



# Three Shires Medical Practice Newsletter

Winter 2025



## Christmas and New Year Arrangements

Welcome to the Winter 2025 edition of our newsletter. Everyone at Three Shires Medical Practice would like to wish all our patients and your families, a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year. Over the Christmas and New Year period, there will be days when our surgeries are closed.

**If you need to speak with a doctor on the days we are closed, please telephone 111.**

**Please be aware that all our surgeries will be closed on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> and Friday 26<sup>th</sup> December 2025 and again on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026**

**Please let us have your medication requests to cover the holiday period by Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> December so that medication can be collected on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> December.**

## Practice Update

We've had a fairly wet and mild autumn so far, with a "mast year" bringing bumper fruit crops. However, we've also had an early year for wintertime respiratory illnesses such as Flu and Covid reaching higher levels earlier than usual. Nationally, flu vaccinations now all start from 1<sup>st</sup> October, and this year uptake in our practice has been good, with 75% of over 65s vaccinated before the end of October which is great, as well as our housebound and care home populations.

In the under 65s who are eligible, the uptake is lower with some still to receive a vaccination (e.g. people with asthma, diabetes, pregnancy). We will have contacted most of you already, but please contact our surgery receptions if you still need a vaccine, and we will try to fit you in; our vaccine supply is still good. Thanks for all those involved at the October

Saturday clinic at Pucklechurch, and all those who helped at Marshfield Community Centre.

Our new Website launched recently. It allows improved accessibility options, and easier navigation on different devices which should help. It's also easier for us to keep updated. We're getting about 2,500 active user "hits" per month on the home page, so it is used widely. We value feedback.

As a Practice, despite recent unilateral contract impositions in October, we are continuing to do our best to match patient demand. We do offer online triage (visit our website to contact us online, or the NHS app) and this is popular, particularly with working age people.

We have decided **not** to make this compulsory as the only/main way of accessing the Practice as other GP Practices have done. Our telephone access is reported as good (we deal with 300-400 incoming calls per day), with small numbers of people queuing and calls answered promptly. We do get surges in demand at times though, and if you are in a queue you can register for a callback or perhaps put in an online request to help make things more efficient.

On a political note, GP practices still don't have the long term agreed contract, despite promises from the government. We are due to receive a small budget uplift in April, but sadly much of this will go back in the form of National Insurance or other levies, to the Treasury.

The British Medical Association's GP committee is now back in dispute with the government, and the risk of industrial action or further collective action is looking more likely. This largely hinges around giving General Practice a bigger slice of the NHS cake (which was promised) but which hasn't been delivered as intended. Let hope. As a small practice with multiple sites, and higher staff numbers these pressures make it harder for us to recruit and retain staff.

On the positive side, we are extremely grateful to the Friends of Three Shires whose individual donations, and fundraising has helped us to replace much needed equipment in our surgeries. We feel amazingly well supported by our communities.

In the run up to Christmas, please try to plan ahead and order medicines (preferably via the NHS app) in good time as on page 1 above. Despite only being closed for the major bank holidays, demand goes up and we can hit supply issues.

**On Christmas Eve 24<sup>th</sup> December we plan to close our surgery front doors early at 2pm across many sites.** We will be running our surgeries on reduced staff, but will have access to all services running in the background, mainly for urgent cases. Please consider this when planning to pick up medication. Our surgeries will be open as normal on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> December.

*Dr Richard Greenway*

## **Staff News**

Practice Nurse Dawn Cable retired at the end of September, however the good news is that she is returning to run some ad-hoc chronic disease management clinics for our patients.

We also welcomed Tracey Baillie who joins our nursing team as a Health Care Assistant.

## **The Memory Café**

Our local Memory Café continues to meet at Doynton Village Hall on the first Thursday of every month from 2.00pm until 4.00pm. It continues to be a relaxed and informal free drop in café providing support for people living with a dementia along with a family member, friend, or carer. Each month the café has a theme; in December Christmas and a performance from our Ukelele Group, the Strummers is planned. In January we hope to have an exercise and healthy living theme, in February a pantomime theme and in March country dancing.

**Helen Williams on 07853 179721 is our volunteer coordinator and the point of contact for any new or potential volunteers.**

## **Friends of Three Shires**

Nearly £25,000 has been raised so far to buy key items of equipment. We hope to hold one or two more fundraising events in the new year.

If you would still like to contribute, our Lloyds bank account is open. The details are sort code 30 99 50 account number 54449863; cheques should be made payable to Friends of Three Shires or you can also use the QR code.



**A huge THANK YOU** from the Practice partners and all the staff at each of our surgery sites and from the PPG and the Friends group for your amazing kindness and generosity in supporting the work of Three Shires Medical Practice.

## Meningitis

Meningitis is an infection of the meninges which are three layers of tissue that protect the brain and the spinal cord. Meningitis can affect anyone of any age but it is most common in babies and young and older children, teenagers and young adults and people with a weaker immune system. Meningitis needs to be identified and treated quickly, as the condition can develop into a serious and in some cases a life threatening illness.

The germs that cause meningitis can also cause septicaemia otherwise known as sepsis which is also very serious and potentially life threatening. These germs send the body's response into overdrive, causing damage to all parts of the body.

There are three main types of meningitis, viral, bacterial, and fungal. Symptoms for viral and bacterial meningitis usually develop quickly, the fungal type slightly more slowly. Symptoms include

- High temperature and fever
- Nausea and vomiting
- Headaches
- Stiff neck
- A rash that doesn't fade when a glass is rolled over it
- Reaction to bright lights
- Confusion or delirium

Babies may become irritable, refuse feeds, and emit a high pitched cry.

Vaccination can give some but not exclusive protection against meningitis. If you suspect meningitis, call 999 or get to A&E. If in any doubt call 111 for advice but don't be afraid to trust your instincts as someone with developing meningitis can get worse very quickly. Tests at hospital, will determine whether it is a viral, bacterial, or fungal infection.

Viral meningitis can get better on its own over a period of 7 to 10 days and in some cases, it can be managed at home. Rest, painkillers and anti-sickness medication should relieve symptoms. Bacterial meningitis needs hospital admission and treatment, usually with intravenous antibiotics and fluids. Fungal meningitis is treated with anti-fungal medication which may need to be taken for many months.

Viral meningitis rarely causes any long term problems. If quickly treated people who have bacterial meningitis usually make a full recovery. However, with both bacterial and fungal infections, there can be long term effects on sight and hearing, memory, concentration, and coordination and sometimes bone and tissue damage.

Helpful support organisations include Meningitis Now on 0808 801 0388 or [www.meningitisnow.org](http://www.meningitisnow.org) and Meningitis Research Foundation on 0808 800 3344 or [www.meningitis.org](http://www.meningitis.org) .

## Medication Supply Shortages

The longer wait to collect medication that you have requested, continues to frustrate both you, our patients and us, the Practice staff. The unpredictable unavailability of familiar brands of medication is an ongoing problem. As a result, please can we ask you to allow **96 hours**, (four days) from the time you order your medication to the time you collect it.

This continues to be a national problem, and not something going wrong at our surgeries. Medication supply issues are still being caused by manufacturing difficulties, supply of raw materials, distribution issues and increases in demand for certain medications worldwide.

The Pharmacists at our Practice spend many hours attempting to source the medication that you need and often have to order alternatives which have the same effects as those originally prescribed. Please be assured that we are doing our best to provide you with the medication you need.

**We do ask please for your understanding and patience with all members of staff.**

More about these issues and our pharmacists work in our Spring newsletter.

## Are YOU a Carer?

Do you look after someone who is ill, frail, disabled, has mental health or substance misuse problems? If this person would not be able to manage without you, or would have difficulty, you are a carer.

By registering that you are a carer with the Practice it could mean that we are able to offer you more support.

Every second Wednesday each month, Neil McIntosh from Carers Support, offers a telephone 'Carers Surgery'. Neil can advise about what help and support is available to you as a carer, including:

- advise on Welfare Benefits and entitlements
- having a Carers Assessment
- applying for a Carers Emergency Card and planning for an emergency
- referring you on for further support such as counselling, carers groups, training courses, and workshops

To book an appointment please contact your local surgery directly and register with your local Carers Centre to find out about support in your area:

**South Gloucestershire Carers Support**

0117 965 2200 <https://www.carersbsg.org.uk/>

**Wiltshire Carers Support**

0800 181 4118 <https://carerstogetherwiltshire.org.uk/>

**Bath Carers Centre**

0800 0388 885 [banescarerscentre.org.uk](https://banescarerscentre.org.uk)

## **Patient Participation Group (PPG)**

The PPG meeting at the end of September, had an update on the financial situation for the Practice. Some further economies have been necessary such as reduced use of locum doctors to cover sickness and leave; however there is still no need for any of the surgery sites to have to close.

There is still no news about the GP contract from April next year. The PPG has written to both our MP's asking them to remind the Health Secretary that GP Practices need to know what will be expected of them from next April. The impact of proposed house building on the Practice in Marshfield and Pucklechurch was also discussed.

Concern about the increased waiting time for prescription collection was raised. More publicity about the work of the Practice's care coordinators and social prescribing was requested and can be found elsewhere in this newsletter and on the Practice new website.

## **Free Sleep Help at Your GP Surgery**

If you're finding it hard to sleep, you're not alone. Many people struggle with falling asleep, staying asleep, or feeling rested in the morning. Poor sleep can affect your mood, energy, and health, but there is something you can do about it.

At the surgery, we offer a free, 4-week sleep course led by our GP, Dr Bhatia. The course is designed to help you understand what affects your sleep and what you can do to improve it, without needing sleeping pills. The sessions are friendly, supportive, and take place in small groups, so you'll learn with others who are also trying to sleep better. You'll learn simple, practical tools to use at home, including relaxation techniques, changes to your routine, and ways to manage stress and anxiety.

People who've taken part in the course have told us it made a big difference. Some said it changed their lives. After just four weeks, most people were sleeping better, feeling calmer, and more in control. In fact, over half of the people who joined the course improved their sleep by 10 points or more on a sleep scale. That is a big improvement!

We know how important sleep is, and we want to help you get the rest you need. If you're ready to sleep better, feel better, and take back control of your nights, ask at your surgery reception, or speak to your GP about joining the course.

## NHS 111

NHS 111 is available for patients over 5 years old, to get advice and treatment for physical and mental health issues. It is a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week service. Telephoning 111 for free from a landline or mobile phone or online at [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk) is the way to access this service. A contact with 111 can point you to help if you cannot contact your GP during the day or out of hours.

Your medical issues will be assessed and depending on what is needed, you might be advised to:

- call 999 or go to A&E
- go to an urgent treatment centre
- see an out of hours GP
- book a call back from a nurse or GP
- get urgent support for dental or mental health problems.

When you call NHS111 you will be asked who you are, where you are, why you are calling and if it is about yourself or someone else. If it is about someone else, it is best to have that person with you when you call.

Based on the answers you give, the health adviser will,

- send an ambulance if you need one
- refer you to an urgent care service
- refer to another health care professional
- arrange for a visit to an out of hours service
- arrange for a nurse call back
- suggest a system of self-care to follow at home.

It is important to remember that NHS111 can help when you need medical direction or advice but it is important to remember that it is not a service for a life threatening emergency.

## Care Coordination

Care Coordinators work at your doctor's surgery. They help you understand your health issues and get the care that you need. They make sure your doctors, nurses, and other services all work together. They can also help you find local support groups or services.

At the surgery, we have three Care Coordinators:

**Sarah:** Team lead. She invites people for yearly health checks, for example if they have asthma, diabetes, or high blood pressure. She helps with cancer care pathways, NHS Health Checks, and special clinics. She supports both patients and the team.

**Victoria:** Helps people who look after family or friends (called carers). She can refer carers to a monthly Carers Surgery and makes sure they are on our Practice Carers Register. She also helps patients who are housebound, older, or lonely. She looks after our cervical screening service too.

**Gemma:** Helps patients with dementia, learning disabilities, or serious mental illness. She makes sure they have their yearly review and get the support they need.

If you want to speak to a Care Coordinator, please ask your usual surgery reception team. They will help you to get in touch.

## **Social Prescribing**

Social Prescribing helps you find non-medical support to feel better. This might include local groups, hobbies, counselling, or community activities. It can help your mood, confidence, and daily life.

Southern Brooks runs our social prescribing service. You can self-refer.

Call: **01174 034238**

Visit: [southernbrooks.org.uk/social-prescribing](https://southernbrooks.org.uk/social-prescribing)

or contact your usual surgery reception team who can advise you about accessing the social prescribing service.

### **Who it's for:**

- Adults (18+)
- People who feel lonely
- People who struggle with daily tasks
- Families having problems
- Anyone coping with grief, abuse, or trauma
- Anyone who needs extra help to stay well

### **How it works:**

1. Your GP or nurse talks with you about what's hard right now.
2. They can refer you to the social prescribing team.
3. You can also refer yourself.
4. You talk about what matters to you.
5. The team links you with local groups or support.
6. You stay in touch to see how things are going.

## **FLU Vaccination**

**Just a reminder to our patients who are eligible for a flu vaccination but have not yet been vaccinated, please contact us. The flu virus is more severe this year than it has been for several years, so if you are eligible and haven't yet had this year's jab, please call your local surgery.**