



Friday, 17 April 2020

It's just three weeks since the lock down was introduced and the way we all go about our daily lives changed. We are grateful to the vast majority of local people who have followed the new guidelines and helped to slow the spread of COVID-19. We are writing now to update you on a few matters that we hope are relevant to you.

Please carry on

First, please carry on keeping to the government guidelines; your efforts and perhaps our location have kept case numbers in Cornwall relatively low and we seem still to be “behind the curve” compared to other parts of the country. That's why it is important to continue with social distancing, staying at home unless for one of the permitted reasons:

- Shopping for ‘basic necessities’, as infrequently as possible.
- Medical reasons, to provide care, or to help a vulnerable person
- To take exercise, e.g. a run, cycle or walk up to once per day
- Travelling to and from work, but only if it is ‘absolutely necessary’

Those at particular risk

Patients with the highest risk from COVID-19 have been advised to “shield” themselves from the risk of infection. To protect themselves they are asked to strictly limit social contact and remain at home for twelve weeks. The health service is identifying and writing to those patients considered most vulnerable. The list of conditions was included in full in our last newsletter (available [here](#) on our website).

With information coming from various sources, the task of identifying the most vulnerable has taken longer than anticipated; the first group will already have received letters from NHS England and we have sent letters to those we initially identified. Guidelines have been revised and a further group will receive letters from NHS England or local hospitals and we are reviewing our records too, following NHS instructions, to identify further patients who should follow this strict advice.

If you are expecting a letter but have not yet received one, you may receive one in the near future and we would appreciate your patience. You can also register yourself via the government's website [here](#) and your case will be reviewed.

In the meantime, if you are concerned, the safest course of action is to follow the advice which you can read [here](#). We would prefer you didn't call the practice to check as we are already working through our records and will write to the relevant patients as soon as we can.

Changes at the surgery

Those who have wanted to see one of our GPs or nurses will know that all requests are triaged in a phone call to assess needs and the risk of COVID-19. As far as possible we try to resolve issues on the phone to reduce the need for patients to come to the surgery. If you do need to be seen by one of our clinical staff, depending on the GP's assessment of risk, you will be asked to come to one of our "zones", at either Looe or Pelynt (our Polperro surgery is currently closed). Please follow the instructions you are given carefully as this protects patients, staff and the wider community. It is possible that if the demand increases, we may start using Liskeard hospital as a 'hot clinic' for suspected coronavirus cases. This is predominantly to keep our surgery 'cold' (so reduce the risk of contracting covid-19). If this is implemented we will clearly explain the process if this applies to you. But rest assured, we have a very strict infection control system currently in our 'red' or 'hot' zone.

If you have been out near the surgery in Looe you may have noticed we now have a marquee in the patient car park. It provides useful capacity to complement our zone approach. We will be using it initially to run INR clinics for patients needing their routine tests but without the associated risks for them of entering the surgery and potential exposure to other patients. Use may change in the future but it's a valuable resource. We're grateful for the marquee and for the understanding of local residents who have lost their overnight parking space too.

Those of you who use the dispensary at Pelynt are asked to come to the side door **during opening hours** to the left of the building as you approach from Summer Lane, and knock if it is closed – you will be provided with your medication there. This reduces the number of people actually entering the surgery in the interests of safety for all. We are grateful for your understanding with this arrangement and for those that pay for your prescriptions, thank you for providing the correct money in a clearly named envelope.

Support for those at home

We are impressed with the number of volunteers offering to help support those who need it during this difficult time. There are various schemes available to provide help:

1. Looe Town Council have provided some excellent resources (see their website here) and in particular are coordinating an amazing number of volunteers (thank you to them) who can help in many ways. If you need physical or emotional support, please either complete the form on the Looe Town Council website, call 01503 804099 or email support@looetowncouncil.gov.uk
2. Similarly Volunteer Cornwall can offer help; To request help with shopping or medication collection, you can Email them at requestforhelp@volunteercornwall.org.uk or telephone on 01872 266988
3. The NHS Volunteer Responders service is a national scheme offering support to pharmacy and general practice to drive patients to appointments, collect medicines from pharmacies and making regular phone calls to check on people isolating at home. Your GP may refer you to this service but, if you are at high risk, you can contact them directly on 0808 196 3382
4. Finally there are a number of reputable websites offering relevant help and advice; please check carefully to make sure websites are genuine and can be trusted. You may also find these helpful:

- The [NHS website](#) for information about all health conditions including COVID-19.
- The [government website](#) with details of many aspects of their response to COVID-19.
- [NHS111 on-line](#) which has a symptom checker and further advice.
- Public Health England have provided some guidance on [looking after mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).
- [Health at home](#) – is a webpage that gives an overview of NHS services that are available, such as how to order repeat prescriptions online and get them delivered.
- Finally [our own website](#) has some useful links as well as information about using our own services and video consultations with an NHS GP using the LIVI video app.

Don't avoid seeking medical advice

We would like to reassure everyone that the surgery and the local hospitals are still functioning and are currently not overwhelmed by the increased demand caused by the coronavirus. We are very grateful that almost everyone seems to be following the guidance on social distancing and shielding, which has greatly reduced the spread of the virus. We are also grateful that many people appear to be self-managing their health conditions and are trying not to burden the health service. However, apart from coronavirus cases, we and the Emergency Department are seeing an overall decrease in demand, which makes us worry that people may be too zealous at avoiding the health service. It is very important that health issues are still dealt with and that if you or a family member is unwell, that you make contact with us (or 111 or LIVI), so a health care professional can assess the situation. This could include early signs of possible cancer, strokes or TIA's, abdominal pain and so on. It also includes getting advice on your child's condition. In some instances people have left it too late and have been more unwell than necessary by the time they have asked for help. We are still here!

Guidance of Advance Care Plans

Some of you may have seen messages in the press or on social media about 'do not resuscitate' (DNR) forms and Advance Care Plans that include personal wishes. This is clearly a delicate area and not everyone is wishing to engage in conversations about this. If you would like to receive more information in written form, which explains this in more detail, please send an email to looe.letters@nhs.net and we'll send an information sheet to you. The main message is to start having conversations about your personal wishes for example about going to hospital or resuscitation, so if you become more unwell, this has either been written down, or your relatives are aware of them. But as mentioned above, the local hospitals are still able to treat patients when necessary.

Thank You!

We would like to thank many patients and local businesses and organisations for their good wishes and support.

So many have provided physical (or edible!) support, and we are extremely grateful for their generosity and support. These include:

- West Looe Town Trust for their extremely generous donation to help fund Personal Protection Equipment (PPE).
- Looe and District ACHE for kindly purchasing 'scrubs' and some new equipment.
- Local volunteers for making or crowdfunding additional 'scrubs' for our clinical staff to wear.
- The Cody Shack for helping to secure the marquee.
- Sarah's Pasties, Looe Bakery, Martin's Bakery and Morrison's for their wonderful cakes and Easter eggs.

Finally, thank you for continuing to support the NHS, to stay at home and save lives. We are grateful for individual offers of good wishes and encouragement, and our staff, our cleaners and other vital key workers across the community continue to be 'touched' by the Thursday clap – and sing! We appreciate knowing we have the support of our local community at this challenging time. Thank you.

Old Bridge Surgery