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| **Westgate Surgery Patient Focus Group – a message from the Chairman, May 2020** | |
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| **1** | **Introduction** |
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| Because of the current COVID-19 crisis, the Patient Focus Group meeting scheduled for 17th June is cancelled and all other future meetings are on hold. We haven’t met since January so I thought we could keep in touch by email until we next meet.  I recently participated in a Health Reference Group (HRG) virtual meeting of the Patient Participation Group (PPG) representatives of the former Thanet Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). There’s a brief note of the HRG meeting later in this message.  Please send any comments, suggestions, questions, etc., about the topics I’ve touched on below, or any other PFG matters, to Nicky at the surgery: tccg.westgatepatient@nhs.net.  I hope we can resume our PFG meetings before too long. Meanwhile, I hope you’ll find that emailed communications, in place of the scheduled meetings, will help to fill the gap. | |
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| **2** | **Minutes of last meeting on 23rd January and matters arising** |
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| Draft minutes  In February, Heather circulated draft minutes of the last meeting. If you have any comments please send them to her at heathergillespie@nhs.net, if you haven’t already done so.  Matters arising  Item 3(b): Please send in your thoughts about our possible involvement with the other PPGs in the Primary Care Network.  Item 3(d): Please let us know about anything you would like to see as a practice objective.  Item 3(e): Invitation to Healthwatch Kent is deferred until the next meeting.  Item 4: Report on incidents and complaints is deferred until the next meeting.  Item 9: Prompted by the coronavirus pandemic, patients can now consult their GP online by completing a form on the home page of the surgery’s website. | |
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| **3** | **Communications between the surgery and its patients – the website** |
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| The surgery’s website is the main online source of information about the work of the surgery and the services it offers. The surgery carries out periodical reviews in order to keep the website up to date and relevant. Recently, they have done an excellent job making sure that links to important information about coronavirus are displayed on the home page. In the present circumstances the internet has become the main means by which organisations in general communicate with their customers, employees, suppliers, etc. It would be nice to feel that all patients with internet access have Westgate Surgery on their favourites bar and visit it as frequently as their supermarket website during the present crisis.  When Nicky invited me to be a patient representative on her Communications Group, I tried to get an idea as to how many patients are regular visitors to the website. The number of hits is an indicator, of course, but how many are by the same users? I talked with a few friends and neighbours and was surprised to find none was a regular visitor to the website, even though they might shop, bank and manage their utilities online. One very competent computer user didn’t even know the surgery had a website.  In response to this the web address is now clearly displayed in the waiting room. I have also suggested that all letters, emails and text messages mention the website and, where practicable, encourage patients to visit it frequently. The surgery has received permission from several thousand of its patients to communicate with them by text and/or email, which reduces the cost of correspondence by letter. However, it takes a lot of staff time to email everyone and using the website to communicate with patients is much more efficient.  If you have any suggestions for getting more patients to use the website, please let me know.  Also, feedback on your own use of the website and any ways you think it could be improved would be much appreciated. As I know from discussions at the Communications Group, technical reasons can prevent the web designer from making some suggested changes, but please don’t let this stop you from making suggestions. | |
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| **4** | **Merging of the Kent & Medway CCGs** |
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| Last year the eight CCGs in the county (of which Thanet was one) decided to merge and as from 1st April there is now a single Kent & Medway CCG.  Thanet CCG has been an excellent source of information about local NHS developments, such as: the new stroke unit; options for redistributing specialist services among the three main East Kent (EK) hospitals; new urgent treatment centres and Kent safe havens. Thanet CCG’s public engagement has thrived under the leadership of Clive Hart, Lay Member of the CCG, with public events and consultations, newsletters and an informative website. He and Katie Blissett, Senior Engagement Officer for the four EK CCGs, ran the Thanet HRG and brought in expert guest speakers to brief us, the PPG representatives who in turn briefed the Thanet PPGs, about NHS development plans affecting local surgeries and EK hospitals. Latterly, the four EK CCGs worked as a unit, corresponding to the area covered by the EK hospital trust.  Thanet CCG is continuing to meet until replaced by its successor. There is now a website for Kent & Medway CCG: https://www.kentandmedwayccg.nhs.uk. If you type “bulletin” in the search box, their first Community Message will appear. There is an introduction by Cathy Finnis, their Lay Member for Patient and Public Engagement. Understandably, coronavirus dominates the bulletin so it is too early to judge how comprehensive the section on Thanet will be in future about the developments mentioned above.  I will be interested to see how K&M CCG look after the interests of Thanet. You might recall that the county’s CCGs formed a joint committee to decide the number and locations of the proposed Hyper Acute Stroke Units. Many local people felt that Thanet was not fairly represented in the consultation and this led to two Judicial reviews, both of which found in favour of the NHS. Whether one agrees with the outcome or not, it seems to me that we must be more vigilant than ever now that local healthcare commissioning will ultimately be decided by a central CCG remote from Thanet and even East Kent. I understand there will be an Integrated Care Partnership for EK to which some aspects of commissioning will be delegated. Watch this space, as the saying goes! | |
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| **5** | **Primary Care Network** |
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| As mentioned in item 2 above, your thoughts on PFG involvement with the other PPGs in our network would be most welcome. Dr Walton’s briefing at the last PFG meeting about the potential benefits of a PCN was, I thought, very encouraging. No doubt progress is being hampered by the present crisis but it will be interesting to hear about developments when life is back to anything like normal.  One development I can report is that Invicta Health (a federation of GPs in East Kent) has taken over the running of Birchington Medical Centre. | |
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| I hope you are keeping well and coping with the limitations imposed by coronavirus. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on PFG matters.  With best wishes from me and our friends at the surgery,  Geoff Lafford. | |