



Three Shires Medical Practice Newsletter

Autumn 2026

Practice Update

The recent summer weather has been quite unusual. If current trends continue it is likely to be one of the hottest summers on record. Whilst many have enjoyed the warm weather, the days of extreme heat can prove difficult for our vulnerable patients to deal with. I suspect by the time this newsletter goes out more moderate conditions will have returned.

By now, many of you will be aware that unfortunately our Colerne surgery is currently shut on Tuesday and Thursday. Please note that all queries (routine or urgent) can still be dealt with on those days by our neighbouring branches (e.g. Marshfield surgery) via the usual telephone number for Colerne surgery (01225-742028). More details are available on the Practice website regarding this. The Practice website will also post any new information or updates regarding the situation when these are available. A further update on this is expected by early September 2026.

The funding situation for General Practice remains unsatisfactory. This is especially so for rural practices such as ours who have certain additional disadvantages (e.g., having to cover large geographical areas). The local health body overseeing our area (called an Integrated Care board or 'ICB') is currently in a period of transition as it is merging with the neighbouring authority in Gloucester. The government has now had three Health Secretaries in 3 months so there is some uncertainty as to the way forward at present. We hope the newly appointed Health Secretary recognises the significant benefits of primary care in improving the health of the nation and prioritises this accordingly in her plans.

I also thought I would use this opportunity to remind patients of some existing services that perhaps not everyone is aware of. The Practice has a Mental Health Practitioner working as part our team, Gemma North. Gemma is based at our Pucklechurch Surgery. There are more details further on in the newsletter regarding Gemma. If you have a mental health concern, you can book an appointment directly with her via the reception team at your local branch surgery. She is happy to see patients directly in person or via a telephone appointment.

We also have a team of 'Care Co-ordinators.' They help patients and their families manage care needs and also assist in coordinating care with

external agencies (e.g. social services). They are mainly based at our Pucklechurch Surgery but a telephone appointment with them can be directly arranged via the reception team at your local branch surgery. The Practice also has two pharmacists (Wendy Fletcher and Jaswinder Lalli) who operate directly in most surgeries. They can be contacted directly via the reception team at your surgery, for pharmaceutical queries.

Our dispensing teams throughout the Practice would also like to remind patients to try and anticipate when they will run out of medication. It appears we sometimes get a rush of urgent requests on a Friday afternoon, and this can be challenging to deal with, is disruptive and creates extra work to an already pressured system. The current Practice policy is that we advise orders are placed 4 working days before collection. If you do find yourself in the position of having genuinely run out of your medication over the weekend pharmacies can issue you with 7 days emergency supplies.

Many of our patients are currently away on their summer holidays. I hope you have a relaxing break. Autumn is not far off so please have a read further on in the newsletter of more details regarding the Practice's plans for flu and other vaccinations.

Best wishes as always.

Dr Pedro Pinto GP Partner

Patient Participation Group (PPG)

Your PPG continues to meet quarterly, and we held our AGM in June. We have continued to try to offer constructive support to the Practice on behalf of all of us, the patients. Recently we have supported the Spring COVID vaccination programme and were involved in the two Carers week events in Pucklechurch and Marshfield. From the Bereavement Group meeting in Marshfield another group has developed, a Carers Forum for people who are family carers. The group is particularly but not exclusively aimed at carers whose cared for person has either recently entered a residential or nursing home, in the process of arranging for that type of care or is needing to think about that for the future. If you would be interested in joining the PPG or would like to know more about the Bereavement Group or the Carers Forum or have an issue that you would like raised at the next PPG meeting in September, please contact us on 4patientparticipation@gmail.com or leave a letter to the PPG at your local surgery.

Friends of Three Shires

The Friends of Three Shires have raised an amazing £31,000 so far and it has been decided to continue the Friends Group for the time being. 35 items of equipment have been purchased thus far for our four surgery sites; the equipment includes defibrillators, diagnostic sets, stethoscopes, ECG machines, oximeters, and pneumatic couches. Everyone at the Practice is extremely grateful for all this support

Influenza and COVID Vaccinations 2026/7

The vaccination season is upon us one again.

There are no changes to who is eligible for influenza and COVID vaccinations this Autumn. Dates for the roll out of the vaccination programme have been set by the Department of Health, (not our GP Practice and will once again kick off on 1st October 2026.

Vaccination Eligibility see also

<https://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations>

(information correct on 25/8/2026, but may change)

Patient group	COVID vaccine	Flu vaccine
Aged 75+	 Yes	 Yes
Aged 65–74	 No	 Yes
Immunocompromised (people with a weaker immune system) aged 6 months+	 Yes	 Yes
People aged 18 to under 65 with clinical risks (diabetes, COPD, etc.)	 No	 Yes
Pregnant women	 No	 Yes
Residents in a care home for older adults	 Yes	 Yes
Frontline health and social care staff	 No	 Yes
Carers / close contacts of immunocompromised people	 No	 Yes

Vaccination Venues

We will continue to offer appointments at Marshfield Community Centre for influenza and COVID vaccinations (given together where possible), or you can visit any GP Practice in our Primary Care Network group.

These are, Christchurch Downend, Willows Mangotsfield, Orchard Medical Centre Kingswood, Leap Valley Downend and Abbotswood Yate.

We will run a larger Flu Clinic at Pucklechurch on a Saturday in October with some smaller clinics during the week at our local surgeries, Pucklechurch, Wick and Colerne, we plan to visit housebound patients to vaccinate them as we always do.

Carers Week Events

Our annual national Carers Week happens every year usually in the second week in June. This year Three Shires Medical Practice decided to organise two Carer information and support events, one at Pucklechurch Surgery on 8th June and the second event at Marshfield Community Centre on 10th June.

Representatives from the local Alzheimer's Society, South Gloucestershire Age UK, Bristol and South Gloucestershire Carers Support, Southern Brookes and our Village Agent were present at each event and the



Marshfield based Carers Forum for carers whose person cared for, was either in residential or nursing care or in the process of going into such care, were present at Marshfield.

We undertook extensive publicity, contacting carers on the Practice Carers

Register, putting posters around the Practice area and in every copy of the summer Practice newsletter and on social media.

Our aims for the two events were:

- To offer carers information and advice
- To link carers with local services
- To involve local support organisations and
- To offer our carers a little time out with some tea, coffee and cake!

We had nearly 30 carers who attended the two events and several carers contacted us because they were unable to attend. The response from our Practice carers both those who attended and those who would like to have come along but were unable to, was very encouraging and we aim to run similar information and advice events in Carers Week 2027.

Before then we hope to be able to create an online Carers event in the autumn aimed particularly at carers who were unable to attend the Carers Week events in June. If possible, we hope to add the online event to the Practice website.

Balance

Balance is a fundamental functioning system in our bodies. Balance is the ability to stay upright in relation to your centre of gravity and to be able to move without falling over. Keeping your balance is a complex process that relies on a constant flow of information to the brain about body position. The integration of all this information and the consequent and continual

instruction from the brain, enables our bodies to make the changes necessary to maintain balance.

The brain receives information on body position from a variety of sources, the eyes, the sensory organs in the skin, joints and muscles, feet, and ankles and the three tiny semi-circular canals in the labyrinth of our inner ears. The part of the brain called the cerebellum, collates all this information and sends out the relevant instructions to our muscles to contract or to relax so that we can maintain our balance.

Balance can be affected by inner ear disorders such as labyrinthitis or vertigo (BPPV). Low blood pressure and some medications can also affect balance as can loss of muscle strength and mobility. Weakening muscles do not help balance as you need to maintain strength to keep yourself stable. Reduced sensation in your feet as seen in diabetic neuropathy and reduced visual acuity due to sight disorders or even moving around in the dark, all impact our ability to remain steady on our feet. Often as we age, several of these factors may contribute to reduced balance.

There is no one way of improving balance. Gentle strength improvement and flexibility exercises can help as can yoga and tai chi. There are some further ideas in another item in this newsletter on Falls Prevention. You could also look on the NHS website for simple balance exercises on: www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/balance-exercises/

Simple Ways to Avoid Falls

Falls are common especially as we get older, but many falls can be prevented. About 1 in 3 people over 65 fall each year and about 1 in 2 people over 80, Falls can cause injury and loss of confidence. The good news is that there are some simple ways to reduce your risk.

Small steps make a big difference!

Staying active as we grow older is one of the best things we can do for our health. Moving a little each day, helps keep muscles and bones strong, boosts balance and makes us more confident getting around.

Do gentle strength and balance exercises a couple of times a week such as

- Standing up and sitting down from a chair a few times in a row
- Heel raises and/or gentle lunges
- Practice standing on one leg (using a chair or wall for support)
- Activities like tai chi, dancing or walking are great too.

Moving a little every day all counts, walking to the shops, gardening or even a bit of housework. The more you move, the stronger and steadier you'll feel.

Try to make sure that you make your home as safe as possible:

- Clear away loose rugs and clutter
- Make sure stairs and hallways are well lit
- Wear shoes or slippers with a good grip, avoid walking around in just socks or stockings.

Keep a check on your health

- Have your eyes and hearing tested regularly

- Speak with your pharmacist or GP if your medicines make you feel dizzy or tired
- Eat as well as you can and drink plenty of fluids and keep bones strong with calcium and vitamin D
- If you have a fall even a small one, let your GP know.

Getting older doesn't have to mean slowing down. Try to be active most days, even gentle movement helps. Include some strength and balance exercises at least twice a week. By staying active building strength and making a few changes at home you can stay steady on your feet.

If you are worried about falling or would like support there are services that can help. Social prescribing can help you find local support and activities to improve your confidence, strength, and wellbeing. If you would like help with this, or contacting any services, you can refer yourself to the social prescribers on 0117 403 4238.

Varicose Veins

Varicose veins are swollen, widened twisted veins under the skin usually in the legs but they can occur in other parts of the body. Varicose veins are usually harmless. They can however cause other symptoms that affect the legs such as:

- Pain, aching or a heavy feeling
- Swollen legs and ankles
- Skin changes such as itching, changes in skin colour or skin that become dry or scaly

Our veins contain one-way valves that push blood towards the heart; if these valves fail, blood flows backwards causing veins to stretch, bulge or twist. Anyone can develop varicose veins, but they are more likely for:

- Women
- Women in pregnancy
- Older people
- People who are overweight
- People who spend a lot of time standing or a long time sitting
- People who have other family members with varicose veins
- People who have had a deep vein thrombosis

If you have varicose veins:

- Avoid standing for long periods
- Don't sit for long periods unless your feet are raised to the level of your heart
- Cease smoking as smoking damages your veins

What it is good to do, is:

- Keeping to a healthy diet
- Putting your feet and legs raised when sitting
- Exercise (even if that exercise is gentle) regularly
- Use a moisturiser if your skin is itchy or scaly

See your GP if in persistent leg pain or you have a sore on your leg which doesn't heal. If a varicose vein bleeds, seek an urgent appointment or go to A&E. Treatment to improve how varicose veins look is not generally available on the NHS. If because of pain, leg ulcers, or other complications, you may need to see a specialist for an ultrasound. You may be advised to wear compression stockings or be offered a clinical procedure to block blood flow into the affected veins. Once that blood flow is blocked, unaffected veins take over the necessary blood flow.

Gemma North Practice Mental Health Nurse

Gemma's role is part of the Government's plan to improve access to mental health support, advice, and guidance at Primary Care level. Her service is aimed at people with mental health issues who do not meet the high thresholds for secondary care, (Community Mental Health Teams), ongoing treatment or access to talking therapies.

Gemma is keen to help Three Shires patients to do all they can to manage their mental health. Gemma has lived mental health experience as well as 16 years of mental health nursing experience.

Initial appointment sessions run for 40 minutes with a conversation about you and exploring what might help you improve your mental health.

A high number of patients attend to explore their Right to Choose for ADHD assessment. This process has recently evolved and now involves a screening questionnaire which patients complete initially. It is sometimes helpful to consider how suspected ADHD impacts your life and what would help coping overall taking this into account.

People attend these appointments to talk through their issues or consider brief interventions, tools, and guidance about how to manage them. Gemma would then usually offer three more 30-minute sessions with the opportunity in session four to review, and where appropriate, to signpost to other support agencies or self-help.

Gemma's working days for Three Shires are Tuesdays for telephone consultations and Wednesdays to Fridays when she is based in Pucklechurch surgery. Please ask at any of the surgery receptions if you would like to arrange an appointment with her.

Memory Café

Our memory café continues to flourish, meeting on the first Thursday of each month at Doynton Village Hall from 2pm to 4pm. It is an informal café for people living with a dementia along with a family member, friend or carer. Each month there's a theme. In October we celebrate harvest and welcome a sea shanty duo; in November, Marshfield Male Voice Choir visit us and in December we will celebrate Christmas. An enormous amount of work and preparation is undertaken by the café organisers who are immensely grateful for all the donations and support they receive.

Assistive Technology to Support Your Independence

Assistive technology is about devices, equipment and digital technology that can help people live safely and independently at home. Assistive technology can be as basic as pill dispensers or timer devices. It can also offer more sophisticated types of support such as personal alarms, sensors, and remote monitoring systems.

Assistive technology can help us:

- Stay safe at home
- Manage daily routines and tasks
- Maintain independence
- Sustain health and well-being
- Minimise risks
- Keep you in touch with family, friends, and community services.

It can also help family and unpaid carers to monitor the well-being and safety of the person they care for/about, even when they do not live nearby or need to be able to go to work.

Examples of smart home technology include video doorbells, motion sensors which for example can turn lights on as you go into a room or send alerts to unpaid carers and/or family. An internet connection is needed for this type of technology.

South Gloucestershire Council has an adapted house called Celestine Home Adaptation Centre. This house can be visited free of charge to learn about and see how assistive technology can assist. To make an appointment email psechousing@southglos.gov.uk Both the Hft Virtual Smart House website and the Alzheimer's Society have information on different types of assistive technology.

It is possible to buy assistive technology items in High Street stores and online. If you aged 18 or over you can ask for an assessment from the Council's Social Care Department on 01454 868007. Some assistive technology may be providable free of charge, some can be offered on long term loan, other items of assistive technology you would be financially assessed for.

If you are asking for an assessment about how assistive technology can assist you and maintain independence, it is worth asking about telecare and what that involves. For more detailed information about assistive technology and telecare, look at the South Gloucestershire Council website and put assistive technology and telecare into the search link. Go to www.southglos.gov.uk