**Social distancing advice for Practice staff**

I am sure you are all sick of hearing about the Covid 19 pandemic. Nevertheless, it would be useful to offer a little explanation, particularly about the changes within practices and the reasons behind those changes.

Firstly, I would like to thank you all for all your amazing efforts and for continuing to work during this very difficult period. I would like to reassure you that in managing the building during the Covid 19 outbreak our main aims are:

* To maintain as good and effective a service to patients as is possible
* To act to protect EVERYONE, patients and staff alike (including ourselves!)
* To contribute to the national approach to defeating Covid 19
* To minimise the risk of complete closure of the practice, even for a short time

These bullet points are likely to make this document easier to understand:-

1. For most people Covid 19 is a minor illness, a form of flu, from which a full and often rapid recovery will be made.
2. Some patients, particularly with pre-existing health problems (heart, chest, neurological, immune) can get a more serious illness. Elderly patients are more at risk, largely because they do have pre-existing problems. Some of these patients will go on to need hospitalisation, intensive care and ventilation. The percentage of people who will have this serious form of the disease and need this level of treatment is very small. If you have any reason to believe that you are in a higher risk group, please speak to one of us, so that we can advise you and, if need be, take extra precautions for you.

3 Covid 19 is very infectious. That is to say it is very easy to catch it. As a result there is the risk that there will be a lot of new cases very quickly and that although only a small percentage of these will need hospital care, this will still overpower the NHS ability to cope. There is also the possibility that all workplaces may see a lot of illness all at once and similarly struggle to cope due to sickness absence. The national strategy and our strategy are designed to prevent this rapid growth in the number of cases.

4 To understand how to protect yourself and how to limit the spread of Covid 19 you need to understand how you might catch it. The virus enters your body by being inhaled. Broadly this can happen in one of three ways.

* A) You can inhale virus from close contact with a person who is clearly ill with Covid 19, coughing and feverish. This is relatively easy to avoid as these patients are recognisable and precautions can be taken. Staying 2 metres away from them eliminates this risk.
* B) You can inhale virus from close contact with a person who is infectious but appears to be and feels completely well. This is a much more difficult problem which I will discuss in more detail as it is the most important matter to understand. Staying 2 metres away from these people eliminates the risk but how do you know who they are?! Over the next few weeks and beyond it is highly likely that there will be a very large number of these people around you….patients, friends, neighbours, work colleagues including doctors. Some will have such a mild form of the illness that they simply won’t know they’ve had it. Some will be well today but will become unwell in the next few days. ALL OF THESE “WELL” PEOPLE ARE CAPABLE OF INFECTING YOU TODAY.
* C) You can inhale virus by contaminating your hands and then your mouth and nose by touching something that has been contaminated by one of the two groups of people above. This is a risk BUT is avoidable. Viruses only live for a short period outside the body so that contamination does not last for long. Rigorous handwashing and avoiding touching your face can protect you ( I am sure you have seen the public information on this).

5 The strategy of the practice is wholly designed to try and prevent the spread of the virus whilst still providing care to our patients. So we have taken the following steps 6-10:

6 The practice is doing as much as they can by phone/video/text and so on. The fewer people who attend the surgery, the fewer infectious people will enter the building. This reduces the risk of them passing the virus to other patients and staff.

7 The practiceare seeing patients with symptoms that could be Covid 19 in a totally separate area and wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Keeping these patients separate prevents any chance of them contaminating the main building or infecting staff working in the main building. TThe doctor seeing these patients is at special risk but is protected by the equipment used. PLEASE NOTE THAT ONCE THE DOCTOR HAS REMOVED THE PPE AND WASHED HER/HIS HANDS THEY ARE NO GREATER RISK TO YOU THAN ANYONE ELSE YOU MAY MEET SO YOU MAY SEE THEM LATER IN THE BUILDING.

8 Seeing the few patients without symptoms suggestive of Covid 19 in the building, again using PPE. This is inevitable if we are to provide a service to sick patients with, for instance, severe mental health problems, cancer, other serious complaints. REMEMBER THAT SOME OF THESE PATIENTS WITH OTHER PROBLEMS WILL HAVE COVID 19 TOO BUT NOT BE AWARE OF IT. THEY CAN INFECT YOU, AS CAN YOUR FRIENDS, NEIGHBOURS, WORK COLLEAGUES.

10 To protect you whilst the risk of meeting infectious people (particularly as described in C and 8 above) is so high and rising, we have changed the way some of you work too. Doctors and other clinical staff need to wear PPE because they may have to come into close contact with certain other people, their patients. That means less than 2 metres away and sometimes a lot closer. Most of you do not have access to PPE and do not require it. Your defence is to stay 2 metres away from EVERYONE whilst you are at work and ideally everywhere except in your own home. So:

* The few patients who come are being instructed to sit at least 2 metres apart
* All staff should ensure that unless wearing PPE, they must stay at least 2 metres away from all patients
* Staff should stay at least 2 metres away from each other. To help this we have changed the way you are spread around the building, so that you can maintain that distance. You can still see people, make jokes (we all need it right now), update them on your life and so on. BUT KEEP THAT 2 METRE GAP AND YOU WILL BE SAFE
* WE ARE PARTICULARLY WORRIED ABOUT CROWDING IN THE KITCHEN WHERE IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN THAT GAP. YOU CAN USE THE KITCHEN IF YOU MUST BUT WE WOULD RECOMMEND YOU ONLY DO SO WHEN IT IS QUIET. To assist you in this we have relaxed the rules on making drinks. You can bring flasks and kettles to use in your room if you wish. You can consume lunch and drinks at your desk (this is not permitted in any rooms that patients access nor on reception front desk. It is best done only if you are the only person who sits at that desk). You are also free to go outside and get some fresh air too. That’s what many of us will do.
* You can use the staff room but please keep that 2 metre gap.
* Staff handling multiple items handed in by patients should wear disposable gloves and change these regularly. Dispose of them in a clinical waste bin. Whether you wear gloves or not, please remember that thorough hand-washing increases your protection against the virus.
* It is nice to be nice to people BUT HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THAT THE NICE COLLEAGUE WHO JUST MADE YOU A COFFEE IS INFECTIOUS. Make your own drinks and don’t be offended if a drink you’ve made is treated as if it’s poisoned! Similarly do you really want to dip into the same biscuits and chocolates as everyone else?
* If you or any of your household becomes ill with a fever or new persistent cough you must tell us immediately. You will be sent home to self-isolate as per the national rules and will be paid as for any other sickness absence. This is for the protection of all your colleagues and the patients. Normally this will require you to be absent for 7 or 14 days to self isolate following the national recommendations. However as we will be acting with extreme caution in the current climate, there may be occasional false alarms (everyone coughs now and again!) and if this is the case, earlier return may be permitted if we are happy there is no risk.
* We are applying exactly the same rules to everyone.

10 You will be aware that the government has advised against social gatherings because of the risk of being infected. We do not consider it our right to tell you how to live your lives away from work. What we would say is that, for the time being, we would ask that you consider avoiding social gatherings with numbers of your work colleagues. There is a real risk that one person could infect a whole group of us and actually close the building down.

I hope this small paper is of some use to you. We will keep you updated regularly from now on as the situation changes.