



Baby it's cold outside...

October 2020

West Sussex is a beautiful county, with many caring and compassionate individuals, communities and organisations. Autumn and winter weather brings additional difficulties to people needing to access services - from queuing outside in the cold, wind, rain and ice to impacts on mobility. We are sharing stories which show the need for all organisations to adapt and find ways for our older and any vulnerable citizens to avoid suffering because of changes in the weather.

Recommendations

We'd like all readers to ask older and vulnerable patients to step ahead in any outside queues by starting with something along the lines of... **Please help me to do a random act of kindness by accepting the offer to move in front of me.**

We recommend:

- West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group's Medicine Management Team looks at how older and other vulnerable patients are supported to reduce the need for regular external queuing for prescriptions.
- All local GP surgeries review their medicine management processes and resource ways to proactively support older and other vulnerable people to avoid the need to visit the surgery and local pharmacy where possible.

Please share examples with us so we can highlight good practice.

- All primary and community care services (GP surgeries, pharmacies, etc.) review their processes on how people access to face-to-face services, so that queuing/waiting outside is avoided.

Where it is not possible to avoid waiting externally before entering a building, then we recommend looking at how to provide safe/social distancing shelter and seating (including the infection control measures needed).

There are local examples where organisations have asked their local community for support. One example: a company has come forward and built an external shelter on the grounds of a care home, so that friend and family visiting can continue.

Story #1

'I was recently waiting outside my village pharmacy in the cold. It was clear we were going to be waiting for some time (in the end, it was over 25 minutes). There were four people ahead of me, and two behind me. The last person being a thin older lady, with a stick. I asked the person behind me if we could let the last person ahead of us, and they quickly agreed. However, when we made the offer the lady declined. This made me realise that I should have approached this better and perhaps made this more about her helping me (warm feeling of doing a random act of kindness), as I sure she was way too proud and independent to want to queue jump.'

Story #2



Maggie's Story

'I took my mother to the surgery today to collect her prescription from the pharmacy. She is 89 and suffering from bladder cancer and also needs a stick to walk.

On arriving, at the surgery, it was apparent that a flu clinic was underway. There was a staff member standing outside the door in the porch waving a clip board around. She called my mother forward, patients were queuing in the open, and when my mother told her she wanted the pharmacy she told her quite rudely to get back in the queue. It had, by now started to pour down. There was also an elderly gentleman with a stick having to stand in the rain too, and one of the other patients was so concerned about him, she stopped and offered him her umbrella.

When asked to allow these elderly people some shelter the member of staff said there was nothing she could do, "*it's all about Covid*". She continued to stand under shelter and could easily have continued doing her job safely, whilst allowing the two older people to stand in the shelter. There was plenty of space to allow social distancing. Or could have used an umbrella to shelter herself, so the older patients could move under the shelter. It may be said that my mother and this gentleman could have returned to the car, but goodness knows how long they would have to wait and would have to have gone to the back of the queue. Also getting in and out the car is no fun either. My mother is registered disabled.

My mother has informed me that on several occasions she has had to stand outside in very poor weather conditions, for some reason she is only allowed two weeks' worth of medication at a time.

I am therefore very concerned about the lack of shelter, courtesy and compassion this surgery is providing to the most vulnerable patients. I'm not even sure an 89 year old with bladder cancer should have to queue for her medication in this manner every two weeks'? If COVID-19 doesn't get these vulnerable patients, pneumonia certainly will.

The surgery needs to put more thought into putting into place a more humane service, and a more empathetic member of staff in charge and to find some way of giving these elderly patients some shelter over the winter months, after all COVID isn't going away anytime soon.

Other surgeries have managed to provide shelter and proper assistance for their most elderly and vulnerable and do not treat them in this barbaric manner.'

