



On the Ridge. . . . (No 33)

Winter/Spring 2022

Newsletter from the Ridgeway Surgery Patient Group



Ridgeway staff's special Saturday vaccination clinic for usually housebound patients with RSPG Committee helpers

In this issue....

- RSPG News & your suggestions please for future talks
- Our Macmillan Coffee morning 2021
- Surgery Matters & meet some more of the Team
- Why volunteer?
- Dealing with uncertainty
- Why do I feel tired all the time?
- Eczema
- Exploring & enjoying our local green spaces
- Thinking about recovery from illness
- Central & NW London Covid Co-production Communities Group

RSPG News & Suggestions please for future talks

Looking back to this time last year so much unfortunately remains the same. The pandemic is still with us, our Ridgeway staff are continuing to care for us whilst also giving their time and skill at one of Harrow's vaccination centres. Your committee continues to try to support both you as patients and Ridgeway staff through our regular meetings.

There have however, been some bright spots too. As you can see from the next item, we were able to hold our Macmillan Coffee morning once again last September and raised a bumper amount. Also, we are pleased to have recruited 3 new committee members and, with the help of Drs Lloyd and Katwa, we finally held our much delayed AGM in November. Those who attended our Zoom AGM were able to send in their questions in advance and we even managed some interactive discussion on the questions raised by you and by Dr Lloyd to us. A question about face to face appointments was interesting as we were asked to compare our patient perception about the number of doctors available in the surgery on a given day to respond to our needs. We were all way out in guessing and estimated the number to be between 2 and 8 when in reality there were 11 doctors available on that day!

Some other examples of bright spots have been the reopening of the branch surgery at the Alex, an improved and more welcoming telephone message when we phone the surgery and an agreement to find the best online software programme from April 2022 once the surgery's current contract comes to an end. Your committee also gave volunteer support at the special Saturday pop up vaccination clinic at The Ridgeway for the normally housebound patients. For some of us this was a real eye opener about the level of frailty and disability of many patients who are only able to continue to live at home with the help of family, friends, neighbours and 2 dedicated specialist nurses from the surgery. From June 2020 we arranged and hosted 5 Health Education talks. The slides from all of these remain available to all patients. You just have to send us an email with your request to rspatientgroup@hotmail.com. We shall plan more talks later in the year so your suggestions for topics to our email address are most welcome.

It was particularly concerning but not surprising to learn from Dr Lloyd at our AGM the findings from 2 recent British Medical Association (BMA) surveys. In relation to the survey on GP morale, 51% of respondents reported currently suffering from depression, anxiety, stress, burnout or other mental health conditions. 47% plan to work fewer hours after the pandemic and 10% plan to leave the NHS altogether. The second survey concerned abuse against doctors and colleagues and was equally upsetting. Indeed we reported on that marked increase in our last newsletter.

As we know these are very stressful times for all of us. Often we are reminded by reports in the media of the deterioration in the mental health of many of us and the concern about the impact of Covid on the education and general wellbeing of our children as well as the struggle to make ends meet for many families. It is at times like these that we do have to continue to try to pull together. With this in mind some items in this newsletter build on this theme by focusing on volunteering and on finding enjoyment in our local green spaces to keep ourselves safe, healthy and in touch with others too.

Not yet a member of RSPG? It's free—just click on Patients' Group on the surgery website & follow the link.

Macmillan Coffee Morning 2021

With the help of St Alban Church we were able once again to hold our annual fundraising event for this very important charity. The grassed area in front of the church was ideal and the sun was shining on us too. Our surgery supported us as always by receiving cakes donated by patients on the previous day. Despite the last minute requirement for Harrow's mayor, Cllr Ghazanfar Ali, to attend an important meeting in inner London, he and the Lady mayoress still managed to pay us a visit very early while the committee were setting up the stalls. This year with St Alban, your help and that of passers by, we were able to raise £1,213.75!



Setting up the raffle stall



Posing with the Mayor & Mayoress



Serving the drinks



Thirsty work!



The drinks are over there.....



A smile for the camera

Surgery Matters

General Practice is changing and developing and The Ridgeway now has a wider clinical team.

We have several groups of new roles at the surgery. All of them have given us a lot of extra help with vaccination and care of patients during the covid pandemic. We are doing many more appointments than we did 2-3 years ago, as well as dealing with covid support (eg: vaccination and the hot hub). Our hope is that having extra clinicians will make it easier for you to get help when you need it. Some roles are familiar- **GPs and GP trainees** (qualified doctors learning extra skills to work as GPs)

Practice nurses- have worked in general practice for a long time and deal with many groups of patients including childhood and other immunisations. They help people manage long term conditions such as diabetes, asthma and hypertension, complex wound care eg: post operative and leg ulcers and women's healthcare eg: smears and contraception.

Most of our nurses have advanced qualifications that allow them to prescribe medication and see people with minor illnesses. Several of our nurses specialise in dealing with frail patients of all ages.

Health care assistants- perform a wide range of medical tasks including dressings, phlebotomy (blood tests), injections and immunisations, health checks and screening.

New roles include:-

Practice pharmacists. Our pharmacists have lots of extra training in dealing with all your medication. They will help you make sense of your medication to be sure you are on the safest combinations, that you get all the necessary check-ups, and that it is made as easy as possible for you to order repeat medication. They can also give immunisations and help with queries about minor illnesses

Our paramedics have had extra training about primary care, as well as all the training to work as the paramedics you usually see in the ambulance service.

At The Ridgeway our paramedics are proving invaluable in the vaccine programme, in helping people with minor illnesses and in helping sort out problems for house-bound patients.

Physician associates are healthcare professionals with science degrees and then a very intensive 2-year course on medicine, so they have had a lot of training. They may call you to help you with queries about minor illnesses or ongoing long-term conditions.

Did you know that we are a training practice? This means that at times we also have medical students, nursing students and physician associate students who are often able to spend a bit of extra time with you when you have a problem.

All students are supervised by one of our experienced clinical educators

Finding out about your Test results: -

In response to patient feedback, we have introduced changes to our test result process.

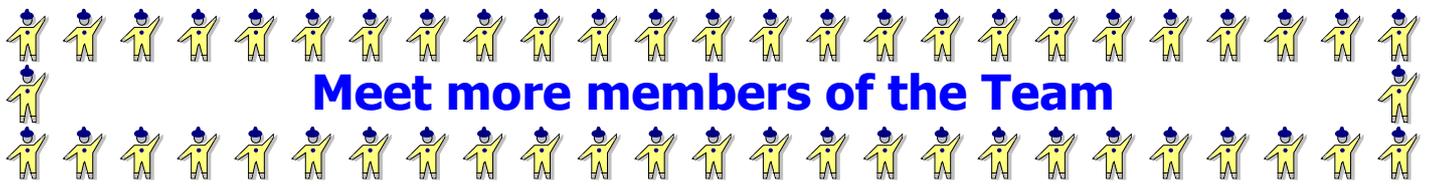
What do these changes mean?

When you are asked to have a test (such as a blood, urine, stool, or scan/X-ray) by one of clinicians, they should indicate the method by which they will follow-up with you.

Clinicians also now have additional information they can communicate with you via text message if you have a mobile telephone regarding your test results, and reception are also able to give you this information if you are speaking to them.

We welcome feedback from patients on this so we can ensure we continue to make our test result process as effective and patient friendly as possible.

Andrew Slater, Practice Manager



Meet more members of the Team



Dr Malvika Dalal joined The Ridgeway over 6 years ago. Medicine was in her family as her mother was a gynaecologist and obstetrician. Initially she thought she might follow the same path but General Practice was a better fit with marriage and family life, (two daughters) and looking back, she is happy that she made this choice. General Practice is a specialism which allows for both continuity of care and a holistic approach. Both of these are aspects which have real appeal to her 'with continuity comes the development of a trusting patient/doctor relationship' and 'you can see the patient as a whole'. Nowadays GPs are looking after an increasing number of those with long term conditions and with many reviews of care coming to GPs rather than staying with the hospital, this is even more important.

Dr Dalal has a particular interest in 'lifestyle' medicine which encourages healthy eating, (no processed food) regular exercise and the importance of looking after oneself. She believes that a plant based diet brings particular health benefits although, as she recognizes, not everyone follows this. Other interests are family planning so that every pregnancy is a planned one, the menopause and hormone replacement therapy.

Away from work she certainly follows an active lifestyle; playing badminton twice a week, daily walks and a new plan to incorporate skipping into her early morning exercise.

Victoria Nolan became a member of the Reception Team in September 2019. Previously she had worked as a receptionist for an optician and was often bored but at The Ridgeway it is very different. She enjoys being part of a team. At times she may be based at the Alex dealing with patients who are referred by the 111 service or by other surgeries. These are patients with Covid who are being monitored in the community. 'A particular pleasure was being involved in the admin work at Tithe Farm and being part of the vaccine rollout.'



Reception work has challenges too. The hardest part is having to say to a patient that no appointments are available on the day that they request one. In such circumstances she has to advise the patient to try again on the next day but at times the patient will be unsuccessful again. Then they may well feel let down as, having followed this advice, still no appointment was available. Often she will get to know a particular patient and that familiar contact is rewarding.

Outside of work she enjoys reading and crocheting. If you were in the surgery last year you may well have seen her handmade teddies with their NHS PPE. We hope that she will have some to sell at our next Macmillan Coffee morning!

Why volunteer?

Volunteering allows us to connect to our community and make it a better place. ... And volunteering is a two-way street: It can benefit us and our family as much as the cause we choose to help. Dedicating our time as a volunteer helps us make new friends, expand our network, and boost our social skills. See a recent example of staff and RSPG committee members coming together for a special weekend vaccination session at the surgery on the title page of this newsletter.

So, what are the benefits of volunteering?

1. Volunteering connects us to others
2. It is good for our mind and body
3. It can advance our career
4. Volunteering can bring fun and fulfilment to our life



Benefit 1: Volunteering connects us to others

A well-known benefit of volunteering is the impact on the community. Even helping out with the smallest tasks can make a real difference to the lives of people, animals, and organizations in need. It is a two-way street: It can benefit us and our family as much as the cause we choose to help.

Make new friends and contacts: One of the best ways to make new friends and strengthen existing relationships is to commit to a shared activity together. It is a great way to meet new people, especially if we are new to an area. It strengthens our ties to the community and broadens our support network. We meet people with common interests, tap into neighbourhood resources, and fun and fulfilling activities.

Increasing our social and relationship skills: While some people are naturally outgoing, others are shy and have a hard time meeting new people. Volunteering gives us the opportunity to practice and develop our social skills, since we are meeting regularly with a group of people with common interests. In addition, we all know that our children are more likely to do as we do and if we volunteer as a family we will be showing our children how volunteering makes a difference, how good it is to help others and animals too and bring about change. It's also a way for us to find resources and activities for our own children.

Benefit 2: It is good for our mind and body and provides many benefits to both mental and physical health

Volunteering helps to counteract the effects of stress, anger and anxiety. Helping and working with others can have a profound effect on our overall psychological wellbeing. Having this connection is a good way to relieve stress. If you prefer to work with pets and other animals this has the same effect too. It is a good way to combat depression as it keeps you in contact with others and helps you to develop a strong support system. It increases self confidence, gives a sense of purpose and acts as an encouragement to stay physically active.

What about those who are disabled or have limited mobility? Whether due to a disability, lack of transportation or limited time some of us may choose to volunteer via the phone or computer. Nowadays many organisations need help with writing, graphic design, email and other web based tasks. As this means working alone, it is still important to have some social contact and get help with the task if needed.

Benefit 3: Volunteering can advance your career

When thinking of a new career, volunteering can help you get experience in your area of interest and meet people in the field. Even if you're not planning on changing careers, volunteering gives you the opportunity to practice important

skills used in the workplace, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, project planning, task management, and organization. You might feel more comfortable stretching your wings at work once you've honed these skills in a volunteer position first. Several youngsters got their first taste of a work environment last year when giving non medical support to our vaccinators at Tithe Farm and in due course this experience will make a useful contribution to their CV too.

Benefit 4: Volunteering brings fun and fulfilment to your life

Volunteering is a fun and easy way to explore our interests and passions. In volunteering we can find meaning and interest and it can be a relaxing, energizing escape from our day-to-day routine of work, school, or family commitments. Volunteering also provides us with renewed creativity, motivation and a vision that can carry over into our personal and professional life.

Remember that when it comes to volunteering, passion and positivity are the only things we need! So bear in mind that the most valuable assets that any of us can bring are compassion, an open mind, a willingness to pitch in wherever needed plus a 'can do' attitude.

Taken from: <https://helpguide.org>articles>healthy-living>

Dealing with uncertainty

The December issue of Harrow Healthwatch contains several interesting articles and information on resources too. In the resource section the Central and NW London NHS Trust writes " We've published an e-workbook for children and young people on dealing with uncertainty: This online practical workbook has lots of helpful information, tools and activities that young people can use at any time when they're struggling with uncertainty, not just during the pandemic".

Paula Arriazu, a Counselling Psychologist who specialises in helping people deal with trauma at the Grenfell Health and Wellbeing Service (GHWS) said:

"Going into the first national lockdown in March 2020 left many of us feeling lost, worried and confused. At GHWS, we had to rethink how to connect with young people remotely and we also had to refocus our interventions to truly address what children and young people (and all of us!) were finding most difficult:- dealing with uncertainty. This booklet is the result of this thinking, the interventions that followed together with the feedback of the people that took part in them. It offers information, examples and tools to understand and manage such uncertainty- give it a go and let us know what you think!

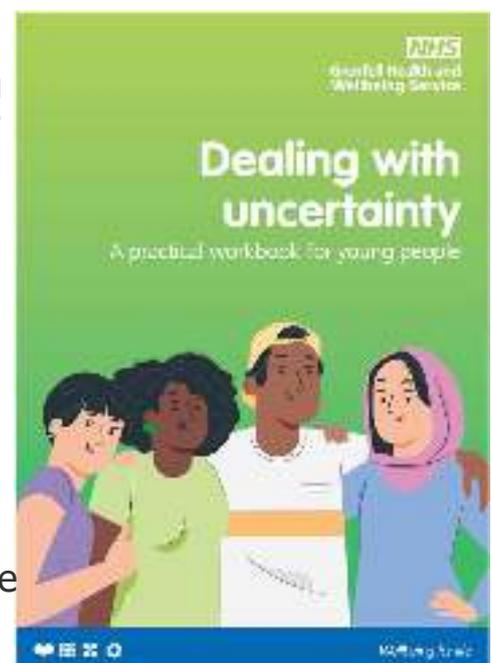
We hope it will be helpful for children and young people struggling with uncertainty, through and after the Covid 19 Pandemic."

You can download this booklet by going to:

[Healthwatch Harrow Newsletter, December 2021.](#)

Scroll down to **Resources** on page 9 and click on the diagonal arrow link **More**

This December issue also invites patient participation in a survey on GP online consultation services, plus a review of Community Based Palliative Care (the care and support given to those with advanced progressive and/or incurable conditions) as well as a link to free courses on age related hearing loss.



Why do I feel tired all the time?

While an occasional drop in energy is usually nothing to worry about, feeling constantly tired could be a sign of another medical problem. These conditions include anaemia, an underactive thyroid gland or type 2 diabetes. So, if you are exhausted all the time and find this is affecting your day-to-day life, consult your GP. They will be able to investigate your fatigue and offer appropriate treatment. This health problem is one of the most common out there yet it can be the hardest to pin down.

Feeling tired all the time might simply indicate that you're not getting enough shut-eye. Depending on your particular circumstances, this problem should be easy enough to fix. But if you're feeling truly exhausted, and can't pin it on any obvious cause, the situation might require a bit more attention. Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard, a past chair of the Royal College of GPs, says: 'Feeling tired after a long and busy day can affect all of us from time to time. It is a natural response to pushing ourselves hard. This can often be rectified by getting a good night's sleep, eating well, and keeping hydrated. But it's important to be aware of the difference between normal tiredness, which is very common, and abnormal fatigue.' If you have the kind of tiredness that doesn't go away, even after a good night's sleep, it may be worth investigating the situation more closely. This is especially the case if you're experiencing other symptoms, have been tired for more than four weeks, or think you might have an underlying condition.



GP and the clinical director of Patient.info Dr Sarah Jarvis says. 'Tiredness isn't a disease, it's a symptom - and one we've all suffered at some point. There may be an obvious cause, like jet lag or disturbed nights. But if your tiredness doesn't settle or if it is affecting your life, it's worth getting it checked.'

Psychological causes: Often, the causes are psychological, which is not to say the exhaustion is somehow 'all in your head'. Rather, if you're going through a particularly stressful period, be that a house move or a hectic time at work, you'll often feel drained as a result. For one thing, you may not be sleeping as well as normal. For another, if you're under stress, your body goes into 'fight or flight' mode, sparking up a series of hormonal and physiological changes. If this stress response is activated frequently, you may end up feeling fatigued.

Some alternative medicine practitioners refer to this kind of tiredness calling it 'adrenal fatigue' and say this occurs because you are unable to produce the amount of adrenaline you need. This is not a proven medical condition, however, and you should steer clear of remedies that promise to cure it.

Although some life stress is unavoidable, it's particularly important to seek help if you think you may be suffering with anxiety, depression or another mental health condition like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These conditions are often accompanied by fatigue, as well as sleep problems like insomnia. Of course there is no simple blood test or scan to diagnose depression. However, 'if you've also been feeling down, depressed or hopeless, or haven't been enjoying life as

much as you were, depression could lie at the root of your tiredness,' points out Dr Jarvis.

Some people feel caught in a vicious circle, in which their depression exacerbates their insomnia and their insomnia exacerbates their depression. Although there can be a temptation to self-medicate with alcohol, it's best to steer clear as this can make both problems worse.

Taken from: patient.info/news-and-features/reasons-you-feel-tired-all-the-time

Eczema



Atopic eczema is a common skin condition where the skin is itchy, dry, cracked and sore. 'Atopy' means a genetic disposition to develop an allergic reaction and you are more likely to develop atopic eczema if you have allergies or there are other family members with conditions like eczema, asthma or hay fever. It is more common in children often starting before the first birthday but it can develop later in life.

Whilst atopic eczema can affect any part of the body, it most often affects the hands, insides of the elbows, backs of the knees and the face and scalp in children. People who have eczema usually have periods when symptoms are less noticeable, as well as periods when they become more severe. Such times are called 'flare-ups'.

When should you seek medical advice ?

See a GP when you have symptoms as they will usually be able to make a diagnosis by looking at your skin or seeing a photo of it and asking questions such as: -

- Whether the rash is itchy and where it appears
- When the symptoms first began
- Whether it comes and goes over time
- Whether there is a history of atopic eczema in your family
- Whether you have any other conditions such as allergies or asthma

You will also be asked whether something in your diet or lifestyle might be contributing to your symptoms

Typically, to be diagnosed with eczema you should have had an itchy skin condition in the last 12 months.

What treatments are available?

Whilst there is no cure, treatments such as emollients (moisturisers) -used on a daily basis to stop the skin becoming dry, topical corticosteroids (special creams and ointments) - used when there are flare-ups to reduce swelling and redness as well as antihistamines for severe itching are prescribed. Also, many children find that their skin improves as they get older.

Taken from: www.nhs.uk/atopic-eczema. **Note:** lots more useful information is available on this NHS site and from the **National Eczema Society:** www.eczema.org

Living with the unrelenting
itch of eczema?
We can give you a helping hand

Helpline: 0800 448 0818
Website: www.eczema.org

Exercise outside in Harrow

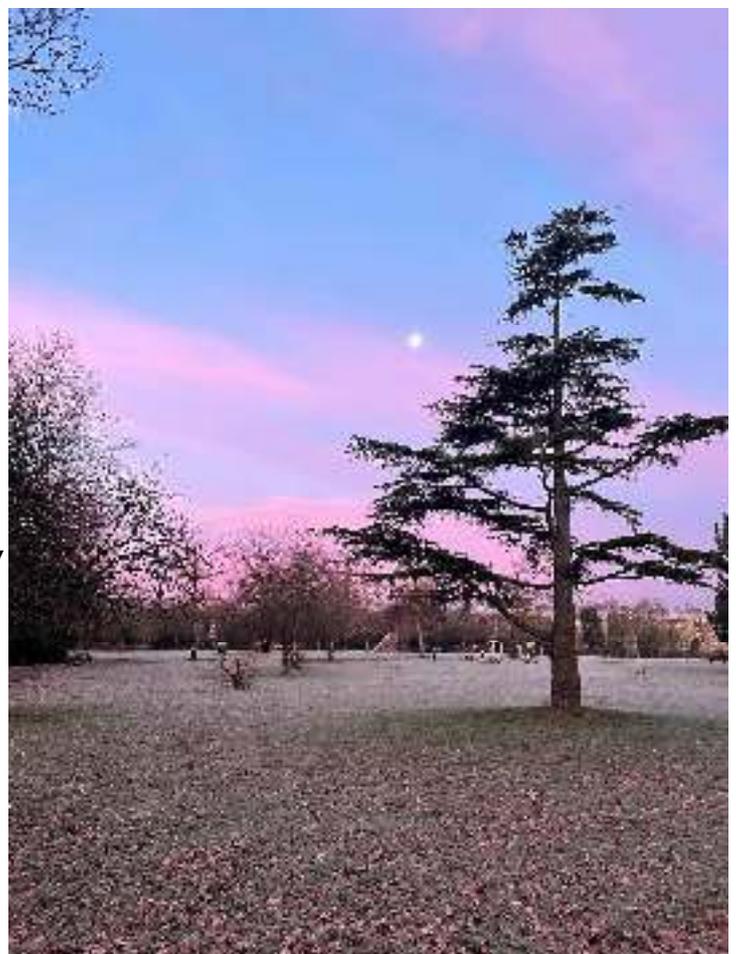
<https://amp.theguardian.com/environment/2021/dec/04/woodland-walks-save-uk-185m-a-year-in-mental-health-costs-report-finds>

Those of you who visit me as patients know that I am a morning person, a great believer in positive lifestyle actions to improve health.

One of the ways I tried to help myself cope with life during COVID was by walking to work- I was so grateful for being to create a zigzag route maximising green spaces. Even on cold or wet days I ended up in a positive mood by the time I reached the surgery. I also grew vegetables in three containers in my garden - watching things grow felt positive, and just as exciting as when I had a whole allotment.

There are many pieces of evidence that 'green' activity has extra health benefits- both for physical and mental wellbeing. Lockdown was most devastating for those in small single rooms or flats with no gardens. Many people are still very anxious as we have lived with uncertainty for so many months. Exercise outside may be one of the ways of helping anxiety.

Several of our local green spaces have had work done on them during the pandemic, and most welcome help. You don't have to be a gardener either as volunteers to join the litter pickers and leaf clearing brigade are welcome too. The green spaces all have paved paths that are flat for easy walking or using a wheelchair. I have listed some. If you have ideas of other local options, do let us know. The PPG and I will collect and add to a list on the website.



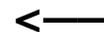
**Yeading Walk,
North Harrow**



**A frosty morning
in Pinner Village
Gardens**



**A community event in
Pinner Village Gardens
last summer**



If you are stuck inside at home, Carry on Gardening has ideas for gardening, even in containers or on your windowsill.

<https://friendsofpvg.org.uk> Pinner Village Gardens

<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofWestHarrowPark/>

<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofYeadingWalk/>

https://www.harrowncof.org/Newton_Farm_leaflet.pdf

<https://en-gb.facebook.com/FriendsofRaynersMead/>

<http://harrownleaf.org.uk/groups.html>

<https://www.carryongardening.org.uk/default.aspx>

Dr Etherington

Thinking about recovery from illness

We have heard a lot about long Covid and the struggle to recover for some of us from this and from other such conditions. A recent article in 'The Guardian' written by Gavin Francis, a GP, gave some useful suggestions about how we might better understand this process and move forward. Here are some extracts from his article.

'Everyone has a different tempo of convalescence, and will require different strategies. It's normal that the process can be slow, and normal, too, for long-term illness to vary in its manifestations from person to person. Protracted symptoms from viral infections may differ enormously between different individuals, but can include varying amounts of breathlessness, difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, mood changes, insomnia, weight loss, weight gain, exhaustion, muscle weakness, joint stiffness and flashbacks. When I see patients troubled by these kinds of problems, I try to emphasise that to experience them isn't evidence that recovery has stalled, or is going into reverse. On the contrary, those symptoms are evidence that the body and mind are reacting and changing in response to the illness – and where there's change, there's hope. There is a booklet I hand out to people with ongoing symptoms of Covid-19, written by local physiotherapists, that emphasises the importance of this "pacing" approach to recovery. It's an attitude I've benefited from myself.'

'All worthwhile acts of recovery have to work in concert with natural processes, not against them. Many antibiotics don't "kill" bacteria as such, but merely inhibit the growth of bacterial colonies and leave the body to do the rest. A doctor who sets out to "heal" is in truth more like a gardener who sets out to "grow" – actually, nature does almost all the work. Even when I stitch a patient's wound, the suture material itself does not knit the tissues – that thread is simply a trellis to guide the body in its own work of healing.'

Taken from: <https://www.com>world>/2022/jan/we-need-to-respect-the-process-of-healing-a-gp-on-the-overlooked-art-of-recovery>

Central & NW London Covid Co-production Communities Group



Is there a way that we as patients make a difference to our health services? Our Central and NW London (CNWL) NHS Foundation Trust has set up a dedicated team for this purpose. The team has a responsibility to work with the public and all of those who use our health services to make sure that patients and carers have a say in how they do things. The belief is that involving people with lived experience leads to better services and better outcomes. They look at all patient and carer feedback and help services to use these to make local improvements.

See: cnwl.nhs.uk/patients-and-carers/patient-and-carer
Contact: by email: involvement.cnwl@nhs.net
by phone: 020 3317 3735