

# Sonning Common Health Centre Newsletter

July 2024



## “NHS Under More Pressure Than Ever...”

As many of you will have doubtlessly read in the news and media, the NHS and especially primary care, is under significant pressure with levels of resources and funding not keeping pace with increasing demands. You may have seen in the news recently that as of April, GPs are now formally in dispute with the government. This follows the results of a BMA (British Medical Association – the body that represents doctors) referendum in which 99.2% of more than 19,000 GPs and GP registrars voted to reject the 2024/25 contract for General Practice from the government and NHS England.

Despite this, the government imposed this contract on April 1, 2024, following the imposition of a contract last year, and also the year before that.

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[Want to head straight to our website?](#)

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[www.sonningcommonhealthcentre.co.uk](http://www.sonningcommonhealthcentre.co.uk)

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SCAN ME

## BMA Industrial Action

More recently, the BMA recently asked GP partners to vote regarding taking action against the imposition of the latest contract which is a real terms funding cut for general practice, at a time where general practice is delivering more appointments and services than ever before. Seven in ten eligible members voted in the non-statutory ballot, with an overwhelming 98.3% of members voting yes, indicating that they are willing to take action to save general practice.

As of 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024, the BMA recommended that GP practices considered implementing some or all of the recommended actions to put pressure on the government to ensure that the right thing is done for both patients and general practice.

For a sustainable future for general practice we need a new contract that is fit for purpose, providing investment and the required workforce to provide patients with family doctors. Here at Sonning Common, we are committed to providing the best service we can to patients, and we will thoroughly consider every action we undertake. We understand there may be some impact on patients, but we feel that for the future sustainability of general practice that change needs to happen. However, we hope that with the new government change may come with minimal patient disruption.

At Sonning Common, we are committed to ensuring that our patients can see us for both urgent conditions and for routine appointments to deal with longer term issues and health conditions.

This balance can sometimes be hard to find, hampered by a national shortage of trained GP's and nurses and no new funding forecast to employ any more. We are continually reviewing our appointments system and trying to ensure we make the best use of the appointments we have available.

Despite this, our recent patient satisfaction survey showed that the vast majority of our patients have good experiences when interacting with the health centre, a trend that we will strive to continue.



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## What are the implications of this for our patients?

We are sharing this as despite trying to improve our internal practices as much as possible, we are also at the mercy of the larger NHS System and political whims.

- We will always see anyone who feels they have an urgent condition that needs to be seen on the same day. (NB very occasionally, on days where there is significant demand that cannot be met safely, we may divert to 111)
- We are continuing to ask our receptionists to ask why you need an appointment, as it may be that another member of the practice team has more expertise, or better availability to deal with your problem. It also means that our duty team can help identify and prioritise clinical emergencies from other less time-sensitive conditions.
- We will continue to offer usual GP appointments on a list-based system for routine care, as we believe that seeing your usual doctor who you can develop a relationship with, is better for patient health (as well as doctor satisfaction).
- Although we would love to be able to provide routine appointments within 72hours, with your usual doctor, this isn't currently feasible, and you may have to wait 1-2 weeks for an appointment. You may have to wait longer to a particular doctor, or for a particular specialist clinic.

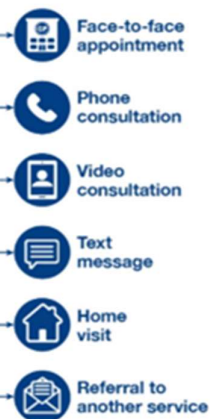


There are three ways to get in touch with us at this surgery



Your GP practice

No matter which you choose, we will get back to you with next steps tailored to your needs



# Staff Update – Partnership Change



We are delighted to announce that as of April 2024 Dr Peter Mennear and Dr Thomas Rockell have now entered the partnership, joining Dr Michael Weeks and senior partner Dr Nicholas Smith.

Dr Kim Emerson and Dr Ralph Drury have now stepped down from the partnership, but positively both are staying on at the surgery. Dr Emerson will be continuing in a management capacity, to help the transition with the new partnership and Dr Drury will be working four clinical sessions a week. We are grateful that we can retain their knowledge and expertise.

In a period of great uncertainty for General Practice, we feel lucky that we have been able to attract two GPs at the beginning of their careers to join the team and continue to provide the style of care we strive for, for as long as we can.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to both Dr Emerson and Dr Drury who have provided over 50 years of partnership to the practice between them.

With NHS changes being suggested by politicians, we feel the best way to protect the practice for tomorrow is to ensure we have strong experienced leaders. Our succession plan centres around wanting to continue to provide as stable and reliable service for patients as possible. Therefore, despite an ever-changing system, reduced funding year on year and ever-increasing needs, our values and culture remain the same as before. We don't expect patients to notice any significant change, bar the names on the letterhead.

With a lot of change happening in General Practice we wanted to reassure our patients that we have no plans to make any significant changes to how we run the health centre. We remain committed to providing an excellent service to our patients.

# Staff Update – New Team Members



Staffing has been a significant issue for a lot of GP practices nationally. We are pleased that we have managed to recruit new staff. We are still looking at adding further staff to bring us to our desired full complement of staff. This will hopefully hold us in good stead for years to come.

## **Operations Manager**

Andrea McFarlane joined the team in January 2024 as our new Operations Manager. She is involved in managing the business, including strategy and planning, IT, CQC and premises. Andrea has settled into life at the surgery quickly and is a great asset to our team.

## **Pharmacy & Dispensary**

We would like to welcome our new clinical pharmacists Vidya and Emily to the team. They will be carrying out medication reviews with patients directly and will be able to help patients with medication queries. Kathryn is our new pharmacy technician who will be supporting the new pharmacists, working in the dispensary, and helping to deal with prescriptions.

## **Admin**

We welcome Rachel to our admin team, who help us process and code the great volume of letters from hospital and other care providers that come in regarding our patients. Angela and Rosie have stepped up together to help manage the admin team, and ensure it continues to run smoothly.

## **Reception & Care Coordinators**

Carol has been promoted to reception manager, and we have added Terri, Elise and Lindsey to our vibrant reception team. We were happy to add Ebony to our fantastic care-coordinator team in March.

## **Registrar GPs.**

Nationally 25% of all GPs are registrars, which means they are GPs in training. We currently have 4 GPs in training in the team;

- Dr Corrie Bruce and Dr Louise Zwiers are our two ST3 registrars who have been with us since August. You may have come across them already, and they will be completing their training this summer after passing their final exams. We wish them well in their future careers.
- Dr Ese Onojaife and Dr Ho Lun Wong joined the team in February, and are both in their second year of training. They have both bedded in well within the team and they will be with us until August.
- In August we will be welcoming a new cohort of GP trainees working at the practice. They will be Dr Shona Nagaroor, Dr Faiza Zahir, Dr Anuja Challishazar and Dr Joshua Rencher .

## Preventative Health Care

There is more and more evidence that making changes to our lifestyles earlier can prevent the development of chronic diseases and help us to live well for longer.

A big focus for the NHS is preventing diseases from developing, as this is better than trying to cure an already established disease. One of these conditions is cardiovascular disease; to reduce the likelihood of heart attacks and strokes. We look at your age, sex, family history, ethnicity, other medical conditions, BMI, blood pressure, cholesterol, and smoking status to try and calculate your risk of developing disease.

Controlling risks that you are able to change such as; your weight, blood pressure and cholesterol along with trying to eat a healthy diet, drinking alcohol in moderation and avoiding smoking, can reduce your long term risk.

## Weight Loss

If you are obese or overweight, losing weight reduces your risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. It can also help if you suffer from arthritis, improve sleep and mood and also reduce your risk of cancer.

If you feel you need help managing your weight please see the following links;

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/digital-weight-management/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/lose-weight/>

You can also speak to any of the GPs about our local weight management services. From later this year, Oxfordshire County Council will also be developing new programmes to help manage your weight.

## Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is one of the key components of being heart and brain healthy. At SCHC we offer health checks which will look at your blood pressure. If raised at your check, we may ask you to do home readings which give us the most accurate ways of monitoring your blood pressure. This can help us see your blood pressure behaves in your day to day life and we can then help you individually.

The care coordinators, pharmacists, nurses, and doctors will all be working together to identify those who would benefit from either doing home blood pressure readings or changing your medication to get better control.

## Preventative Health Care

### Cholesterol & Statins

Cholesterol is another risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Cholesterol is important in keeping the cells in our body healthy but too much puts you at risk. There are several causes of high cholesterol that you can control such as eating too much saturated fat, being physically inactive and smoking. Age, sex, ethnic background and your genes can also influence your cholesterol, however we can't control these, which is why we focus on the things we can change.

Cholesterol is a hidden risk factor because you may not have any symptoms of high cholesterol. Attending an NHS health check will test this for you, so please attend an appointment if you are invited.

If your result shows there is elevated cholesterol we can use a scoring system called a QRISK score to estimate your 10 year risk of having a heart attack or stroke compared to people with similar risk factors to you. Previous guidance would suggest that if this risk was high (>10%) we could offer a statin, which is a medication which helps lower cholesterol. However, the latest guidance has changed, and we can now offer statins to patients even if that risk is less than 10%, and we believe there will be benefit. If you are not able to take a statin, there are other medications that we can use, such as ezetimibe or bempedoic acid, which also help lower cholesterol levels.

The latest science has evolved towards tighter control of cholesterol, specifically at reducing the bad cholesterol (non-HDL cholesterol) to a specific target. Because of this, even if you are already on a statin, we may ask you to increase your dose, change to a different medication, or add another medication to get the best protection.

***Using medication earlier, together WITH diet and exercise provides the best protection against developing heart disease and stroke.***

Please see the links below for more information:

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/treatments/statins>

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/cholesterol.html>

***Our care coordinator team are leading our Preventative Health: Healthy Lives Efforts so please look out for texts and emails from them.***

# General information



## Cervical Screening

The Cervical screening Programme is a way of preventing cancer. It tests for a virus called human papilloma virus (HPV). High risk HPV can cause cervical cells to become abnormal. Virtually all cases of cervical cancer are linked to high-risk HPV.

Cervical screening helps prevent cervical cancer from developing and saves thousands of lives every year in the UK.

***Book your appointment with health centre by calling the appointments line on 0118 972 2188 (option 1)***

## Shingles

From the 1st September, those turning 65 and 70 will also be able to get the vaccine after their birthday, in addition to those already aged 70-80. Patients will be contacted by their GP practice when they become eligible. Eligibility will then be expanded to include those 60 and up by September 2028.

## In the community

**Social Prescribing – For things affecting your health that medicine can't fix.**

Abbie Crook and Rachel Downey are your Social Prescribers from Age UK Oxfordshire.

The Social Prescriber Team at SCHC help with a wide range of issues, including financial support, living standards, and health and wellbeing. They can provide support and guidance to help you, or someone you know, access services and resources that can improve your overall quality of life.

We want to promote Abbie and Rachel's services, so that those who require assistance know this service exists. This can be especially beneficial for those who may feel isolated, or those who are unsure of where to turn to get help.

Contact the surgery for more information: 0118 927 2188 or email directly:

[Communitylink.schc@nhs.net](mailto:Communitylink.schc@nhs.net)

**More information also available on our website here:**

<https://sonningcommonhealthcentre.co.uk/community-link-worker/>





# The Hive

## Community Coffee Morning



All welcome for refreshments and a friendly chat. A great social morning with a chance to meet your local Community Link worker, along with our colleagues at **Dementia Oxfordshire** and **Carers Oxfordshire**.



We'll also be supported by your local Social Prescribers from Sonning Common Health Centre, our Digital Support Volunteer, and different local services in your community.

**When:** First Thursday of the month, 10am-12pm - **Starting 1st August 2024**

**Where:** Sonning Common Village Hall, Wood Lane, Sonning Common, RG4 9SL

**Cost:** FREE - with support from Farrans Construction

**Rachel 07827 235 420**

**Abbie 07827 235 431**

**[community@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:community@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk)**

**[www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire)**



# General information



## Your privacy

The health centre will send you SMS/ email messages about general information/ practice updates and newsletters (like this one!) from time to time; and while there are people who are happy to receive these messages, we also appreciate that others may not.

If you would only like to receive clinical information surrounding your personal care, let the Care Coordinator team know by emailing: [bobicb-ox.schc\\_care\\_coordinators@nhs.net](mailto:bobicb-ox.schc_care_coordinators@nhs.net)

We will update your records to ensure you only receive communication surrounding your care.

## Summer getaway

If you're planning to go away and need to get your prescriptions early or request more than usual to cover the break, please give us plenty of notice. We have systems we use to back up safe prescribing, so please put a note with the request stating e.g. "For holiday", so we know to override these.

If you need your medication sent to a different pharmacy than normal, (**within England only**, not yet Wales, Scotland, or N. Ireland), put a note with your prescription for us to send to "Any Pharmacy". We can then electronically sign the prescription and send it to the "NHS Spine", or a secure 'cloud'. The pharmacy where you are staying can then download this prescription for you wherever you are. This will keep your designated normal pharmacy set as it is, so next month your prescription isn't sent halfway across the country!

# Medicines and Prescriptions



## NHS App

If you're a patient at our practice, you can use the NHS App to access a range of NHS services on your smartphone or tablet. It doesn't replace existing services. You can still contact us in the usual ways. But, once you have verified your identity in the app, you will have easy, 24/7 access to a growing range of health services and information. You can:

- order repeat prescriptions
- access NHS 111 online
- find NHS services
- view your health records
- book appointments
- and much more...

## Ordering your prescriptions

If you have the NHS App, you can use their website to order repeat medication. If you have not yet registered to order your prescription online, or would prefer not to, you can also make a request in any of the following ways:

- Email our admin team at: **[schc.admin@nhs.net](mailto:schc.admin@nhs.net)** – please include your name, DOB, medication required and which pharmacy you would like your prescription to be sent to. (Dispensing patients can collect from the health centre)
- Put a written request into the box in our foyer.
- Ask your preferred pharmacy to request medication on your behalf.
- Complete the online form on our website: <https://sonningcommonhealthcentre.co.uk/order-your-prescriptions/>

### Medication Availability

As many patients will have experienced, it is very common to have temporary supply issues with certain medications. Most notably the availability of HRT hit the headlines during the winter.

However, every week we have several different medications that are not available.

Please avoid requesting medication last minute, as sometimes it may take an extra day or two for either the dispensary or pharmacy to get a supply of your medication or issue an alternative. **This is why we continue to need 3 working days' notice to issue a prescription.**

# Seasonal Illness - Hayfever



With summer now underway many of you may have started experiencing seasonal hay fever.

Hay fever is a common condition that affects many people. It can usually be managed at home or by seeing your local pharmacist.

Common symptoms of hay fever include a runny, itchy and/or blocked nose, sneezing and itchy eyes. You may also get an itchy throat, or a cough due to mucus running down the back of the nose to the throat. Treatments for this included antihistamine nasal spray and/or a steroid nasal spray.

There are a number of ways you can help manage hay fever:

- Stay indoors as much as possible and keep windows and doors shut
- Avoid cutting grass, large grassy places and camping
- Shower and wash your hair after being outdoors
- Wear wraparound sunglasses when you are out
- Keep car windows closed and consider buying a pollen filter for the air vents in your car.

Treatments for hayfever include antihistamine tablets and nasal sprays, steroid nasal sprays and eye drops. You can check with your pharmacy what is best suited for you, and these medications can be purchased over the counter.

You should give the medication 2-4 weeks to work, and if your symptoms are not controlled then speak with one of the GPs.

Please follow the link for more information:

<https://patient.info/allergies-blood-immune/hay-fever-leaflet>

We also have a handy guide on our website to show you how to use your nasal spray for it to be most effective:

[https://sonningcommonhealthcentre.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Steroid-nasal-spray-leaflet .pdf](https://sonningcommonhealthcentre.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Steroid-nasal-spray-leaflet.pdf)

# Self Care and Self Referral



- Around 80% of all care in the UK is self care. Many people feel comfortable managing everyday ailments like coughs and colds themselves.
- By feeling confident to manage minor ailments at home, this reduces demand on your local health centre to focus on caring for higher risk patients, managing long-term conditions and providing new services.
- Please see the following links which have NHS guidance on common minor conditions and tips on how to manage them:
  - <https://www.cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk/your-health/helping-you-stay-well/self-care/>
  - <https://northyorkshireccg.nhs.uk/self-care-and-lifestyle/self-care-and-minor-ailments/>
- Your pharmacy can also help with lots of minor conditions.
- The minor injuries unit in Henley is also available for injuries sustained in the last 7 days.
  
- There are now a number of services that you can self refer to without the need for a GP appointment:
  - Activity/exercise support
  - Alcohol and substance support services
  - Ear syringing
  - Hearing Aids
  - Physiotherapy
  - Sexual health services
  - Sick Notes
  - Smoking cessation help
  - Talking Therapies for Anxiety, Depression and PTSD
  - Weight loss help
- Please follow the link to our website to see how you can do this:  
<https://sonningcommonhealthcentre.co.uk/self-referrals/>

# Pharmacy First



The Pharmacy First service has been launched this year. This service allows community pharmacies to see, assess and prescribe (if necessary) treatment for 7 common conditions (as listed below). To access this service, head directly to your local pharmacy, there is no need for a referral.

The idea of this service is to reduce urgent demand on GPs to aid in increasing patient access. This is especially useful at weekends.

Your local pharmacy can also help with emergency supplies of prescriptions, as well as support with health eating, exercise, stopping smoking, monitoring your blood pressure, contraception, flu and covid vaccinations.

For more information about this service please see the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/primary-care/pharmacy/pharmacy-services/pharmacy-first/>

## Accessing Pharmacy First services

The following table shows the 7 conditions pharmacists can manage across various age ranges.

Clinical pathway	Age range
Acute otitis media	1 to 17 years
Impetigo	1 year and over
Infected insect bites	1 year and over
Shingles	18 years and over
Sinusitis	12 years and over
Sore throat	5 years and over
Uncomplicated urinary tract infections	Women 16-64 years (not pregnant)

## Emergency Prescriptions

Your local pharmacy can also provide an emergency supply of your regular medication if you have run out.

# PPG Update



Our fantastic PPG (Patient Participation Group) is a group of our patients who meet with members of the GP practice staff to discuss practice issues and patient experience to help improve the service, provide practical support to the health centre team and organise health events of interest to our local community.

They recently carried out a survey of our patients to assess how we are doing as a practice and some areas that we can look to improve on. We were delighted to find out that the vast majority of our patients are happy with the surgery, with over 96% of respondents describing their experience of the practice as good or very good.

Patients also felt that the team at the surgery were kind and helpful, and that during their appointments they felt they were listened to and had adequate time to explain their concerns.

Respondents highlighted that they would like shorter waiting times for appointments as well as being able to see their own GP. How we offer appointments is an area we are looking into, to see if we can improve efficiency and reduce waiting times. However, as demand increases there may be times when patients have to wait longer than they would like for a routine appointment.



**Keep up to date with the PPG  
on Facebook**

## Your feedback

We turn up every day to try and do a good job for our patients. It's really useful to know when we have managed this, as well as when we may have fallen short and need to improve. Unless we get told, we don't know how you feel we are doing. So please use <https://sonningcommonhealthcentre.co.uk/friends-family-test/> to give us confidential feedback, or email [schcreception@nhs.net](mailto:schcreception@nhs.net) if you want to give feedback that we can reply to.

Or you can leave a review on google:

<https://search.google.com/local/writereview?placeid=ChIJ32g8SHeQdkgRbpgzINq7iMg>

**Thank you from the SCHC Team**



**SCAN ME**