Re: Update on the COVID-19 Booster Programme and Impact Upon Your GP Services

Dear Patient

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday 12th December, we want you to know that Derbyshire general practice will be moving into a new phase in the battle against COVID-19.

The PM's ambitious target is **to offer Covid booster jabs to everyone over 18 by the end of 2021,** i.e., approx. 1 million vaccines a day for the next 17 days. With the worrying rise in the Omicron variant, it is clear from the Chief Medical Officers across the UK that without a substantial booster programme the NHS will be overwhelmed by a tsunami of cases, and care for patients with any medical condition will be impacted.

For the past 20 months practice teams across the county have been working relentlessly under the most challenging of circumstances, continuing to provide quality patient care to all patients, protecting the most vulnerable patients whilst simultaneously **providing over 75% of the vaccinations given in the county to date.** The new ask will be a huge challenge for practice teams that are already exhausted and being hit by the same illness and COVID impact as the rest of the nation. **It will require everyone to work even harder and longer than they do now.**

To meet the needs of this programme, patients will see a short-term change in the way care is delivered by general practice. Using guidance from both the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Medical Association, **practices will pause routine activity to free up their staff time to support enhanced vaccine delivery.** Practices will **continue to provide care for those presenting with urgent or potentially serious underlying problems such as known or suspected cancer**.

We appreciate the concerns you may have and once again request your kindness, respect and understanding for the teams working incredibly hard within our practices to help as many people as possible. You might notice the following:

- Delays in calls being answered
- Routine care being delayed
- Reception teams asking a lot of questions to help them get you to the best person first time, that person may not always be a GP
- Delays in any paperwork such as health forms and sick notes being completed
- That you are signposted to self-help and pharmacy options for self-limiting conditions

There are also a number of things you can do to help us:

- Use the NHS website and self-care for simple medical conditions https://www.nhs.uk/
- Visit the Derbyshire Helpline if you are struggling with your mental health
- Please **do not** contact the practice to request a COVID vaccination appointment. You will be contacted, or you can book through the National Booking System
- Remember it is **not too late** to start your vaccine course. If you have yet to book your first dose, please do so now.

Finally, **everyone can play their part in limiting the spread of the Omicron variant** and its impact on our local health care services. On behalf of all colleagues working across health and social care in Derbyshire, please could we ask you to help us by remembering the key messages we have repeated throughout the pandemic:

1. **Wash hands well and often**
2. **Wear a face covering**
3. **Maintain a 2 metre social distance and limit social contact**
4. **Isolate and take a PCR test as soon as you develop any COVID-19 symptoms. Remember Lateral Flow Tests DO NOT exclude COVID infection – these are for screening well people with no symptoms only.**

General practice teams across Derbyshire will be doing their very best for you and we know that you will want to do all you can to help us all get through this next phase in the pandemic.

Thank you again for your understanding, consideration, and kindness; it truly is appreciated by the whole team.

With thanks, Derby and Derbyshire LMC