

Hollies Patient Forum

NEWSLETTER

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The Hollies Patient Forum (HPF) is the patient voice of the Hollies Medical Centre (HMC)

HPF is a 'Patient Participation Group' and allows patients to offer their views, experiences, suggestions and ideas to the Centre through a strong and close working partnership between patients and the practice.

HPF Steering Group

Information on the Group, its work, and the Notes of its meetings are available at <https://www.theholliesmc.co.uk/the-hollies-patient-forum>

We're recruiting

We have vacancies for the HPF Steering Group. If you're interested, we would love to hear from you. For more information please see <https://www.theholliesmc.co.uk/the-hollies-patient-forum>

If you want to apply, email hpfegroup2@gmail.com expressing your interest and consenting to share your email address with current Steering Group members. Please get in touch before 5 November.

Get in touch

We want to encourage participation in the work of the Group and the Newsletter. If you have comments or contributions, please email: newsletterhpf@gmail.com

The Hollies is Busy

In September, the Practice received: 6,715 phone calls (avg. 305/working day), with a 'talk time' of 8,716 minutes. There were 1,863 call-backs (avg. 84/working day), with 4,285 minutes of 'talk time.' Hospital referrals in the month were 445 (~15/day); 63 were urgent two-week waits. There are 7.75M people on NHS hospital waiting lists in England (excluding mental health patients), amongst 62.8M registered with a GP (1 in 8). If the Hollies is 'average', it is likely around 1,250 of its patients await hospital treatment.

Appointments at HMC

Continuing our work on Appointments, one morning in August two members of the Hollies Patient Forum shadowed the lead GP and reception staff, to learn about how appointments were managed. This is their fly-on-the-wall report.

'On a bright Monday morning, we arrived at Hollies Medical Centre to see how the surgery runs from a staff point of view. One GP acts as a lead each day, prioritizing and allocating requests for appointments, reviewing test results, and the hundred-and-one other demands on the Practice. At 8 o'clock their first formal task was reviewing online requests, but they had already dealt with emails and other correspondence. When they logged in, the computer screen lit up like a penny arcade slot machine. In the next half hour, there were 46 requests for appointments and advice. And this was before telephone requests came through after 8.30.

All requests are triaged, that is, assessed and prioritised. Two GPs did a rapid first sift to identify any urgent requests or anyone in a 'vulnerable' category. In one case, the patient's story was known and swiftly made 'urgent'.

The pressures on the Practice were seen when triaging had to be paused because a locum doctor, brought in because of staff holidays, had not arrived and could not be contacted. The reassignment of their appointments, which were starting soon, began. Surgery hadn't opened yet but already the doctor's adrenalin levels must have been spiking! Fortunately, as changes were being made another message

came through that the Locum had arrived (late). Everything was put back to how it had been planned and the lead GP went back to triaging.

The whole staff team met at 8:20 a.m. for a briefing as they do every day. We were very surprised just how many people work at the Hollies! So many 'behind the scenes' staff are necessary for smooth running. (In fact, there are 32 staff (ft+pt), plus 10 shared from Porter Valley PNC.)

Soon after telephone lines open at 8.30 a.m., call-backs begin. Indeed, when triaging GPs often send texts to patients assessed as needing to be seen that day. Examples were a patient with a long-standing serious condition that had possibly returned and a child with a fever. Patients were soon arriving for in-person consultations. Telephone appointments were also underway, for example, to discuss changing medication and specifying samples to be brought in for testing. There are constant comments about the demands on GPs due to the number of mental health and neurodiverse conditions. This is borne out at the Hollies, where they account for ~30% of people seen.

In Reception, we were immediately impressed by the multitasking of the staff. As well as greeting patients and taking calls, staff processed triage referrals for different types of appointments, dealt with emails from patients, hospitals, and laboratories, emptied the prescription box, and dealt with administrative queries, such as patient registrations. Their work was constantly interrupted to deal with walk-in patients. There is a self-booking screen in the lobby, but not everyone uses it. An elderly patient needed help getting down the stairs, another duty inevitable in a Victorian building.

The two receptionists we sat with said that enjoyed the job but admitted that it could be stressful at times. One wasn't sure how long she would be able to continue due to the stress. Overall, we were struck by the high level of professionalism displayed by all staff despite the high level of pressure. The reception staff and lead GP were very thorough in their approach, assessing each request carefully to ensure that an emergency wasn't missed. It is not often visible to patients how much work goes into every approach made at the surgery, be that a telephone, online or in-person enquiry.'

NHS GP Patient Survey

Every year the NHS commissions an independent survey by Ipsos of GP practices. The 2023 Report on the patient experience at the Hollies can be viewed at <https://gp-patient.co.uk/patientexperiences?practicecode=C88052>

Porter Valley PCN Event for Patients

Primary Care Networks (PCNs) have to be set up to help join up GP practices to give better access to a range of NHS local services HMC is in the Porter Valley Network.

<https://portervalleyprimarycarenetwork.gpweb.org.uk/index.php/home-mobile>

On 9 November there is a Zoom Meeting to introduce the Porter Valley Network and to explore how the patient voice can be strengthened across the partnerships between all the six GP practices and their patient groups. Patients, staff and GPs, plus Healthwatch and Age UK professionals, will be involved in planning and running the event. HMC will send out more details soon.

Jab-tastic! Enthusiasm for vaccines persists at HMC

Like many people in September, I received a text message inviting me to have my annual 'flu vaccine, and I duly booked a slot at Hollies Medical Centre for one Saturday morning a couple of weeks ago. On arrival, I was surprised to see a queue snaking out of the centre and down the pathway. But, thanks to the smooth operation of Hollies' staff and volunteers, the queue was pretty fast moving and within 10 minutes I'd been jabbed and was away home.

On this occasion, I was fortunate to receive my COVID-19 booster vaccine for 2023. Much has been reported in the news since September about a surge in new COVID-19 infections caused by the *Pirola* variant. The autumn vaccine rollout for individuals over 65 or those with compromised immune systems started earlier than usual as a precaution to reduce severe illness and hospital admissions among the more vulnerable. Indeed, some government officials are advocating for the vaccination of individuals aged 50 to 64. One challenge we face is that COVID-19 testing is at its lowest level since the pandemic began, and if we can't effectively track the spread of COVID-19, it becomes difficult to plan for its control beyond vaccinating as many people as possible to limit its harm.

So, I was pleased to see so many people in the queue! Many of them, like me, were receiving both the flu and COVID-19 vaccines. In these times of doubt and scepticism towards basic public health initiatives, it's a relief to see that there are still many people willing to get jabbed.

Ian Hodgson
