**SUNBURY HEALTH CENTRE (SHC) ... In Conversation**

**December 2021 - Issue No. 127**

**Neil Huntingford, Chair, Patient Participation Group in conversation with Richard Fryer, Business Manager, SHC**

The media and the press are quick to highlight issues with the NHS, especially with regard to patients having difficulty getting access to GP surgeries, and yet 9 out of 10 NHS Chief Executives have reported that the health service is under unsustainable pressure, with the worry that the situation will only worsen as we head into winter.  Is this situation reflected at Sunbury Health Centre?

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It's very frustrating.  We have the right number of Clinical Practitioners for our patient population, but demand has gone through the roof.  The Pandemic is part of the reason for this rise in demand and it's easy to think that Covid has gone away, but it hasn't and we struggle with staff isolating and sickness, while trying to maintain a safe environment for patients and staff.   
  
​Unlike many Practices, we have stayed open throughout the Pandemic, seeing patients face-to-face when necessary, and progressing our on-line service to help as many patients as possible.

You've mentioned on-line services that is something that some patients have difficulty accessing and using.  How do you respond to that?

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On-line systems are complex to develop and operate and we are lucky that in North West Surrey, all Practices are using one system.  'Footfall', which is centrally supported.  
  
It's a steep learning curve for our staff, but as time moves on, it will allow us to deal with more patients, getting them the right support from the right Clinician.

How does that help those patients who don't have on-line access?

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Our phone lines open from 8.00am - 6.00pm.  The aim is to help patients who contact us by telephone and enter their requests into the on-line system so that all enquiries, by whatever method, are triaged in the same way.

So if I telephone Reception, the Receptionist may ask me quite personal questions about my health?  That sounds concerning!

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That's understandable, but these days the Receptionist role is very different.  They are trained to deal with confidential personal information and are the first line of Triage to get you to the right person.  Our GPs have provided strict procedures to ensure you get the appropriate care.

... But I just want to see a Doctor!

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Compared with a few years ago, we have a range of Clinical Professionals to help you.  Yes, it may be a Doctor or a Paramedic, Nurse Practitioner, the Nursing Team or a Pharmacist.  
  
The Triage System is designed to ensure requests are directed to the right member of the team.  Many requests can be dealt with by telephone or video call, although, if the Clinician needs to see you face-to-face, they will arrange this.

It all sounds very different compared with the days of seeing your family Doctor.

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General Practice has changed, and many things that used to be dealt with in Hospitals are now managed by GPs.  To give an idea of the work-flow through our Practice, in a typical wee, we handle:

* Over 7,500 patient-related communications, with nearly 3,000 being patients contacting the Practice
* Over 1,300 clinical consultations and face-to-face appointments
* Over 1,000 Prescription requests
* 250 nursing appointments
* 25 blood tests … and so on.

This is very enlightening and much more complicated than many of us realised.  How can patients help?

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Our staff is here for you and we try to meet all patient requests.  It really helps if you can help us with little things, like use the on-line system or a Chemist for your Repeat Prescriptions, rather than paper requests.  Use the excellent free LIVI video call system, or call 111 out-of-hours.  
  
We should like to thank patients for their understanding over the past 18 months.  We recognise that whilst we have had to change and adopt new systems, comply with constantly changing Government and NHS guidelines, so have our patients, in these unprecedented times.