

PPG MATTERS

“How to get what you NEED when you NEED it”

Report of the PPG event held on Thursday 23 March 2023 in the Group Room at VMC.

A panel of five NHS and health professionals who deal directly with patients gave a lively account of how you can get the fastest and safest advice and treatment in an emergency and on a day-to-day basis. Dr Fiona Alexander (VMC GP), Belinda Uduoborie (VMC Advanced Nurse Practitioner), Nishma Hirani (pharmacist, the Warwick Pharmacy), Ana Sarcevic (pharmacist, Gees Chemist) and Andy Alcroft (paramedic, Fast Response Unit, Causton Street Ambulance Station)

Dr Alexander willingly acknowledged that continuity of care between doctors and patients, although known to be clinically important, is increasingly difficult to achieve with the current pressures on general practice, with shortages of staff at all levels. The addition of Advanced Nurse Practitioners to the VMC team is an asset that patients should welcome. Belinda explained that she had ten years of hospital nursing experience before training to become an ANP, a role that enables her to advise patients what action to take, to diagnose and prescribe medication for minor illnesses, and if appropriate refer patients to their preferred GP.

The double-act of two pharmacists stepped in to encourage patients to build a personal relationship with their local pharmacist/chemist, who are well trained (in fact more intensely than doctors) to prescribe the right medication for all health conditions. In a local community the pharmacist is able to offer continuity of care to whole families, knowing their medical history and personal circumstances. Moreover, for patients who find it difficult to navigate the internet, a pharmacist can contact your GP and arrange for a prescription to be issued, and in some cases advise the GP that your condition warrants an appointment at the practice. And if you have mobility problems they can deliver your prescription to you at home.

Andy Alcroft gave us a fascinating insight into the workings of the NHS London Ambulance Service (LAS). From the moment a 999 call is received they spring into action firstly with two key questions: Is the patient breathing? and Is the patient conscious? Depending on the answers and the postcode, an ambulance car sets off towards the location of the medical emergency, and over the next few minutes as more questions are asked, more decisions are taken about the patient's needs – whether they need to be taken as quickly as possible by ambulance to the nearest hospital or to be treated on the spot by a suitably equipped paramedic on a motorcycle. Also under pressure because of severe staff shortages one godsend is the new Shark Carry Chair that enables just one paramedic to lift a patient who is lying on the floor into a sitting position. Find out more about the workings of the LAS and how you might be able to help – online at London Ambulance Service NHS Trust.

When asked about the wisdom of attempting self-diagnosis online, Dr Alexander said that all medical advice headed by the NHS logo would be reliable – although it can be scary reading some of the side-effects. If in doubt, it would be better to ask advice from your local pharmacist.

Jim Curran, a member of the PPG Committee, said how comforting it was to be able to phone the PALS (Patient Liaison and Advice Service) while in hospital. PALS offers confidential advice, support and information on health-related matters. He suggested that GP practices should also offer the PALS service.

Overall it was a happy event with occasional bursts of laughter and eager participation from an audience of 40+. The panel was given an enthusiastic round of applause and were mobbed by admirers when the event ended at 7.30 pm.