



On the Ridge. . . . (No 36)

Summer/Autumn 2023



Having a good time at North Harrow Library & Community Centre

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RSPG News & Events for your diary

At the time of writing your committee remains without a Chairperson but that certainly does not mean that our activities have ceased. Regular committee meetings with surgery representatives are continuing with 3 long-standing committee members taking the lead on various patient matters, liaising and working with our surgery. We continue to give the surgery our experience of Patchs and recently we have been encouraged by the expansion of this way of contacting the surgery. The Monday morning request numbers are always high and recently more than 170 such requests could be given a prompt response - this is a far cry from the initial 30 slots which were available at the beginning when staff were trying to get to grips with the new software. Furthermore, together with Ridgeway staff, we have been successful in applying to take part in a pilot scheme with the Patchs software company who will be developing the use of Patchs for patients who cannot use a digital system.

At a regional level a member of the committee attends the NHS across North West London meetings with other representatives of Patient Participation Groups (PPG's). NHS NW London is responsible for planning, buying and monitoring most of the health services that we patients use. This is our chance to give the patient feedback on issues such as the availability of appointments including Face to Face ones, support for carers and on other matters of patient concern. You may also remember that there were plans for all the practices belonging to our HealthSense Primary Care Network (PCN) to amalgamate. Whilst close cooperation continues and many additional staff have been appointed with PCN money, the plan now is to remain as a federation rather than become one very large GP practice.

For some patients actually getting to the surgery is impossible without help with transport so it is of concern to learn from a patient that the taxi card service is short of drivers and for this reason it has become unreliable.

Since Covid restrictions were lifted we have been able to resume hosting our free Cardiac Pulmonary Resuscitation courses at the surgery. Recently there has been a change of name and these courses are now called London Life Savers. On the 4 courses held since we were able to resume these sessions 35 patients were trained. Do look out for publicity giving the date of our next free evening course which will be taking place at The Ridgeway as usual.



The April Health Education talk on 'Dementia - a medical and a social issue' was given at our AGM by Dr Lloyd. The response to our publicity was overwhelming so we asked the first 100 patients applying to attend to confirm that they would definitely be coming. In this way we hoped to admit those on our waiting list if some people's plans had changed. On the evening and despite this request, only 60 of the initial confirmed attendees turned up so that others were unnecessarily excluded. Knowing that our most recent talk, 'Communication and Continuity of Care' would be particularly popular, we temporarily extended our Zoom license and received additional and much needed assistance on the evening from surgery staff to allow more patients to attend. More than 85 did so. The talk was recorded and is

available. Requests should be made via rspatientgroup@hotmail.com.

RSPG's next event - Annual fundraising for Macmillan Cancer

**RIDGEWAY SURGERY PATIENT GROUP IS HOSTING
OUR ANNUAL MACMILLAN COFFEE MORNING
IN ST ALBAN CHURCH**

YOU WILL BE ABLE TO

- ♦ **Meet the Mayor**
- ♦ **Donate cakes & savouries**
- ♦ **Take part in the Raffle Draw & win Amazing Prizes**
- ♦ **Make a cash donation at this event or online on our Just Giving page link below:**

**[https://coffeefundraising.macmillan.org.uk/
fundraising.cm23023050](https://coffeefundraising.macmillan.org.uk/fundraising.cm23023050)**

- all money raised goes to Macmillan Cancer Support

WHERE: St Alban Church, The Ridgeway, HA2 7PF

WHEN: Friday, 29 September 2023

TIME: 10am to 1.00 pm



**MACMILLAN COFFEE MORNINGS ARE ONE OF THE
BIGGEST FUNDRAISING EVENTS TO SUPPORT PEOPLE
LIVING WITH CANCER**

Please join us & bring your family & friends

Surgery Matters from Andrew Slater, Practice Manager

Dear All

In response to common comments received via patient feedback during 2022/23, we made changes to how we work to meet your needs.

This is what patients said:

- PATCHS (online consultation submissions) not available for majority of time
- Patients told by reception to call back at 8am the following day to access the system
- All appointments being by telephone in the first instance is not popular

We made the following changes from June 2023

- Increased the number of PATCHS that can be submitted and the availability times for submission
- Instructed reception to log all routine enquiries to prevent patients needing to call back
- For patients who cannot use the internet, for reception to continue to receive these requests by phone
- Used a dedicated clinician to triage all PATCHS to ensure patients are booked with the right person at the right time in the right place, to help maximise our same day capacity

In July 2023 how did we compare to the national and local picture?

The Ridgeway offered 432 face-to-face appointments per thousand patients compared to a national average of 325 and an average of local practices of 267. The percentage of patients booked in for a same day appointment in the same time period was 54% at Ridgeway compared to national and local averages of 40% and 41% respectively.

In July 2023 RSPG worked with the practice to hold a talk for patients where we shared how patients could best use the practice. At this event we heard about some areas where the practice could make further improvements.

1. Better communication and understanding on following up test results
2. More information regarding how to overcome IT barriers in accessing PATCHS / Patient Access / NHS App on patient devices

Work is continuing to improve in these areas. We shall also put together videos and other materials to help. Note that to use PATCHS you have to use your internet browser on your computer or smartphone. Go to ridgeway-surgery.co.uk and click on the large PATCHS logo which is now at the top of the page and sign up by using either your personal login or your NHS login.

Finally: Use PATCHS to tell us when you need help.

Use Patient Access / NHS App to request repeat prescriptions and to view your medical record.

If you cannot use the internet, call us and request prescriptions via your pharmacy .

Meet the Personalised Care Team **promoting our wellbeing**

Staff in this team represent a broader way of thinking about our health and wellbeing. We know that stress, loneliness, lack of physical activity and a lack of knowledge about benefits and other help to which we may be entitled may all have an adverse effect on our health. So a referral to someone in the personalised care team is designed to give support in non medical ways. Developing the role of the Social Prescriber as a member of such a team, has been encouraged by the NHS since 2014. However, recently and with money from HealthSense, there has been a further development in personalised care with the additional appointment of the Wellbeing Coach. The first consultation with a member of the team will focus both on exploring what is important to us and on our current wellbeing. During such an unhurried discussion local activities or services from which we might benefit may be identified. There is also ongoing support through follow up appointments.



Sharon Bergeron is our Social Prescriber employed by HealthSense PCN in the Personalised Care Team. She has an MSc in Psychology and she has worked in Mental Health Support before taking up her current post.

Patients are referred by one of our clinicians who think that they would benefit from a discussion with Sharon. Depending on the nature of the referral, she responds with a telephone appointment or a face to face one. If all that is needed is pointing someone in the right direction for information then a phone call will suffice. However, if a patient's needs are more complicated Sharon sets up a face to face meeting with time to talk and work out together what help would be most useful. Sometimes a referral to Harrow's Adult Social Care Team for an assessment could be the next step or at other times help to take advantage of a service in the community is the way forward.

Replying to a question about what she likes to do outside of work, Sharon said that she plays badminton regularly. Also, before coming to The Ridgeway, she was living in Scotland so now in her spare time she is enjoying finding out what London has to offer.



James McDonnell is one of two Wellbeing Coaches. His colleague is Gee Gahir. Like Sharon they are employed by HealthSense PCN. This too is a non clinical job focusing on healthy lifestyle, stress management and long term conditions. Such Wellbeing posts are a new role in the NHS and a first for Harrow. James' background is in fitness and he previously worked across 3 leisure centres where he set up a range of activities. He has also had extra training in health and wellbeing.

At present patients are referred by doctors and nurses. Up to 6 sessions are offered to give the patient the opportunity to think about what they would like to achieve and to set their own goals. James is very clear that Wellbeing Coaches provide encouragement and help to build confidence and behaviour change. However, they do not tell patients what to do.

Away from work James enjoys football, music, travelling and especially his baby of 7 months.

How can we stop worrying about our health if we have health or cardiac anxiety?

When we have had a heart attack, surgery or been diagnosed with a heart condition, it's normal to feel more concerned about our health. But sometimes this can get in the way of living our life.

Dr Kelly Buttigieg, psychologist at Imperial College NHS Trust in London, explains: "Health anxiety is when you spend so much time worrying you're ill, or about getting ill, that it affects your quality of life, even though you might not have any underlying condition. Cardiac anxiety is when you have a heart problem or have had a cardiac event, but your worries are disproportionate and are having a negative effect on your daily life. " Either type of anxiety can be difficult to live with so if it's affecting our lives, it's important to get help. Dr Buttigieg's colleague, Dr Vicky McKechnie adds: "Confusingly, some symptoms of feeling anxious (such as noticing your heart racing, feeling breathless, being sweaty) can feel similar to symptoms experienced during a cardiac event, like a heart attack." [Anxiety](#) can lead to "avoidance behaviour. " Dr Kelly Buttigieg, who's also a psychologist at Imperial, explains: "People can fear that normal physical activities might trigger another cardiac event, and so they might avoid [exercise](#) that can actually help improve their health."



Top tips for managing your health worries

1. Talk to your doctor or nurse

If this sounds familiar, speak to your [cardiac rehab](#) specialist or GP. They can help you to understand whether symptoms you're experiencing are due to a heart problem, and how to manage them. They can also give guidance on which activities are safe for you, tell you how regularly you should monitor your health, and point out reliable sources of information.

If you get invited to cardiac rehab, don't miss the opportunity. It can be a helpful place to talk to someone about your recovery and get support to get back to exercise and your normal life.

Get more information about [cardiac rehabilitation](#)

2. Set a "worry time"

If difficult thoughts pop up regularly, it can help to write them down. "Whether in a diary or on your phone, record your worries as they come up. You might wish to set aside a particular time of the day or the week, it could be just 20 minutes, to sit down with these thoughts," says Dr Buttigieg.

"In a calmer moment, you might think, 'Is there a more helpful or realistic way that I can think about this?'" explains Dr Buttigieg. "For example, someone might worry about sensations in their chest. Then they gently challenge this by reminding themselves of advice provided by their doctor and then have a more balanced thought: 'My latest medical tests show no new problems and my cardiologist suggested this sensation is likely to be tension-related.'"

3. Practise mindfulness or relaxation

Dr Buttigieg has seen how practising relaxation techniques has helped her clients to feel less anxious. She recommends techniques including:

- diaphragmatic breathing, also known as deep or belly breathing
- progressive muscle relaxation (where you tense and relax muscles while breathing in and out)
- practising mindfulness or meditation

4. Make goals easy to achieve

If you're working to overcome anxiety, you might need to do things that make you feel a little anxious, in order to overcome it. But it's counterproductive to force yourself to do things that make you very anxious," says Dr McKechnie. Sharing goals with loved ones can help for example "Say someone is too nervous to walk far, even though their health professional has told them they are okay to do so. They could start by saying, 'I'm going to walk 300 metres up and down the road; I'll take my phone with me and tell someone where I am. I'll do that for a few days, until I feel confident, then gradually increase the distance.'" Dr Murray adds: "Sharing goals with loved ones can help. Support groups where you can talk with people in a similar situation can help you see that others share similar worries." Find a [BHF support group](#) or ask your doctor if they can suggest a support group.

5. Get reliable health information - but don't overdo it

When you're worried about your health, it can be natural to look for reassurance. Getting health information from reliable sources can help reduce your anxiety. But if we continually look for reassurance this can cause problems. "This might mean constantly looking up information on the internet, checking your pulse 20 times before leaving the house, or asking for another echocardiogram when there's no medical reason to," explains Dr Buttigieg.

Four signs it might be time to get help

It's natural to feel some anxiety or be worried after a cardiac event, surgery, or diagnosis. But it may be a good idea to speak to a professional if your worries are:

- Preventing your return to normal life, even several months after your heart event (for example, you're afraid to leave the house or go back to work)
- Regularly keeping you awake at night
- Involve spending a lot of time thinking about your condition or seeking reassurance about it
- Seem very out of proportion to what your medical experts say (for example, if you find yourself going to A&E very often and each time you're told that you don't have any cardiac problems)

You can ask your GP for a referral for psychological therapy, or, if you live in England, you can refer yourself through the [NHS's IAPT service](#). You may be offered talking therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Taken from: [bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine /wellbeing/stop-worrying-about-health](https://bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/wellbeing/stop-worrying-about-health)

Amnesty for Walking Aids

Thousands of walking aids are given to patients every year but many are not returned when they are no longer needed. Northwick Park Hospital has a shortage of crutches, metal frames and walking sticks and physios are appealing for them to be returned if you no longer need them as discharges are delayed if no aid is available. Please note that only metal items are required.



The drop off point at NPH is Level 4, Physio Reception. If you prefer to drop off items locally, contact RSPG committee member Neelu on neeshvaree@hotmail.com as she will be pleased to take them to the hospital.

How to get rid of a Urinary Tract Infection

A UTI stands for urinary tract infection, also called a water infection. Cystitis, which means bladder infection, is the most common type, but you can also have a UTI in your kidneys or urethra. UTIs are caused by bacteria and are relatively common. They're more common in women than men, and occur more often as we get older. Dr Harry Ahmed, practicing GP and Senior Lecturer at Cardiff University, shares the common symptoms of a UTI and how to get rid of them.

What are the symptoms of a UTI and when to seek urgent advice?

If you have a UTI, you might have one or more of the following symptoms:

- needing to pee more often than usual
- feeling a burning or irritating sensation when peeing
- having pee that looks cloudy or has a strong smell
- having pain or discomfort in your back or lower tummy
- feeling tired, sick or losing your appetite



NHS says seek urgent advice if:

1. you have a very high or a very low temperature
2. are confused or drowsy
3. can see blood in your pee

Sometimes a UTI will go away on its own. Most people will need antibiotics. Some people may be prescribed a 'delayed antibiotic', which means that they will be asked only to use it if their symptoms don't go away after a certain amount of time. If you think you have UTI symptoms, you should speak to your GP to discuss treatment options. If your symptoms continue after treatment, you should seek medical advice to rule out anything else that might be causing the problem. Some people keep getting UTIs and if this is your experience, then your GP might recommend a low dose of antibiotics over a long period of time, or may refer you to a specialist for more tests and treatments. For women who have gone through menopause, there is evidence that vaginal oestrogen creams can reduce UTI symptoms.

How to prevent UTIs

Here are some things you can do yourself that may help prevent a UTI returning: -

- going to the toilet regularly during the day
- trying to completely empty your bladder when you go
- wiping from front to back, not the other way round
- going for a pee as soon as possible after sex

Are there home remedies for UTIs?

Very few of these have been proven by scientific evidence. Although cranberry juice is often thought to be helpful, to date research has not shown a clear benefit. However, clinical trials have shown that drinking more liquid than you normally do may help prevent recurrent UTIs.

Taken from:

1. Heart Matters: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/ask-the-experts/uti>
2. NHS inform, urinary tract infection

Looking after our feet to help prevent falls

Did you know that a quarter of our body's bones are found in our feet? An important way to look after them is to stand up and get moving because by keeping our feet strong and flexible we reduce any foot and ankle pain. However, problems with your feet can stop you getting out and about. They can also affect your balance and increase the risk of falling. So it's important to look after your feet, and report problems such as foot pain and decreased feeling to a healthcare professional

A simple foot routine will help keep your feet in good condition, including:

- wearing suitable socks and footwear
- keeping your toenails short
- regularly moisturising your feet
- checking for cracked skin, blisters and signs of infection.



Which types of shoes are best for our feet?

Many of us find that trainers or well-cushioned shoes are more comfortable than ordinary shoes and offer welcome support. These footwear tips can help us feel more confident on our feet.

- Always wear shoes or slippers. To avoid slips, never walk indoors in bare feet, socks or tights
- Wear shoes that fit well. High sided shoes with low heels, thin soles and a good grip are a good choice
- Avoid sandals and shoes with high heels
- Wear slippers that have a good grip and fasten up. Loose or worn out slippers may cause you to trip

Good nail care is important

Good nail care can help to keep feet feeling comfortable. Nails that are too long can press against the end of the shoe and the constant pressure can cause soreness. Toenails that have been poorly cut can also become ingrown.

If you're struggling to cut your own nails, you can try filing them regularly to keep them at a comfortable length or ask a friend or family member for help. If that is not an option, there is a Podiatry service at Alexandra Avenue so ask the surgery to refer you. Also, many local Age UKs offer toenail-cutting services and this service operates from a number of clinics.

If you have a long-term health condition such as diabetes, arthritis or circulatory problems, you're more likely to be at risk of complications. If this applies to you, seek advice from a Ridgeway healthcare professional.

Taken from: NHS inform/ Services

Polio & MMR: is your child protected?

Parents across London are being urged to ensure that their child's immunisations are up to date particularly for mumps, measles, rubella/German measles. (MMR) and polio. Current low rates mean an increased risk of an outbreak which could lead to serious illnesses such as meningitis and pneumonia. The NHS wants parents to make a GP appointment for this now. Your child's Health Record Book (red book) tells you if your child's routine immunisations are up to date.

Taken from: Healthwatch Harrow newsletter June 2022

North Harrow Community Library & RSPG

North Harrow Community Library runs a variety of activities both for children, such as Rhyme Time, and for adults, sessions on topics such as Genealogy, Citizens Advice Service, and Computer training. This winter it was one of Harrow's warm hubs - a welcome heated place to sit in nice surroundings, have a hot drink, and company if you wish to chat. Volunteers run the library. Many volunteers are RSPG members too.

Our Ridgeway surgery team, RSPG and library volunteers have been meeting at the library to see how surgeries and the community can work together to improve health and wellbeing at a time when budgets are tight, and both the NHS and social services are stretched. Following suggestions for health talks we have so far run sessions on immunisations and child health, healthy eating, and lifestyle. As well as Ridgeway team members our health visitor, social prescribers, new health and well-being coach and a Northwest London immunisation lead have attended to answer as many questions as possible.

Immunisations and child health events

About 30 children and guardians attended Rhyme Time, a safe and informal space to ask for information and advice about childhood immunisations. There was a mixed group of attendees, with many languages represented. We had information leaflets to hand in multiple languages. We talked about misinformation/confusing advice on the internet, the difference between one-off vaccines and courses of them, and gave some one to one advice to some parents and carers. We shared website /virtual resources. The main takeaway was that everyone loves stickers, and that, as a surgery, we needed to take time to sit and listen.

Healthy eating event

Representatives from the Ridgeway Surgery and Healthsense PCN teamed up with the Ridgeway Patient Participation Group and North Harrow Community Library to 'untangle' some of the complexities of Healthy Eating with the local Knitting Group and other members of the public.

The Personalised Care team of Justyna, James and Sharon introduced themselves and their roles as social prescribers and health and well-being coaches. Together they told us about the many NHS pathways that patients can access on their health journey. In response Dr Etherington asked "How can we link people to the best source of help for their particular situation?"

This led on to a discussion on topics such as the way that long-term conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol affect our diet through to the social aspects of health. Kamal Shah, Chair of the Community Library shared valuable experience of how loneliness affected the health of people in our community and he highlighted the value of groups and events such as these!

Dr Etherington shared some tools/strategies that could be accessed via a GP visit (Well Person checks, medication/diabetic injectables, blood glucose sensors) but also talked about how the choices we make at home have an impact on our health. We shared stories of which diets we have tried and what worked. From there a thought-provoking discussion took off raising issues about dieting versus making sustainable changes in your eating habits. Dr Etherington advised us to, "Be kind to ourselves!" when making changes in what we eat.

Geeta Patel from the RSPG shared her experience of changing some items in her healthy eating vegetarian diet when cooking for a diabetic family member. We heard the value of having a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in our diet and how changes like substituting brown flour for white or soaking/sprouting your pulses and legumes can be an easy way to make an impactful change. We particularly appreciated Geeta tackling the myth that frozen or tinned vegetables are less healthy than fresh, providing some practical cooking and eating advice for

people with busy lives looking for convenient and healthy food strategies.

Justyna and Sharon brought wonderful leaflets containing free or low-cost resources for improving our health. This sparked a group discussion on activities available in the local area, including Tai chi, yoga, walking groups, volunteering opportunities and Park Runs.

James provided us with some tips on how to work exercise into our week, including ways we can work out at home, or even when sitting down! Whilst talking about resources available through the PCN and the surgery, he provided information on the 'Exercise on Referral' programme. An audience member who had participated in this programme and found it an extremely positive and life-changing experience reinforced this.

Our audience also shared a lot of useful experience and asked questions as we discussed finding the right combination of strategies that work for you, be that investing in an air fryer, keeping food diaries, when to eat bananas to avoid too much sugar at once, or making sure to take a walk before or after meals. After the talk attendees were able to bring their healthy eating questions to our health professionals on a one to one basis so we were able to talk to people from many GP surgeries in the area – a really collaborative event!

This session represented the start of several of these events and if you have ideas for topics for future talks, please get in touch either via RSPG or the Community Library Team. Let us know too if you would like topics repeated. We are also planning to run some sessions in the evening or at a weekend.

Resources

Via the surgery: **Exercise on Referral** - available to most people with a long term condition including those identified in a Well Person Check (free at the surgery every five years for people aged 40-74, who are not already being regularly checked for a long term condition).

KnowDiabetes - has the most up to date information about resources in Harrow, and you can create a personalised page.

<https://www.shapeupharrow.com>

NHS Active 10 App for your phone - this helps you do ten minute blocks of moderate exercise

NHS - Better Health Weight



Article written by Dr Etherington & Kiran Lyn

Your Pharmacy - services & information

You can find a free copy of the magazine below in most local pharmacies and although there are many adverts, it has much useful information too. For some health treatments you can choose to go to a pharmacy rather than to your GP as they will not only discuss your symptoms but many are now able to prescribe suitable medication. This is helpful for the very busy and it relieves some of the pressure on your GP too. Do be aware however, that if you are entitled to free medication, this is not available without a prescription from your surgery so you will have to pay if you go straight to the pharmacy instead of the surgery.



YOUR HEALTH
Your Pharmacy
The essential guide to your local pharmacy

Let's Swim!
The benefits of swimming for health are endless

OUTDOOR FITNESS
Ideas for exercising outside

SUMMER ESSENTIALS
Helping you prepare for the warmer months

FOOT CARE
Tips for looking after your feet

SUMMER / AUTUMN 2023
www.yourhealthyourpharmacy.co.uk

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