Shipston Medical Centre
Patient Participation Group (PPG)

Website: https://shipstonmc.warwickshire.nhs.uk/
X: https://x.com/ShipstonGP
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ShipstonMC
Instagram: shipstonmedicalcentrenhs

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AUTUMN EDITION



STAFFING UPDATE

Dr Helen Shipley begins her maternity leave this month – congratulations to Dr Shipley and family on the pending arrival of baby number 3!

Rachel Hayward resigned her post as a medical receptionist and left at the beginning of the month to pursue an opportunity as an administrator. Good luck Rachel!

Briony Ahern began her post this month as a dispensary assistant. You will see her often on the front desk in dispensary helping patients order and collect their medications. Welcome to Briony!

We say goodbye to Becki Freeman this month who leaves us after 9 years in her role as an administrator. Good luck in your new role as a deputy practice manager.





This month the focus for this series turns to…
Rachel Vial, Practice Manager and Business Partner

Quite coincidentally, the day I interviewed Rachel was the 20th anniversary of her joining Shipston Medical Centre (SMC) as Practice Manager. A lot has changed in that time, not least the number of patients being served by the Practice (from around 10,000 in 2005 to 12,200 in 2025).

With that in mind, I decided to focus on trying to properly understand the pressures on the SMC team to continue to deliver high quality patient care nowadays and Rachel's role in achieving that.

Rachel told me that at the age of 18 she had no thoughts about becoming a Practice Manager. Perhaps it was fate then that after university and a job in the charity sector she moved to the Royal College of General Practice in London working on NHS quality programmes with Dr Theo Schofield, then senior partner at SMC. He subsequently invited her to apply for the newly vacant Practice Manager role in Shipston - Rachel said that she had always had the ethos of wanting to help people so the rest is history as they say.

Back in 2005 Practice Management was very much in its infancy, so it was a steep learning curve. Although an incredibly difficult time, Rachel pointed out that in those days there were more resources made available to GP Practices to deliver care for their patient population. The amount the Practice receives in basic NHS funding per patient in 2025 is just £123.34 per year.

Nowadays the role of a Practice Manager covers so many areas of responsibility there just isn't space here to properly cover all of them - examples being patient services, staff management, business planning, budgeting, payroll, IT systems, appointment systems, contracts and regulations, premises, to name but a few…

Despite all of these responsibilities and the need to ensure that the Practice can generate enough income to cover its operational costs, Rachel emphasised that the primary motivation for everyone working at SMC is to provide the best possible patient care.

Key to this is recruiting and retaining high quality staff (a team of around 60 is needed to provide the SMC service) and again Rachel was keen to point out that this is a very important part of her responsibility. High quality clinicians, well trained administrative staff, systems that support all staff,

whatever their role, to be efficient and effective in their work. As Rachel said 'my view always is that if you look after your staff, they will look after our patients'.

Rachel also mentioned the importance of continuous learning, with staff encouraged to report when, despite best efforts, something goes wrong. Or, sometimes, there is a patient complaint. She said it is important to ensure that any such situations are investigated, understanding the events that led to them and then where necessary modifying Practice processes to avoid a repeat.

Rachel referred to some significant challenges in recent years including COVID, a growing local population, and cramped premises. On that point there is at last some light at the end of the tunnel with SMC due to operate from both the existing premises and from the Ellen Badger site by the end of the year. Again, Rachel is responsible, with the GP Partners, for ensuring that the move to a split site operation happens smoothly, with no interruption to provision of safe patient care.

With so much information to draw on this could have been a very long article so instead I simply asked Rachel to describe for me the frustrations of being a Practice Manager – and then, what she enjoys about the role.

Inevitably, there are quite a lot of frustrations – reactive NHS policy changes, relentlessly high workload with competing priorities, striving to meet the needs of individual patients whilst ensuring there is equity of access to care for the whole SMC patient population, recognising the value of continuity of care but with insufficient resources to adequately provide this…not to mention IT and phone systems and suchlike over which the Practice has no decision making authority!

At the end of the day though, Rachel made it clear that she gets enormous satisfaction from her job. She told me she likes solving problems, likes making sure that the Practice is doing the right thing and that systems are working effectively, likes still working in an environment where she can help people. Above all Rachel said 'my team make me proud'.

As a patient myself, but also representing other patients, all I can do is marvel at the energy, knowledge and experience Rachel brings to her job. We are all very grateful for what clinicians do for us when worried and unwell but writing this article really highlighted for me that behind the scenes, Rachel's effort means that the whole team are supported to provide an excellent service for us as patients.

Carole Nossiter, Chair, Shipston PPG

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN! STAY STRONG THIS FLU SEASON AND PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR COMMUNITY WITH A QUICK FLU VACCINATION.

The flu clinics are scheduled to occur as below:

- The flu clinics this Autumn 2025 will be running from the 18th of September for children and the 1st of October for adults
- The clinics will all be held at Shipston Medical Centre for your convenience on a range of times and days to include usual surgery hours, some Thursday evenings and a few Saturday mornings
- Those patients who are eligible will be contacted by email, text or by letter depending on what contact details we have for you on your records
- Flu and Covid vaccines will be offered within the same appointment to those who are eligible
- In order to help us run the clinics as smoothly as possible, we would appreciate it if you wore a short sleeve top and remove any jumpers or coats whilst you are waiting to go in
- There will be a member of staff at reception to warmly welcome you in and check your name off the list
- Please arrive no more than 10 minutes before your allocated appointment time to help manage the number of patients in the practice at any one time. This also means that it is quicker for you getting in and out and enabling you to get on with your day

Thank you for your help in keeping our amazing community protected.

WHY ARE THERE SOMETIMES MEDICATION SHORTAGES?
You may have noticed that certain medications are occasionally hard to get. Medication shortages are happening more frequently across the UK due to a combination of global supply chain issues, increased demand, manufacturing delays, and changes in licensing or pricing.

What We're Doing to Help -
When a medicine is unavailable, your GP will always try to find a safe and appropriate alternative where one exists. In many cases, we can prescribe a substitute that will work for your condition.

However, if no alternative is suitable or available, you may need to contact your usual pharmacy — and possibly others — to check if they have stock. Pharmacies often vary in what they can access, so trying a few different ones can help. Legal requirements prevent GP practices directing patients to specific pharmacies and so patients do need to 'shop around' themselves.

About Our Dispensary -
For patients who are able to use our dispensary (legally, patients must live more than a mile from a pharmacy for us to be able to dispense to them) we will do our best to get hold of medicines. We hold accounts with multiple wholesalers, which gives us a better chance of sourcing medications during shortages.

We understand how frustrating and worrying it can be to experience delays in getting your medication. Please be assured we're doing all we can to help you access the treatments you need, as safely and quickly as possible.

NHS APP
Have you downloaded the NHS App yet? It is a quick, easy and safe way of accessing information about your health, including viewing your health record to see information such as your allergies and medications. You can also use it to request your repeat prescriptions and nominate a pharmacy where you'd like to collect them; book and manage appointments and view test results. You can download it for free on the App Store or on Google Play.

If you would like some help to download and get familiar with using the NHS App, the Digital Champions will again be at the Community Warm Hub at the Ellen Badger Hospital on the **2nd October and 6th November from 10am - 12 noon.**
Just pop in to the hub with your device and any queries you may have and a friendly expert will be on hand to help.

WE'VE INTRODUCED A NEW CHECK-IN SCREEN!
This month, we've upgraded our reception area with a brand-new check-in screen, replacing the older (and slower) version.

The check-in screen is now the fastest way to let us know you've arrived for your appointment. By using it, you can skip the queue and head straight to the waiting area—leaving our reception team free to help patients with queries about their care.

The screen is simple to use, and your check-in only takes a few easy steps:

1. Touch the screen to start
2. Enter your date of birth
3. Confirm your details

Next time you have an appointment, try out the new check-in screen—conveniently located to the right of the waiting room door!



And that's not all… a **brand-new patient calling screen** for the waiting room is coming soon!

GOT QUESTIONS ABOUT OUR PRACTICE?
Do you have ideas, feedback, or suggestions about how our services run? Or maybe you'd just like to share something positive with the team but aren't sure who to tell? Our Patient Participation Group (PPG) is here to help! They can:

- Find answers to your questions
- Pass on your ideas to the right person
- Represent patient views to improve our services

How to contact them – email shipstonppg@gmail.com including your contact details and one of the team will contact you. Interested in finding out more? Visit https://shipstonmc.warwickshire.nhs.uk/patientgroup to learn more about what the PPG does and fill in a registration form.

SURGERY CLOSURES
Staff Meetings
The surgery is closed for staff meetings between 1 and 1.45pm on:

Wednesday 24th September
Thursday 23rd October
Tuesday 18th November

Staff Training
Each month all Warwickshire GP surgeries are closed for one afternoon from 12.30pm for staff training. The next dates are:

Wednesday 17th September
Thursday 16th October
Wednesday 26th November

THE DR SUE PRITCHARD MEMORIAL CHALLENGE
The Seated Exercise class has been so popular with members of the community who may be experiencing mobility issues or want to maintain their mobility that we have had to increase from one class to two. These are now held on the ground floor in the Ellen Badger Community Hub at 10:30am and 11:30am on Mondays. There is the opportunity afterwards to have a cuppa and a chat with fellow attendees. If you would like further information, please visit our website http://www.shwp.org.uk

TOY LIBRARY
The Stour Toy Library continues to run at the Ellen Badger on Thursdays from 11am – 12noon, the session at the Scout Hut on Mondays from 10am – 11am starts back up again after their summer break. If you would like to sign up or borrow toys, please go to the website https://borrow.shwp.org.uk/ where you can view all the toys on offer and reserve these for collection at either of the 2 collection points. Annual membership is just £5, and this entitles you to borrow up to 2 toys a week.

COMMUNITY WARM HUBS
The Shipston Community Warm Hub continues to be open every Thursday from 10am to 12 noon and we are settling in well in our new home at the Ellen Badger Community Hub on the ground floor. You're assured a warm welcome, a good cuppa and biscuits and the chance to make new friends. Keep an eye out for updates in future newsletters on regular events that will be hosted there monthly. Also why not check out the news page on Stour Health and Wellbeing Partnership's website: https://www.shwp.org.uk/news/ [shwp.org.uk]

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust will be running walking sessions from the Ellen Badger Hospital. These sessions start on Friday 19th September – 24th October from11am – 1pm. The 6-week course is aimed at adults living with chronic health conditions. For more information and to register directly, please contact Rosie Charter: rosie.charter@wkwt.org.uk or 07796380771

HAVE YOU HEARD OF HEALTHWATCH WARWICKSHIRE?

Healthwatch Warwickshire is an independent service for everyone who uses health and social care services. Together with their volunteers they help make your voice heard and improve services including GP surgeries, Hospital Services, Social Care Services, Dental Practices and others. Tell them about your experience of local NHS and social care services. This is their webpage https://www.healthwatchwarwickshire.co.uk/ but they can also be contacted on phone - 01926 422 823 and on email - info@healthwatchwarwickshire.co.uk; Instagram - healthwatch_warwickshire and X. - @healthwatchwarw

SHARING THE INFORMATION

If you know of patients who aren't on Facebook do let them know that the newsletter is available for collection from Reception, Dispensary and in the Waiting Room. If they have their medication delivered, they can also ask the delivery driver for a copy.

The newsletter is also published on our website under Patient News, and we alert on Facebook and X when it's published. If you would like the newsletter emailed to you, please contact reception.