

## VMC PRACTICE UPDATE

### EARLY DETECTION IS KEY

#### A Message from Dr Rankine to all patients



*Dear patients,*

I wanted to let you know how wonderful the NHS breast screening service is in our area. We are so lucky and I urge you to take up the invitation for screening when offered. As some of you may well know, I also live in Westminster and have been invited to have my mammogram every three years. I recently went to my breast screening appointment at St Mary's Hospital and it was very well organised. The unit is on the third floor and easy to find. Within five minutes I was in the screening room, undressed from waist up (so do dress appropriately to make it easy) and a lovely radiographer explained the process, telling me it may be uncomfortable. It wasn't! I got dressed and was told that the result would arrive in the post in two weeks. The whole process took about 15 minutes.

A mammogram is not scary or painful or embarrassing. Please go and have yours when you are invited (aged 50 to 70 years). If you are older than 70 you can ask for a mammogram but you will have to arrange it yourself. <https://www.london-breastscreening.org.uk/West-London>.

Early detection is a key factor in improving your chance of survival, whether for breast cancer, bowel cancer, prostate cancer or other life-threatening diseases. Mammograms, stool tests, smear tests, prostate testing and blood tests are all freely available on the NHS. Please get tested. It could save your life.

With best wishes,

*Susan Rankine*

### COVID-19 SPRING 2023 BOOSTERS

Covid-19 is more serious for older people and for people with certain underlying health conditions. For these reasons people aged 75 years and over, those in care homes and those over 5 with a weakened immune system are being offered a spring booster of the Covid-19 vaccine. You should be offered an appointment between April and June with those at higher risk being called in first.

### BROKEN PRINTER – APOLOGY

The front reception printer has not been working for a few weeks. A new printer has been ordered but there is a backlog in the system to get it actioned and the Practice is at the mercy of NHS centralised IT support. Although we encourage patients to request repeat prescriptions online the receptionists are aware that there is a printed form at reception that patients can complete and submit.

### CITY OF WESTMINSTER COMMUNITY ALARM SERVICE

Westminster Alarm Service provides a free 24/7 emergency home alarm service to residents who feel vulnerable living in their own home, including neck-worn alarms. This includes disabled people, older people, people at risk from domestic violence and those with mental health difficulties. VMC's care navigators will send a referral to social services. The social service team will do their assessment over the phone and dispatch the alarm to the patient.

# 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.