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## **THE MERGER**

### **Your questions answered about the merger**

In April 2016, Moss Valley Medical Practice & Gosforth Valley Medical Practice merged to become The Valleys Medical Partnership. Prior to the merger, both practices undertook an exercise to liaise with patients about the reasons for the merger and the effect this would have. It is now more than 12 months since the merger took place and we have produced an updated list of questions and answers.

### **Why did the practices merge?**

Practices around the country are generally becoming larger as a result of mergers and takeovers by larger commercial organisations. This is happening because the pressures on general practice both from a workload and a financial perspective are increasing and the economies of scale associated with larger organisations help to alleviate this. The partners were keen to protect the future of each practice and felt this was best achieved by working in partnership with each other.

### **What about the name?**

Our organisation is called The Valleys Medical Partnership, but we were keen to retain the individual names of each practice. The rest of the health profession will take time to adjust their systems to our new name. You may find that letters from hospitals and other health centres may refer to the practice as any of the three names and may include the names of any of the doctors from either site. This has no adverse impact on your care. Our computer system is one joint system with a single patient list. All our documents are held electronically and can be viewed by staff from both sites, irrespective of where the physical document is sent.

### **Will I have to go to the other practice?**

It has always been our intention that patients will continue to visit the same local practice. We do not expect patients to attend the other site, but we may ask some of our staff to work across both locations. This has already happened as a result of staff shortages, where staff from the other site were able to help out. The practice business manager, Stuart Tilley, works across both sites, as does Dr Reborá. We also have plans for our employed pharmacist to work across both sites.

### **What problems have been encountered as a result of the merger?**

The main challenge has been the change of clinical computer system at Gosforth Valley so that both locations could use the same system. This was a two stage process (November 2015 and April 2016) and proved more problematic than we were expecting. The clinical computer system holds all patient records and manages all of our systems relating to patient care, including appointments, prescriptions, internal practice communications, referrals and all communications with other healthcare providers. We experienced a number of technical issues during the two periods of change and of course our staff have had to work very hard to become familiar with the functionality of the new system. As we begin to pull our systems together to work as one organisation, we have found that processes across the two practices are very different. Whilst this gives us some short term challenges, it does provide us with an opportunity to adopt the best processes from each site.

### **What benefits have we seen so far?**

- We have extended the service provided by the practice employed pharmacist at Moss Valley to benefit patients registered at Gosforth Valley and to help free up valuable GP time;
- We have employed a pharmacy technician to support the work of the pharmacist across both practices;
- We have improved the process to undertake an annual review of patients with specified long term conditions by removing the need for some patients to come in to the surgery for their review and by ensuring only relevant tests are undertaken;
- We have improved our annual medication review process so that, where possible, all medications are reviewed at the same time by the practice pharmacist with patients only needing to attend an appointment where there are specific concerns or a clinical need for a face to face appointment.

### **What changes are likely to happen in the coming months?**

We are embarking on a process to align our administrative processes across the two sites. This will allow us to undertake some of our administrative work centrally so that staff at a single site can undertake work for patients of both practices. We hope this will help to relieve some of the pressure our staff currently experience. As part of this change, there will be a move towards staff at Gosforth Valley making outgoing calls to patients and staff at Moss Valley handling incoming calls. We think this will improve our performance for handling incoming calls.

### **Why has it become more difficult to book an appointment with a doctor?**

General Practice across the UK is under severe pressure at the moment. There are a number of reasons for this:

- We have an ageing population, living with an increasing number of long term conditions;
- Nationally, there has been a significant increase in the incidence of certain conditions (for example, diabetes);
- There has been a move towards providing care closer to or at home, and away from hospital care;
- There is currently a shortage of doctors training to be GPs. This has reduced the number of GP registrars working at both of our sites;
- In recent years, the increase in funding for GP surgeries has not kept pace with our rising costs and demand.

All of these situations have placed general practice under significantly increased pressure and the current demand for our services is now significantly higher than our capacity. We will always try to prioritise our most urgent work, but unfortunately this affects our ability to offer routine appointments.

We have not decreased our capacity as a result of the merger. In fact, as a direct result of the merger, we have been able to increase our clinical resource. The merger gives us new opportunities to improve our efficiency so that we can invest any savings into additional clinical resource.

### **Stuart Tilley**

Business Manager

The Valleys Medical Partnership

# HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND OTHERS IN THE HEAT

## Taking care of yourself

- Drink more water than usual and don't wait until you are thirsty
- Avoid alcohol and drinks containing large amounts of sugar
- Take cool showers and baths
- If the rooms in your house are hot, draw the blinds or curtains and leave the doors and windows open to ventilate and cool down the house
- Make sure your clothes are lightweight and loose
- Always wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from sun damage—choose ones which block out 99 to 100% of both UVA and UVB radiation

## Taking care of those around you

- Check in on elderly and vulnerable neighbours during warm weather
- Never leave a person, child or a pet in a hot car
- Check regularly on how babies and toddlers, people taking mental health medications and people with heart disease or high blood pressure are doing

## If you must be out in the heat

- Avoid outdoor activity in the heat of the midday sun
- Rest often in shady areas
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat
- Use sunscreen of SPF 30 minimum and don't forget to reapply as directed
- Take bottles of water with you if you are walking in the heat or taking a car journey and take extra bottles as these could be used for anyone you see who looks like they could use a cool drink of water



## If you have a pet

- Provide plenty of shade and water.
- Never leave them in a car

# HAY FEVER - DON'T SUFFER THIS SUMMER

Late Spring and Summer can be miserable if you are one of the 15% – 20% of the population who suffer from hay fever. For many, even though the symptoms may be mild, hay fever can be very unpleasant, but for some the symptoms may be so severe as to be debilitating, affecting the ability to leave the house, drive and continue working.

## What is Hay fever?

Hay fever is an allergic reaction to pollens – mainly grass pollens but also to pollen from other plants, flowers and trees.



## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of hay fever include sneezing, wheezing, coughing, itchy or runny nose, and itchy or watery eyes. Inflammation of the throat, nose and eyes can be particularly severe in some sufferers causing difficulty breathing and disturbance of vision.

## Precautions:

You can't entirely avoid contact with pollens but sensible precautions can help to reduce exposure.

- Regularly check pollen count forecasts. Details are often broadcast on radio and the TV. Information is also available in newspapers and on the internet;
- Stay indoors on days when the pollen count is high and in the early evening when levels tend to be at their highest;
- Don't cut the grass and avoid grassy areas or where there are lots of flowers and don't have flowers in the house. Wear a face mask outdoors if very sensitive. Change clothes when you come indoors;
- Damp dust and vacuum regularly (use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter );
- Keep windows and doors shut;
- Keep car windows shut – fit pollen filters to air vents;
- If eyes are affected wear sunglasses and bathe eyes with freshly boiled and cooled water;
- Tobacco smoke in the air will make symptoms worse. If you smoke you should seek help to stop.

## Treatment:

There are many effective treatments to control the symptoms of hay fever that are available without prescription from a pharmacy, for example:-

- **Antihistamines:** Taking antihistamine in tablet, capsule or liquid form is the mainstay of treatment. Some older types of antihistamine may cause drowsiness and so if you are at school or college, have to drive or have to operate complex or dangerous machinery make sure that you tell the pharmacist so that they can supply non-sedating types.
- **Decongestant drops or sprays** to treat a blocked or runny nose are OK but only for short periods as they can damage the lining of the nose. Decongestant tablets can also be taken to control symptoms.
- **Steroid drops or sprays** may be used if your nose or eyes are affected or alternatively drops or sprays containing a specific '**anti-allergy**' drug such as **cromoglycate** could help.

If your symptoms are severe or don't respond to over-the-counter treatments which your pharmacist is able to supply, or your symptoms become worse despite treatment, you should see your doctor. Some treatments are only available on prescription.

**Don't forget you must always tell your pharmacist and doctor if you are, or if you may be pregnant, or if you are taking any medicines for other conditions. You should also ask about possible side effects of medicines that you purchase or are prescribed.**

## Honey as a treatment for hay fever:

There has been speculation about the use of honey to desensitise sufferers of hay fever. Because honey will contain small amounts of pollen or chemicals derived from pollens it is suggested that taking regular small amounts of a locally 'farmed' honey will offer protection from 'local' pollens – well it's worth a try!

**Speak to your pharmacist for further advice on treatments that are available without prescription.**

**Information about hay fever and its treatment is also available on the 'Patient.co.uk' website, the 'Allergy UK' website, and the 'Asthma and Allergy Information and Research' website.**

Mick Down

The Valleys Patient Participation Group

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