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Mersea Island Medical Practice Patient Participation Group Newsletter

Introduction

Introduction

A Patient Participation Group (PPG) is a group of patients, carers and GP Practice staff who meet to discuss Practice issues and patient experience to help improve the service and promote the Practice to the wider community.

The PPG is open to all patients registered with the Mersea Island Medical Practice. We meet every two months, and a small committee works between meetings to take issues forward. We also have a virtual PPG – for those who wish to be kept informed and may like to take part in specific projects but who do not wish to attend regular meetings in person.

Our PPG chair, is Maureen Phillips who has lived on Mersea Island for forty years.

Message from the chair

A message from our chair

Firstly, I would like to welcome you to our third newsletter, produced by the PPG on behalf of patients, PPG members and the GP Practice. Our aim is to share information and news about our surgery, your healthcare and other health related issues that may be of interest. Previous issues of the newsletter are now available on the Practice website at www.westmerseasurgery.co.uk.

In this issue we have features on the menopause, carers, physiotherapy, drink awareness, Healthwatch and the NHS App along with our usual updates.

Changes to the PPG Management Team

We have had some changes to our PPG Management Team recently. I would firstly like to say thank you to Susan Rhys Jones, our

	<p>departing PPG Secretary, for all her hard work and dedication to the PPG and Mersea residents in keeping the PPG up and running through some difficult times over the last eleven years. I know that many other PPGs faltered during the COVID pandemic, but Su kept her hand firmly on the tiller and guided us through those choppy waters. We have been lucky in having someone with such experience and knowledge supporting the PPG over the years. I would also like to say a big thank you to all the members of our Management Team, who welcomed me into the role as Chair and supported my learning in those early days. I would particularly like to thank Martin Westley and Teresa Manning who have both decided to step down over the last couple of months to make way for some new members. On this note I would like to welcome two new members of the Management Team, Jane Morgan and Christine Cheetham and we look forward to working together over the coming months.</p> <p><i>Drop-in session for the NHS APP</i></p> <p>We are currently working with the practice to organise a drop-in event to be held on Wednesday 19th June for patients who want some help and advice in using the NHS App – there is more about this in the newsletter, and we will send out a reminder nearer the time. We are very aware that not everyone has a mobile phone or computer and we are considering how best to identify and support these patients as the NHS moves forward with digitisation.</p>
<p>Update from the Practice</p>	<p><i>Practice update</i></p> <p>The practice is fully staffed and has recently benefitted from the appointment of an Advanced Nurse Practitioner who will be adding additional clinics as well as undertaking some home visits. Advanced Nurse Practitioners are highly skilled nurses who have undertaken additional training in things such as prescribing.</p> <p>The Primary Care Network of Rowhedge, Tiptree and Mersea are together continuing to offer a mental health support service. Appointments can be made through reception.</p> <p>The memory café continues to run each month on the second Wednesday of the month between 1.30-3pm at the Community Support Hall in Melrose Road.</p>

	<p><i>Veteran Accreditation</i></p> <p>As we announced last time the practice has received its Veteran Accreditation and we promised to explain a bit more about what this means. The Armed Forces veteran friendly accreditation scheme is operated by the Royal College of General Practitioners. This means that as part of the health commitments of the Armed Forces Covenant the practice has a dedicated clinician who has a specialist knowledge of military related health conditions and veteran specific health services. This is important in helping ex-forces to get the best care and treatment and where appropriate referral to dedicated services for veterans, of which there are several.</p> <p>If you are ex-forces, please make the practice aware of this regardless of when you left the forces. If you have recently left the forces, it is important you give the practice the paperwork your military medical centre gave you, including any medical records. This will ensure that your military health record transfers back to your NHS record. If you have any concerns about sharing information with the practice, please be assured the NHS is legally bound by a confidentiality code of practice.</p> <p>You can find more information about veteran health by visiting www.nhs.uk/armedforceshealth. There is a wealth of information on the Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS) website accessible from https://dmws.org.uk or contact the Helpline on 0800 999 3697. DMWS is an independent charity providing medical welfare to those who have, and continue to, serve on the front-line including NHS, police and fire services personnel.</p>
<p>Focus on the menopause</p>	<p><i>Menopause and Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)</i></p> <p>As women grow older the hormones oestrogen and progesterone which are responsible for the regulation of female reproduction start to decrease. This will eventually result in menstruation or periods stopping. When periods have stopped for 12 months in women who are over 50 years old or for more than 24 months in women aged under 50 years old, women are said to have reached the menopause. The average age for menopause is 51 years but some women experience menopause much earlier or later than this.</p>

Many women experience a variety of symptoms as they move towards menopause – often for several years before periods stop. Menopause can also happen due to surgery to remove the ovaries or the uterus, and because of some cancer treatments like chemotherapy. Symptoms of menopause can continue to affect women after periods stop – whether this occurs naturally or not. There is no blood test which will definitively diagnose menopause.

Symptoms

The symptoms of menopause vary considerably with some women experiencing virtually no symptoms whereas others have multiple and/or severe symptoms. The first sign of menopause is usually irregular periods accompanied by various symptoms including:

- Changes in mood – low mood, anxiety, mood swings,
- Memory and concentration issues – commonly referred to as brain fog,
- Hot flushes often accompanied by dizziness,
- Sleep problems sometimes accompanied by night sweats,
- Palpitations,
- Headaches,
- Muscle aches and joint pain,
- Weight gain,
- Skin changes including dry and itchy skin,
- Reduced libido (sex drive),
- Discomfort during sex including vaginal dryness, pain and itching.
- Recurring urinary tract infections,
- Sensitive teeth, painful gums and other mouth problems.

It is important to note that if women are taking or using hormonal contraception, they may not experience menopause in the same way as hormonal contraception can mask menopausal symptoms. For example, women who take the combined pill will continue to experience monthly period-type bleeds as long as they take the pill, and they may not experience symptoms such as hot flushes and night sweats. It is therefore very difficult for women to know when they have reached the menopause. NHS advice is that women can stop using contraception when they reach the age of 55.

Things that can help

There are several things women can do to help themselves manage menopause symptoms including getting plenty of rest, eating a healthy diet rich in fruit, vegetables and sources of calcium, taking vitamin D supplements, taking regular exercise, taking time to relax, sticking to recommended alcohol limits and not smoking. For women experiencing hot flushes and night sweats it is helpful to adapt clothing, avoiding trigger factors such as spicy food and hot drinks, taking a cool shower, having a cool drink and using a fan. Vaginal dryness can be helped with vaginal moisturisers or lubricants which can be purchased without prescription from the pharmacy. Women experiencing mental health issues may find it helpful to talk to others experiencing similar symptoms, trying some self-help therapies or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Information about self-help therapies and how to access CBT can be found at <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/>.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

HRT is a safe and effective treatment for most women going through the menopause. Your GP will advise if it is suitable and discuss any risks involved. There are different types and doses of HRT including:

- Skin patches,
- Gels and sprays,
- Implants,
- Tablet form.

For many women HRT can relieve most menopause symptoms as well as reducing risks of osteoporosis and heart disease. See <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/hormone-replacement-therapy-hrt/> for further information.

Menopause in the workplace

In February 2024, The Equality and Human Rights Commission published new guidance for employers relating to women experiencing menopause in the workplace because the symptoms of menopause can negatively affect women at work. If menopausal symptoms have a long term and substantial impact on a woman's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities these could be classed as a disability and consequently an employer will be under a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments at work and women would be protected from direct and indirect discrimination at work. For more information see

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/menopause-workplace-guidance-employers>.

There is a very good website that provides a wealth of information about the menopause. See <https://www.menopausematters.co.uk>.

New roles

New roles - physiotherapy

Musculoskeletal (MSK) health issues are the most common cause of repeat GP appointments and account for around 1 in 5 of all GP appointments. Most MSK issues can be dealt with effectively by a physiotherapist without any need to see the GP.

MSK is the second largest cause of sickness absence and speeding up access to a physio can reduce this. The government changed regulations in 2022 to support patients getting advice and fit notes from their physiotherapist without having separately to see a GP.

Physiotherapists are autonomous, regulated practitioners, holding their own professional liability and don't require supervision or delegation from medical colleagues or others.

General practice physiotherapy roles are a relatively recent form of self-referral which further develops GP and physio services, enhances patient care and reduces the GP workload.

In many surgeries, including Mersea Island Medical Practice GPs are bringing in experienced physiotherapists to work alongside them as the first point of contact for their MSK patients. Already over 8 out of 10 GPs have confidence in this model.

GP physios usually have advanced practice skills and training. Patients with MSK symptoms can opt to see them instead of the GP to assess, diagnose, advise and provide exercises and, when needed, carry out further investigations and refer on.

These new roles in General Practice put physiotherapy expertise at the start of the patient's journey, at the place they are most likely to seek help first.

To access the practice's physiotherapy service patients just need to call the surgery. The practice encourages all patients who have an MSK

	<p>issue to see the physiotherapist first – you do not have to be referred by a GP. The practice physiotherapist can investigate and refer patients onwards and will liaise with the GP if they feel a doctor’s input is required.</p>
<p>Focus on Carers</p>	<p><i>Support for Carers</i></p> <p>The Care Act 2014 came into effect in 2015 and replaced most previous laws regarding both carers and people being cared for. We have focused on adult carers below but there is also support for young carers in the information provided at the end of the article.</p> <p>The Care Act outlines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the way in which local authorities should carry out carers’ assessments and needs assessments (for the looked after person), • how local authorities should determine who is eligible for support, • how local authorities should charge for both residential care and community care, • if they should charge for carer support, • the local authority obligations. <p>If you care for someone, you can have an assessment to see what might help make your life easier. This is called a carer's assessment.</p> <p>It might recommend things like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • someone to take over caring so you can take a break, • gym membership and exercise classes to relieve stress, • help with taxi fares if you don't drive, • help with gardening and housework, • training how to lift safely, • putting you in touch with local support groups so you have people to talk to, • advice about benefits for carers. <p>A carer's assessment is free and anyone over 18 can ask for one.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the Carers Team at Essex County Council, telephone: 0345 603 7630 or email: carers.team@essex.gov.uk If you're a parent or carer of a child, contact the children with disabilities department.

GPs also play an important part in supporting carers and all practices have a Carers Register. By registering as a carer with the practice, the GP and other members of the team will be alerted to the fact that you have caring responsibilities.

As a registered carer the practice will make sure that you are offered:

- A free flu jab,
- A free annual health check,
- Access to our carer's champion.

Locally we also have organisations and groups that can support people with caring responsibilities.

- Guardian Angels can help with picking up prescriptions or shopping and providing a volunteer to sit with someone when the carer needs a break – call the helpline: 07961 322923
- Carers First West Mersea Carers Wellbeing Group – meetings in the WI Hall in Kingsland Road on the third Tuesday of the month between 1.30-3.00. The meetings help carers to connect with other carers, take a break from caring, gain access to information, advice and guidance. Call: 0300 303 1555

There is a great deal of information available for carers and we have included some links below:

www.carersfirst.org.uk

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/support-and-benefits-for-carers/carers-assessments/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/support-and-benefits-for-carers/benefits-for-carers/>

www.carersuk.org

Care4Carers Club which is an Essex-run online support community for both Professional Assistants and Independent Carers in the UK, which is run by family carers and provides a voice and guidance from personal experience. See <https://care4carersclub.co.uk>








Essex Carers Network and Essex Carers Support - A registered charity dedicated to helping unpaid carers get the best from life. Need the

	<p>support of other carers? Join the online Cuppas chat sessions or see their Facebook page. Call 01255 474 410.</p> <p>SCAFT (Supporting Carers and Families Together) - aims to relieve the social, emotional, mental, physical and educational needs of carers and their families in Essex. See https://scaft.org</p> <p>Carers Trust - works to transform the lives of unpaid carers. It partners with its network of local carer organisations to provide funding and support, deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes and raise awareness and influence policy. See https://carers.org</p> <p>Sidekick – Sidekick is a confidential helpline for young carers in the UK. See https://sidekick.actionforchildren.org.uk</p> <p>Project 21 – run activities for people with Down’s Syndrome across Essex, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire which can give carers regular free time. See www.project21uk.com</p> <p>With grateful thanks to the Essex Neurology Network for sharing their resources.</p>
<p>Public Health Focus</p>	<p><i>Be Drink Aware</i></p> <p>As the summer months arrive it is very tempting to have a few cold beers or glasses of wine in the evenings and at weekends but are you drinking sensibly? There is no amount of alcohol that is completely safe for your health but for people who enjoy a drink the NHS recommends that adults should try not to drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week. This is not a target but a maximum amount to be consumed in any one week to avoid the harmful effects of alcohol on health.</p> <p>The guidelines also recommend that you don’t drink this amount in one day but spread consumption over a least three days.</p> <p>If you are driving, even a small amount of alcohol can affect your ability to drive safely and the advice from the police is to avoid alcohol altogether if you plan to drive.</p> <p>Top Tip: if you drink at home use a measure to check the amount you are pouring.</p>

Whilst there is no formal offence of drunk in charge of a boat in the same way as a car, it does not mean you cannot be prosecuted while being drunk in charge, but it is brought under either maritime law or by local authority harbour byelaws.

Remember that if you are taking medication, you should read the information leaflet to check if you can safely drink alcohol or ask your pharmacist.

In the chart below we have included some information about what 14 units of alcohol looks like. This is for guidance only – check the labels on bottles and cans or ask the person serving you to do so.

		What 14 units of alcohol looks like
		6 pints of lager – less if it is strong lager. Normal strength lager is around 4% alcohol by volume (ABV).
		6 large cans of beer. The average pint of beer is around 4% ABV so adjust this for higher strength beers.
		5 pints of cider. An average pint of cider is between 4.5% and 5% ABV. Adjust for stronger brews.
		14 single measures (25 ml) of spirits such as vodka, gin or Whiskey. Don't guess though – use a measure.
		6 glasses of wine (175ml) – excludes fortified wine such as sherry and port
		9 glasses (125ml) champagne or prosecco
		Ready mixed drinks and cocktails contain different amounts of alcohol so always check the can or bottle or with the person pouring the drink.
The Bigger Picture	<p><i>Healthwatch</i> Healthwatch is an independent charity set up under the Health & Social Care Act 2012. Healthwatch England is the overarching organisation and then each area has a local Healthwatch organisation – ours is</p>	

Healthwatch Essex covering the whole county. The main aim of Healthwatch is to use the voices of local people to improve health and care in Essex.

Healthwatch has a number of different functions which are briefly described below:

Information and Guidance Service – which can help people find out about and access health and social care services. You can access the service by calling 0300 500 1895 or text 07712395398. There is also a live chat facility operating three days a week through the website. See <https://healthwatchessex.org.uk/speak-to-our-team/>

Research – the research team at Healthwatch will undertake high quality in-depth research informed by lived experience methodologies that aims to generate implications for the transformation and development of health and care policy, services and, ultimately, the experiences of those affected. The research often involves people who might find it more challenging to get their voices heard. One recent example is a piece of research exploring the experiences of women with inflammatory bowel disease who become pregnant. To view the various reports published by Healthwatch go to <https://healthwatchessex.org.uk/library/>.

Engagement – Healthwatch works with patients and the people who use health and social care services to co-design the services of the future. There are a number of ways they can support effective engagement across systems which often involves providing a platform from which people can share their stories and experiences relevant to the health and social care system. In particular, they strive to engage with under-represented voices to uncover seldom addressed issues, even when this means going against the grain of existing strategies and initiatives. The engagement team has some long-standing groups that meet such as the Essex Fellas Forum and Collaborate Essex Disability & Carers Forum.

This is only a snapshot of the immense amount of work that Healthwatch Essex does. To see the full extent of what they do and how you can become involved go to <https://healthwatchessex.org.uk>.

Systems explained – The NHS App

The NHS App

The NHS App is increasingly being used across the NHS as part of NHS reforms. The NHS App is owned and run by the NHS and can be accessed by anyone over the age of 13 years in England who is registered with a GP surgery. The App can give you access to an ever-developing range of services and resources. The App does not store any patient data but enables you view health information held by your GP practice. The security of access is therefore taken very seriously by the NHS so the set up does require some effort – however it is worth it once it is all set up.

The things you can do in the NHS App include:

- Ordering repeat prescriptions without having to contact your GP surgery. Our practice is now using on-line ordering as its preferred method. If you haven't downloaded the NHS App yet you can bring in your repeat requests and pop the request in the box in reception (or in the out-of-hours box outside). However, the surgery is encouraging everyone with an appropriate mobile or tablet to use on-line ordering. It has already made a huge difference to the number of telephone calls being received leaving staff free to focus on appointments,
- As part of ordering repeat prescriptions, you can nominate the pharmacy where you wish to collect your prescription from, and you can change pharmacies if you wish,
- You can view your medical history, test results, allergies and medicines. This includes your COVID vaccination record,
- You can register your organ donation decision, this along with making a will, ensures your organ donation decision is known, making things so much easier for your loved ones in the event of your death,
- You can sign up to take part in health research,
- You can book, view and cancel appointments with your GP,
- You can book and manage hospital appointments in one place,
- You can book, amend or cancel vaccination appointments,
- You can send and receive messages from your GP surgery,
- If you are a carer, you can link profiles so that you can access health records, appointments and prescriptions for people you care for,

- The App will give you access to a range of advice and information including the symptom checker, NHS 111 online and you can search for services near you.

NHS Digital which is responsible for the NHS App has produced some great guides and will also provide support if you get stuck. You can access the Quick Start Guide here:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/services/nhs-app/toolkit/step-by-step-guides>

The main points are:

1. Open the App store or Google Play,
2. Search for the NHS App,
3. Install the App,
4. To create an NHS login account, you must be aged 13 years or over, have your own email address and phone number,
5. Enter your email address and select 'continue'. Please use the same email address and mobile telephone number as those recorded on your GP record,
6. Choose a password,
7. Accept the NHS login terms and conditions,
8. You will be sent a security code by email. Enter the code in the NHS App to confirm your email address,
9. Enter your mobile phone number and select 'continue',
10. You will be sent another security code in a text message. Enter this code in the NHS App to confirm your mobile phone number.

You will now have an NHS login. In order to keep information safe, you will need to prove who you are to access services like seeing your GP record and other personal information. You need to use photo ID to prove who you are (if you do not have any form of photo ID you will need to contact the surgery which will give you a PIN document containing 3 details. Follow the instructions in the NHS 'How to prove who you are without photo ID'.

If you do have photo ID such as a UK passport or UK driving license you have two options.

Option 1 – complete a face scan (please note the App will guide you through this process)

1. Take a photo of your ID with your mobile phone,

2. Complete an automated scan of your face using your mobile phone. This will be used to match your face with your photo ID,
3. Enter your date of birth,
4. Enter your NHS number or your name and postcode.

When you have completed these steps, your identity should be confirmed within a few hours.

Option 2 – take a video (again the App will guide you through this process)

1. Take a photo of your ID with your mobile phone,
2. Record a short video of your face and say randomly generated numbers (you can also use British Sign Language or write the numbers down and show them in the video),
3. Enter your date of birth,
4. Enter your NHS number or your name and postcode.

When you have completed these steps, your identity should be confirmed within a few hours.

Once this has happened you can start using the NHS App.

To order a repeat prescription you need to log into the NHS App. You can also use a tablet, laptop or desk top computer to access these services at www.nhs.uk/app. Then:

1. Select the 'Prescriptions' icon in the bar at the bottom of the screen,
2. Choose which pharmacy your prescriptions will be sent to (nominated pharmacy),
3. Select the green 'order a prescription' button at the top of the prescription page,
4. The next page asks what type of prescription do you want to order? You can only order a repeat prescription on the NHS App, so if you have one, choose 'A repeat prescription' and then press 'continue',
5. Check the prescription is going to the right pharmacy. Select 'continue',
6. The next screen shows which medicines are available for you to order. Choose the ones you need and press 'continue',

7. Check all the details (medicines and the pharmacy) are correct and then press 'confirm and order prescription',
8. From there your request goes to your practice and then onto the pharmacy. Please allow at least three working days for this to happen.

For the rest of the services available via the NHS App look through the guides and explore the App.

NHS App walk through videos

There are some good videos showing how to use the NHS App step by step. These videos show how to navigate the NHS App and use its services.

You Tube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnhASgDToTkuPtdsIVQStTmg04Bij5T4k>

Support Session – save the date

We have also arranged a drop-in session to help those who are finding it difficult to download or navigate the NHS App. The session will be held in the Community Support Hall, Melrose Road on **Wednesday 19th June 2024 1.30-3.30**. We will send out a reminder nearer the time.

Contact us

You can contact the PPG management team by emailing MerseaPPG@hotmail.com