THE BOULEVARD BALHAM HIGH ROAD SW17 7BW FOR HIS GENEROUS SUPPORT IN PRINTING THIS NEWSLETTER.

020 8675 7875 sales@copyprint.biz