



Reflections and Recommendation Early Flu Communication

September 2020

Healthwatch in Sussex has provided insight to the Sussex Integrated Care System (ICS), through various winter planning discussions, on this year's local communication about flu vaccines, having listened to residents. We have provided this through winter planning workshops, in direct conversations with system leaders and via written communication.

Here we reflect on what could be done to support more people to get this important protection.

Context

General Practices (GPs) and Community Pharmacies are well versed in communicating and running the flu vaccine programme, having refined this over recent years. Many enlist the support of their Patient Participant Groups (PPGs) in this process.



This year, fear and changing community practices has brought a new dimension to this. Added to which, the Government's announcement in July that more people will be offered the flu vaccine has meant GPs and Pharmacies have increased demand and new cohorts of people to communicate with.

Reflections

• It is unclear from the examples of patient communication we've seen (letters/text messages/websites - see **examples**) and conversations with residents, that Sussex GPs have recognised people's concerns about whether accessing a flu clinic is safe.

This is an obvious fear when all people have to go on is potentially their experience of crowded clinics.

• Frontline staff don't appear to have the current information and understanding they need to support patients and public health/NHS to deliver on the ambition of making every patient interaction count, to ensure people most in need of the vaccine have it.



- Having a communication toolkit is useful but has come after local general practices
 have already sent out letters/texts etc to patients. This suggests a huge missed
 opportunity to align and strengthen the messages being offered to local people.
 - We've seen examples of really good public/patient communications that appeared at the end of August - which we know is when many of our general practices sent out their communication to patients.
- Whilst we've been involved in many workshops and conversations it has not been clear that there is a Sussex Health & Care Partnership strategic message that has been shared and agreed by all partners.
 - We have heard duplication of conversations and a warning that local groups/community representatives or ambassadors may switch off if they are asked to have the same conversations again as they may feel they are not being listened too (because professionals have come back again to ask the same questions).
- We've not been able to see how community pharmacy representatives have been included in local discussions, and understand there is more integration in other parts of England.
- Community Pharmacist's deliver a small part of the annual flu vaccines but do have a role in picking up people who otherwise may be left behind. This year, they may be viewed as a *safer* environment for people to visit than a GP surgery during the pandemic. Particularly, for those who may have visited a pharmacy but not a surgery more recently. They may also be seen as having been open throughout the Lockdown and are recognisably still open.

Recommendations

- As an integrated care system: public health, local authority community teams and the NHS specialists need to have a strategy and be clear on responsibilities to avoid duplication and the risk of disengaging local communities.
- System-wide communication with primary care (general practice and community pharmacies) needs to occur before they seek to roll out their own messages or the process of delivering initiatives commences. This should enable the delivery of shared clear messages that enable patients to make informed decisions and take proactive action.
- Use patient feedback to reassure others that this year's flu clinics are safe examples are available. May also want to video one.
- Supporting frontline staff, particularly reception teams in general practice, to
 understand the importance of making the most of interactions to make it easy for
 vulnerable patients to have the vaccine when they are already accessing a service. Key is
 that they know leadership wants them to work flexibly around internal processes to
 achieve this ambition.



Examples

Northern GP practice patient letter - with no information about the process

Dear Parent or Guardian	
	Annual Seasonal Flu Vaccination
Medical G identified as being in vaccination.	froup has now started our annual flu vaccinations and your child has been an at risk group and therefor are eligible to receive the free nasal flu
Please contact the surgery at either of the above numbers to make an appointment in a vaccination clinic.	
Please ensure that on	ly one parent or guardian attends the appointment with your child.
If they have already had the vaccination or have booked an appointment, please ignore this letter.	
If you do not wish your child to have a flu vaccination this year, please complete the slip below and return to the surgery and your records will be updated accordingly.	
Please note that if the parent or legal guardian is not bringing the child to the flu appointment then we will require their written consent to give the vaccination.	
Kind regards,	
Practice Manager	
×	
I do not wish to have the Flu Vaccination during your campaign	
Name: .	Patient Reference:
Date:	

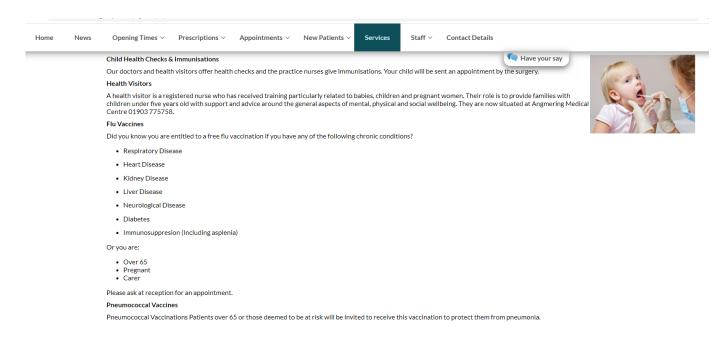
Chats with receptionists when trying to book vaccination appointment

Parent called and spoke to surgery's receptionist who was very pleasant and easy to talk too. However, they clearly did not know school years and the children's ages, e.g. that a 12 year old (Year 8 student) was outside the extended age range - now up to Year 7 for school vaccines. They asked why are you calling the surgery and not getting this done at school?

Rural, older patient had a face-to-face appointment at the surgery and asked the receptionist if they could book a flu vaccine appointment. They were told no, that they would have to phone the surgery when they got home to book. They mentioned this to the nurse and the nurse gave them the injection there and then.



Coastal GP practice - only flu information found on website



Northern GP practice -flu information on website

