



## **Friends of Amersham Health Centre Patient Participation Group**

### **Newsletter**

**October 2023**

#### **From the Chair**

I hope you have all had a safe and enjoyable summer, despite the rain!

Our committee has continued to meet through the summer and I am delighted to say that we now have two new members on our team, Mark Dunscombe and Sandyha Mohindra. Both are very welcome.

Martin James has very kindly taken on the role of volunteer co-ordinator, so we had a group to support the meeting held on the use of the AskFirst App and our AGM meeting. They will also play an important role in the smooth running of the flu vaccination programmes.

We have also been updating the FAHC link on the surgery website so that you will find more information about our activities. A summary of our monthly meetings will be posted there, as well as on the FAHC noticeboard in the surgery.

The evening meeting for the AGM, followed by Dr Gabe's presentation, was very well attended. During the AGM, elections were held and I remain as Chair, Judith Jones was elected as Hon. Secretary and Peter Harper was re-elected as Hon. Treasurer. Dr. Gabe gave a very interesting and enlightening account of the work at the surgery and the challenges with which they are having to deal. More on this later in the newsletter.

News from our Primary Care Network (PCN) is that a further Talking Café has been set up in Little Kingshill to support patients within that area. We already have one set up at the Chiltern Lifestyle Centre which takes place every Thursday at 10.am.

A new Physiotherapist has been recruited and his services will be spread across the 5 surgeries according to need. Further information on how to access these services will be given out by the surgery in the near future.

With best wishes

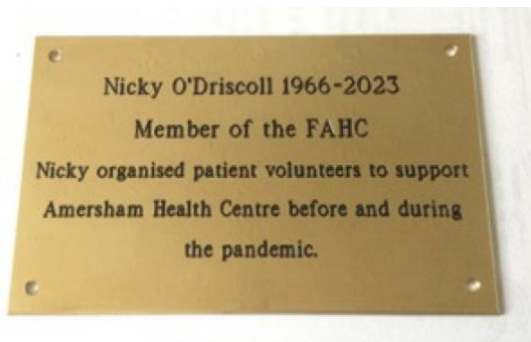
**Daphne Lally**

[Chair1ppg@outlook.com](mailto:Chair1ppg@outlook.com)

## Nicky O'Driscoll

Nicky was an active member of the PPG committee. She was an outstanding co-ordinator of the patient volunteers who play such an important role in helping to organise flu clinics at AHC and in other situations where the Practice needs support.

There is a small plaque now in the waiting room to record her contribution.



## Flu Vaccinations 2023

The next flu vaccination session at Amersham Health Centre is on 7th October 2023.

## Physiotherapy at the Health Centre

Physiotherapist, Faheem Abbas, will now be working at Amersham Health Centre all day Wednesday and Friday. Appointments should be made using the AskFirst app or, if it is not possible to use the app, by contacting the surgery.

## Presentation on the AskFirst app

**Thursday 13 July, 2023 – Barn Hall, Amersham-on-the-Hill**

This presentation was given by Meeta Jobanputra, the Practice manager, and Charlotte Prince, the senior patient co-ordinator, as well as staff from the Sensley Team who design the app.

It was a very well-attended meeting for which the Barn Hall was filled to capacity. Unfortunately, audience members were frustrated by the fact that there was no audio for the video which was being used to demonstrate how to use the app.

The main message from Meeta was that the NHS is pushing surgeries to use AI to make appointments. The advantage of the system is that it will triage patients before the Surgery is contacted, thus ensuring that the patient is directed to an appropriate medical practitioner. This frees up reception staff, so that they can assist patients who have difficulty using the app.

Concerns were raised about the number of 'glitches' which patients had encountered while trying to use the App. The staff from Sensley, who are working closely with the surgery, accepted the feedback and assured patients that improvements will be made to make the system more user-friendly.

However, patients should be aware that they can telephone the surgery to make appointments if they are unable to use the AskFirst app for any reason.

### **Background information to the talk and making appointments.**

*The Practice has been exploring ways to make it easier and fairer for patients to make appointments. The phone lines are frequently busy, and it can be frustrating and time-consuming waiting to get through.*

*Consequently, patients are advised that the easiest and simplest way to communicate with the Surgery is by using the AskFirst app which is free to install on your phone from your app store. You can use this app to request an appointment and to undertake administrative tasks; for example, to request a renewal of your sick note, chase up referrals and to submit a travel form.*

*AskFirst is an online clinical triaging system. The system will direct you accordingly, so that if you need to see a clinician, it will indicate that within the booking system from where a member of the AHC patient liaison team will contact you to arrange a suitable appointment either on the phone or face-to-face. This application can also be used to request repeat prescriptions, repeated sick notes, travel forms, or update your contact details.*

*The Practice is encouraging those patients who can use the technology to embrace this system, as it helps those patients unable to use the app to be assisted on the phone lines without the large queue.*

*The number of AHC patients currently making their appointments via AskFirst is 7,000, approximately 50% of 14,000 patients. As appointments for patients of 12yrs or younger cannot be made via AskFirst, a telephone call to the surgery is still necessary.*

*It is no longer possible for patients to book online appointments but telephone calls to the surgery can be made if it is not possible to use AskFirst for any reason.*

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**\*\*\* Please keep your contact details for the Surgery updated \*\*\***

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### **New Amersham Health Centre Website**

The new website is up and running. It is much clearer and is easier to navigate than the previous website.

<https://www.amershamhealthcentre.co.uk/practice-information>

### **AHC Facebook Page**

The Practice has a Facebook page where you can see current information about the surgery. For example, for the month of July, entries include the following facts:

- 2349 face-to-face appointments
- 3714 prescription items issued
- 127 DNAs (Did Not Attend), cost to the NHS approximately £3810
- 322 referrals processed
- 109 new patients registered
- 68 sick notes issued

The Facebook page provides information about how to give feedback, via a survey link, on the Ask First app now being used by the surgery; about vaccinations, pharmacy opening times during public holidays, the Talking Café and more.

### **Dr Gabe's Talk**

Thursday 7 September – St Michael's Church Hall, Amersham

Dr Gabe's talk, which followed the PPG Group AGM, was attended by approximately a hundred patients of the Practice. Initially, Dr Gabe noted her pleasure in the fact that face-to-face appointments have increased considerably since the end of the pandemic. However, her frustration with the current state of the NHS in general was clear. She used the example of a waiting time of 53 weeks for a routine gynae hospital appointment, although cancer referral pathways within 10 working days are generally met.

The future vision for the Practice is based on three pillars, with the main aspiration of accessible care:

1. Flexible working must be embraced because younger doctors do not want to work full-time; they have "portfolio" careers".
2. The workforce is being increased with a wider range of professionals, so that patients see the best person for their needs e.g. pharmacist, physio, nurse, minor illness nurse, mental health practitioner, social prescriber, mental health practitioner. It is hoped that it will also be possible to appoint another paramedic and an advanced nurse practitioner.  
Dr Gabe stressed that patients would never be denied the opportunity to see a GP.
3. The introduction of AskFirst (see above). This is a bespoke system for Amersham Health Centre, with over 7,000 patients signed up to use the app.

Dr Gabe concluded her talk by praising her team and the reception staff who undergo constant training. In particular, she highlighted the contribution of the Practice Manager, Meeta Jobanputra. The partnership is aiming to increase GP numbers. Finally, she encouraged patients to tell the Practice when something goes wrong and emphasised that, although so much is changing, she wants to maintain the old principles of good care.

Following the talk, members of the audience asked questions. The first questioner asked why the turnover of GPs was so high. Dr Gabe reiterated that work patterns are changing; there are fewer applicants and those who do apply have specific requirements. The next questioner asked about the possibility of trying to see the same doctor each time when several appointments are needed for the same condition. The questioner was reassured that this was possible, if requested. A further question about AskFirst elicited the response that it is possible to ask non-medical questions via the app but, if necessary, phone the Surgery.

## **We have received a further request for us to publicise Social Prescribing and the Talking Café.**

*What is Social Prescribing?*

*Many things that affect our health can't be treated by doctors or medicine alone.*

*Like loneliness, debt, or stress due to financial pressures or poor housing.*

*Social prescribing connects people to non-medical support to address these issues and other unmet needs.*

*This could involve a Social Prescribing Link Worker or an equivalent role:*

- *Helping someone who is isolated join a befriending group, an art class or a community gardening project, based on what works for them.*
- *Connecting someone struggling with financial stress to a service that helps with managing debt or claiming benefits.*
- *Supporting someone with dementia to join a dementia choir, enabling them to maintain a sense of social connection.*
- *Working with someone with high blood pressure to take up a form of exercise that they're comfortable with.*

*Social prescribing can help change the circumstances that can make people unwell. It can empower people to manage existing health problems, to get the right benefits or get back into employment. It can help people to connect and to grow in confidence.*

*The Mid Chiltern Primary Care Network Social Prescriber Link Workers work across five local surgeries – John Hampden Surgery, Prospect House Surgery, Hughenden Valley & Chequers, Amersham Health Centre and Rectory Meadow Surgery. The social prescribing team run a Talking Café every Thursday at the Chiltern Lifestyle Centre HP6*

*5AH ,10-12pm - and also the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every month at Little Kingshill Baptist Church, Kingshill Kitchen HP16 ODZ. 10am -12pm.*

*If you would like to find out more about social prescribing to see how they can support you, or if you just fancy a coffee and a chat why don't you go down and meet the team – Julie Sarah & Cari would love to meet you.*