

Riverside Medical Practice PPG Zoom meeting 26th April 2021

Chair: Dr Malladi

Attendees: Kim Stoner, Mr Dale (PPG chair) and 8 other PPG Members.

This meeting had been called following receipt of an email from Mr Dale on 14th April 2021

“As PPG lead in the village I have been told of instances where patients have recently tried to phone the surgery to make appointments and been unable to get a reply. Some say they have tried many times with one lady having tried over the last three weeks and still unable to get an appointment.

Patients are aware of the pressures the surgery is under but I am concerned that the goodwill that the surgery has always rightfully enjoyed is in danger of running out.”

Dr Malladi telephoned Mr Dale and the following points were shared with the PPG via email:

“A member of this group has brought to my attention the fact that the surgery has become extremely difficult to contact via phone. This member had tried many times over a period of three weeks and still not managed to make an appointment. They found that the line cut off after a few rings after Kim’s Covid prevention message. This appears to have been echoed by others in the village as postings on social media show.”

I thought I should alert the surgery to the fact that goodwill towards the surgery appears to be suffering as a result of this. After emailing him, Dr Malladi called me earlier today while he was at lunch.

Dr Malladi wanted to make it clear to me that the practice still doing the best that they can. He assures me that the current situation is temporary, brought about by a combination of the following factors:

Absence: both scheduled and unscheduled. This is because of the Easter holidays. Two doctors are on leave. Support staff are on leave (Kim is until next Monday). After the Easter school holidays those doctors will return which will help the pressure. One locum doctor who was meant to assist cancelled at short notice. Locums are very hard to find as all surgeries are short of staff at present.

The surgery did have two good trainee doctors working there full time until recently – now they have another trainee doctor but this one works part time only (50%). This will change in August when there should be two full-time trainee doctors joining the practice.

One of the things that Dr Malladi was at pains to tell me was that calls to the surgery have been increasing rapidly and are now very high indeed. He thinks this is because it is actually easier now to make an appointment with a doctor under this arrangement than it used to be. There is now no leaving home and having to sit in a waiting room for an unspecified length of time and some patients appear to have taken advantage of this. Many calls are to discuss “problems” that Dr Malladi feels those patients would never normally bring to him. This week he has called three patients who wanted an appointment only to find they needed only to order a repeat prescription.

The surgery is working within NHS guidelines – they cannot give an appointment to physically see a doctor unless the doctor has previously spoken to the patient.

Staff still need to work at the vaccination centre which of course takes them away from the surgery. This weekend the blood nurse was there on Saturday so she will need to take a day out from the surgery in lieu of that.

The situation regarding doctors' surgeries supplying staff to vaccination centres is unclear for the immediate future. When the vaccination strategy was first devised it was said that this would continue until the under-50's groups were to be vaccinated. The plan was that under-50's could travel more easily and they were to attend the mass vaccination centres set up around the country – places such as The Woodville Halls in Gravesend. This idea seems to have been dropped as the under-50's are now being vaccinated locally.

I did check with Dr Malladi that the phones were still being answered by the same number of staff as they had always been, and that the surgery still had the same number of phone lines – This has not changed.

I have arranged to meet Kim, on her return on Monday, and we will arrange a time for an online PPG meeting where Doctor Malladi will probably tell you most of the above again and give you the opportunity to question him.

During the meeting Dr Malladi talked about the joining of the vaccine programme. We are on course to meet the government target. He explained that these are GP run clinics and we have to cover 2 shifts a week. This does cause a shortage of staff at the surgery but all staff have been very flexible.

Kim and Chloe are admin leads at the vaccine centres. Dr Malladi and Dr Gardiner have been overseeing the vaccine centre..

Mr Kittlety asked what would someone do if they were not registered at a GP Surgery? Dr Malladi informed that as long as the patient was eligible for the vaccine. Any local surgery is able to book them in for a vaccine with their basic details – i.e. name, DOB, postcode.

Dr Malladi informed the PPG that patients aged 40+ are being invited from today.

Mr Barnes asked what percentage was refusing to have the vaccine? Dr Malladi reported that over 85% wanted the vaccine.

Dr Malladi stated that it is unclear if there will be boosters in the autumn.

The surgery is doing its best to keep as normal service as possible in the surgery while these clinics are taking place. Hopefully the telephones will settle once the younger groups are done as they have mobile numbers and access to the internet.

Dr Malladi discussed the calls coming into the surgery. We still have to deal with patient queries, appointment, booking vaccines. Kim informed the PPG that last month we had received over 7000 calls into the surgery. We had to invite the top 6 groups for their vaccines, this included house bound patients, learning disabilities etc. The learning disabilities patients were booked in to a

special clinic with more time allocated and specialist nurses. We thought that the younger patients were to be done at the mass vaccination centre but they do not have the capacity.

Kim informed the PPG that she has logged a call with our telephone supplier regarding the issue with patients being cut off. We have 23 lines coming into the practice and it appears that the 24th in the queue is getting cut off instead of getting the engaged tone. Kim will update once this has been sorted. Action completed: Kim telephoned Southern Communications and an extra license has been added that enables almost unlimited call queuing. No patients have reported being cut off since then.

NHS guidance is for GPs to telephone patients before being given a face to face appointment. We still have to have the social distancing in place within the surgery. This is standard operating procedure.

Dr Malladi explained the difficulties over the Easter holiday with a locum GP cancelling at short notice. We lost 2 trainee registrars and now only have 1 who is part time. We have a new trainee coming in August. Dr Gardiner is completing her training and we will receive another trainee. Dr Malladi is hopeful that by August things should have improved.

No one in the PPG had any other questions.

Dr Malladi is going to write a statement for Kim to publish on the village social media to keep patients updated. Completed.