



Dear friends and colleagues,

Much has been happening in the PPG since our last newsletter. At our AGM in February, along with our old committee, three new members were elected. Our new Vice-Chair, Margaret McKinlay, is a VMC patient of long standing, and as I am retiring at the next AGM it is great to know that her experience gained this year will be appreciated. Andrew Brown, another old patient, is now our regular minute taker. He also writes up our events for the newsletter – a very onerous task. Finally we welcomed Mark Platt, a new patient and an enthusiastic newcomer to the committee. Mark works for the Royal College of Nursing.

The surgery seems to be working very smoothly and the reception is a happy, efficient and vital part of the Practice. And we also welcome our delightful new doctors.

We would like to see even more of you at the events we put on. No other PPG we know holds such big events on a regular basis and with such outstanding speakers. They take a lot of work to organise and we would love you to be taking advantage of them.

Best wishes,

Gillian Guy, (PPG Chair)

BOWEL CANCER - an almost silent disease

On 24 March Mr Anthony Antoniou, consultant colorectal surgeon from Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, together with members of his team, led a very informative Victoria Medical Centre PPG event on bowel cancer.

About 100 new diagnoses are made in England every day (35,000 a year) and the death rate is about 15,000 a year. Mass screening is offered by the NHS involving taking smears of stool samples at home which are then sent off and analysed. Such screening has proved to reduce significantly the incidence of bowel cancer.

Bowel cancers develop in small polyps that grow in the lining of the large bowel. About one in ten polyps has the potential to become cancerous over a period of four to eight years. If the polyps are removed the potential for cancer falls to zero. In about 5% of patients there is a genetic tendency to form polyps and early screening is crucial in families with a known history of the disease.

If cancer develops it produces obvious symptoms: bleeding in the stools, a change in bowel habit, visible mucus in the stools, and anaemia. A patient with these systems should consult a doctor. Doctors will fast-track patients into a hospital cancer clinic where they will receive further examinations of the colon. If polyps are found they can be removed immediately.

If cancer is diagnosed most patients have to undergo surgery. Modern surgical techniques are highly sophisticated, possibly involving endoscopic micro-surgery (operating via the anus) or keyhole surgery through the abdominal wall. Patients suffer less pain, have fewer complications and recover more quickly from such techniques than from conventional surgery. In some cases (6–8%) a temporary bag might be necessary to aid healing of the small intestine (ileum). In a few cases a permanent bag may be necessary (colostomy bag).

Before taking questions Mr Antoniou introduced the C & W stoma nurses, who demonstrated the ileostomy and colostomy bags and showed how and where they were placed and used. The nurses also described their own important support role to patients before and after the operation.

An interesting question and answer session followed. (A full report of the event including the Q and A session can be read on the VMC website.)

A buffet lunch was kindly provided by Coloplast, suppliers of ostomy care products; and a representative from the charity 'Beating Bowel Cancer' distributed important information about the detection and prevention of the disease. Many thanks from the PPG to all the participants.

Seasonal Advice

Did you know that over 2,000 people a year die from malignant melanoma (skin cancer) in Britain alone? Be a 'sun smart' family by watching the NHS video on the effects of sunburn. Just Google the Victoria Medical Centre and follow the links to 'Helpful Information' and 'Sunburn'.

Better still, come to our next PPG event on Wednesday 22 June where a panel of expert speakers will cover all aspects of summer wellbeing including skin, eyes, first aid, travel, children, etc. There will be time for questions. See page 2 for details.

News from the Practice

NURSING TEAM Welcome to Jacinta Deacy and Elizabeth Shannon who joined our nursing team in May. And welcome back to Rosie Mason after her maternity leave. Rosie will be working on a part-time basis. Our nurses work Monday – Saturday during opening hours by appointment or on the day.

ADMIN TEAM In addition, Maisa Freitas and Patricia Ashley have joined the admin team to help keep the front line of the VMC operating smoothly.

MISSED APPOINTMENTS The number appears to be increasing. On average we have a shocking 200 'DNAs' (did not attend) every month.

NEW PRACTICE LEAFLET There is a new Practice leaflet at both surgeries giving all the Practice information. This can also be found on our website.

e-mail CONSULTATIONS

In recent years e-mail communications have revolutionised our lives in many ways and have already brought positive benefits to the world of General Practice. Over the next few months the Practice will be exploring the possibility of giving patients access to their doctor by e-mail. This will not adversely affect other more traditional patient/doctor relationships but hopefully will offer a practical additional service for patients in need.

Aziz Pandor (Practice Manager)

South Westminster Centre, Vincent Square, re-opens with expanded facilities

On Wednesday 27 April, Andrew Lansley, the Secretary of State for Health, formally re-opened the South Westminster Centre in Vincent Square. He then made a tour of the building before meeting up with a wide cross-section of health-care professionals and patient representatives, including Gillian Guy, the VMC PPG Chair, and our Vice Chair, Margaret McKinlay. Mr Lansley explained that the Government was in 'listening mode' as regards the proposed NHS changes. Issues raised included concerns about the *quality* of healthcare services in future if they are procured through competitive tendering and price, and the future *funding* of healthcare services. Other topics under the spotlight were the importance of more involvement in the changes by community-based healthcare professionals, a call for better co-operation between general practitioners and hospital-based professionals, and a plea for better homecare for the elderly.

Musculoskeletal Study

The paper from the Study that took place at the VMC in 2009–10 was presented to the College of Medicine at the Mansion House on 19 May to wide approval. It showed how a fully integrated acupuncture and osteopathy service in a primary care setting helped patients with their pain, functionality and well-being. The full paper will be published soon with details on the website. 147 patients took part in the trial, which was huge success. The Practice is now hoping to raise further funding for another study. *(Dr Susan Rankine)*

UPCOMING PPG EVENTS

Wednesday 22 June

'Look after yourself this summer'

6.00 pm at the surgery

Sept/Oct topic: Depression

Dec/Jan topics: Hearing and Eyes

dates, speakers and venues to be announced – all VMC patients, friends and neighbours are welcome



IF YOU BOOK IT, KEEP IT!

Please let the Practice know if you are unable to keep an appointment – remember there are others in need. Just phone 020 7834 2298 to cancel.



Left to right: Margaret McKinlay, Gillian Guy, Secretary of State for Health Andrew Lansley and Aziz Pandor at the re-opening of the South Westminster Centre on 27 April 2011.

HEALTH BILL UPDATE by Mark Platt, VMC PPG committee member

HEALTH and the NHS have never been more topical than now, with recent weeks seeing a deluge of newspaper articles, TV reports, public meetings and protests. Every day seems to bring new developments as regards the NHS. The basics are that in January the Government published the 'Health and Social Care' Bill, with the stated aim of changing both the structure of the English NHS, and of how it works.

The Bill is currently 'paused' awaiting its next stage, when it will be discussed in the House of Lords. Meanwhile, in response to the growing calls for it to be amended or even withdrawn, the Government has launched a 'listening exercise', overseen by a group of 40 appointed representatives including doctors, nurses, NHS managers, patient groups, and voluntary organisations. This group, called the 'Future Forum', is scheduled to publish a report of its findings, drawn from events taking place around the country, at the end of May in time for the Bill being debated in the Lords.

The Bill is quite complex, running to over 300 pages, but in essence its proposals are quite straightforward. The current structure of Strategic Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts will be abolished, to be replaced by 'Consortia', groups made up of GPs, who will be responsible for purchasing the vast majority of care for their patients.

All hospitals in England will become independent Foundation Trusts overseen by two regulators, one for quality: the Care Quality Commission (CQC), and another to ensure good financial practice and fair trading: the Monitor.

In preparation for the Bill becoming law the Department of Health has encouraged the creation of shadow consortia, called 'Pathfinders'. The VMC is a member of the Victoria Pathfinder, and there are two others operating over the central London area.

All of these issues, including the Pathfinder consortia, were discussed at a 'listening' event organised on 19 May by the Westminster LINK (Local Involvement Network) in which VMC PPG representatives participated. The feeling of the well-attended meeting was of people having too little information about the proposed changes, and having concerns as to whether the NHS will be able to continue to provide good care, especially with local government beginning to cut its services. On a positive note, representatives from one of the Westminster Pathfinders took part in the event and noted how well it had involved patients in the delivery of existing services and the development of new ones.

A report from the Westminster LINK event will be published shortly, and the Bill is currently expected to go into the Lords in June. *(Mark Platt)*