Newsletter from your Patients' Group – January 2026
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In your Patients' Group Newsletter this month:

- **New Year 'Reset'**
- **Winter Pressures on the NHS:**
- **NHS App**
- ***Chicken Pox Vaccine***
- ***BEAT***

New Year is often a time when people choose to **'Reset'** after the excesses of Christmas and New Year. Here are some great yet simple ideas:

- **Dry January**: Challenge yourself to not drink alcohol for the whole of the month of January. Some of the many benefits include improved physical health (like lower blood pressure and better sleep), better mental health, and more money saved!
- **Nutrition**: Increase your intake of whole foods, including vegetables, fruits, lean proteins, and healthy fats. Reduce consumption of ultra-processed foods and sugary drinks.
- **Hydration**: Drink plenty of water throughout the day - aim for 6 to 8 glasses, or around 2 litres, of water daily.
- **Physical activity**: Start with gentle daily walks and gradually work your way up to a goal, like 10,000 steps a day. Aim for 150 minutes of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week. Maybe try Yoga or Pilates.
- **Sleep**: Aim for 7 to 9 hours of quality sleep each night. Establish a consistent bedtime and wake-up time. Create a sleep-friendly environment by keeping your bedroom dark, cool, and quiet. Reduce screen time before bed.
- **Mindfulness and stress reduction**: Incorporate deep breathing exercises. Spend time in nature. Connect with others.

Winter Pressures on the NHS: Once again, the NHS is experiencing unusually high pressures with an increase in 'Flu; Pneumonia and Norovirus. This has put an enormous extra strain on already stretched services in Hertfordshire and West Essex. Winter is always a busy time for the NHS, but this year they have seen unprecedented demand due to a higher than expected surge in flu cases and other seasonal illnesses. For most people, these illnesses are best dealt with at home.

You can help the NHS by using the right service for your needs. This means they can keep hospitals and emergency departments available for treating those with life threatening or very serious conditions."

Please help the NHS by:

- Preventing winter viruses from spreading, protecting vulnerable relatives and friends and ensuring that vital NHS services are there for those who need them.
- Making sure that you and your family are up to date with flu, COVID, and RSV vaccinations. Ask at your GP practice or drop in to a local pharmacy. Most practices or pharmacies have some flu vaccines left in stock, but you may need to try more than one location.

- Staying at home if you or your family get the norovirus bug that causes sickness and diarrhoea, getting plenty of rest and drinking lots of fluids. Reduce the spread by washing your hands frequently with soap and water – hand gels won't kill norovirus. Stay away from care homes, hospitals and social occasions until you've been clear of symptoms for at least two days. You will still be very infectious until then.
- Treating 'Flu by staying at home, getting plenty of rest and drinking lots of fluids. Simple painkillers can help if needed. 'Flu is not usually a concern for otherwise healthy adults and older children, but can be more worrying in the very young, very old or those with other illnesses.
- Using the Pharmacists to help with minor symptoms. There is also a service that allows you to walk into a pharmacy and get advice and medicine, if needed, for these minor illnesses and health concerns. Where the pharmacist is unable to help or if your symptoms need further investigation, they will direct you to your GP surgery or another health care professional:

    - Earache (aged 1 to 17 years)
    - Impetigo (aged 1 year and over)
    - Infected insect bites (aged 1 year and over)
    - Sore throats (aged 5 years and over)
    - Shingles (aged 18 years and over)
    - Sinusitis (aged 12 years and over)
    - Urinary tract infections (UTIs) in women (aged 16 to 64 years)

By using online consultations where possible and avoiding calling at the 8am rush, even though your GP practice is open from 8am to 6.30pm every weekday.

- If you have a family member who has finished their hospital treatment and is due to be discharged home, help to get them home without delay by being available to collect them in your car if you have one. This helps to make beds available in hospital for people who are seriously unwell.

Stay Connected: Check Your Care Messages in the NHS App: We know how important it is to keep up-to-date with your health, and the NHS App is a fantastic tool to help you do just that.

What's New? Messages About Your Care: You can now use the NHS App to securely receive messages about your care directly from us and other trusted healthcare providers. Think of it as a dedicated, private mailbox for your health information!

This is a simple and secure way to hear from us without waiting for a letter or a phone call.

What Do I Need to Do? To make sure you never miss an important update, here are two quick steps:

Download and Log In: If you haven't already done so, get the NHS App on your phone or tablet, by visiting the NHS App page: www.nhs.uk/nhs-app You can also find the same services on the NHS website.

Turn on Notifications: This is key! Make sure you turn on notifications for the NHS App. You will need to go into your device's 'Settings>Notifications>Change notification settings for each App'. This way, your phone will alert you immediately when a new message about your care arrives.

Why turn on notifications? It means you'll be the first to know about appointment updates, test results, or reminders from your healthcare team.

Accessing Other Services: Remember, the NHS App is also the easiest way to manage your health 24/7. You can use it to:

- Order repeat prescriptions
- Book, check, or cancel appointments
- View your GP health record

Please ensure you always know how to contact the practice and how to access services like appointments and repeat prescriptions.

Need More Information? To learn more about all the features of the app and how it works, you can visit the official NHS page and look for NHS App. Using the NHS App is a great step forward!

Chicken Pox Vaccine: Starting from 1 January 2026, the NHS is adding Chicken Pox (varicella) to the standard childhood vaccination schedule. Instead of the familiar MMR vaccine (measles, mumps, rubella), children will now be offered a four-in-one vaccine: measles, mumps, rubella and chicken pox (varicella). The Chicken Pox vaccine has been safely used for decades and is already part of the routine vaccine schedules in several countries.

The move follows recommendations from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and is designed to reduce incidence of Chicken Pox infection and the serious complications which can follow. Chicken Pox is a common childhood infection and most children will recover in a few weeks, but it can cause serious complications for some children and vulnerable adults, particularly pregnant women. By rolling out the MMRV vaccine, the NHS aims to reduce transmission, protect children from illness, give them the best protection and to support parents who would otherwise miss work to care for children while they are unwell.

You can find out more at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vaccine-update-issue-365-november-2025/vaccine-update-issue-365-november-2025

Making a GP Appointment: Online consultations should be only be used for routine, non-urgent appointments and/or administrative queries. If a patient is not well and needs 'on the day' treatment and/or think they require antibiotics they should phone the Surgery on the day or go to the Pharmacy if the condition can be resolved by the Pharmacist. (See Winter Pressures information above.)