

“Inaccurate claims that general practice closed during the Covid19 crisis is undermining public confidence and causing patient harm” says LLRLMC

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Today the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Local Medical Committee (LLRLMC)(1) is sending an open letter to all MPs in LLR to express their concerns about the ongoing misinformed denigration of general practice (Appendix One), and providing every practice with a letter they can share with patients (Appendix Two). False claims about general practice has led to practices being sent inappropriate complaints by patients, and even staff being subjected to verbal abuse.

Dr Nainesh Chotai, who is Senior Partner at the Glenfield Surgery and Chair of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Local Medical Committee (LLRLMC), said “Inaccurate claims that general practice closed during the Covid19 crisis is undermining public confidence and causing patient harm. General practice has never faltered or stopped. It has always been there for when patients need it. I am so proud of my general practice colleagues who rapidly changed their surgeries in collaboration with the Clinical Commissioning Group to provide a safe service during the coronavirus pandemic for patients in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. GPs have worked tirelessly for their local patients, often at personal cost.”

“Unlike other parts of the NHS general practice has continuously provided a service when patients need it without ever stopping. During August 2020 there were 20 million general practice appointments in England of which half were face to face. In the same month LLR practices provided 420 thousand appointments of which 245 thousand were face to face.”(2)

“Practices had to evolve faster than ever before during the worst pandemic since 1918. Anyone who has visited a general practice during the pandemic will have witnessed the huge changes that have been made. Dividing screens have been erected, seating arranged to enable safe social distancing, one-way systems implemented, Covid19 symptomatic patients kept separate, and high-risk patients fully protected. Staff and clinicians are wearing appropriate PPE in line with government advice. I hope that patients feel reassured and protected by all these changes.”

“Some patients have been disappointed that they cannot choose to see a GP face to face. Practices have continued to be available to our patients throughout the crisis, but to protect both patients and our workforce, and following government guidance, we have used telephone and video consultations to reduce the need to attend the surgery. However, whenever it is clinically necessary to examine a patient or carry out a procedure, face to face appointments have been provided. GPs and their teams have always, and will always, continue to provide this service.”

Dr Fahreen Dhanji, LLRLMC Board Member and partner at Latham House Medical Practice said “During the pandemic the workload has changed, but general practices are busier than ever. In my



own practice the number of patients dealt with in our emergency clinic was 19% higher last month compared with August 2019. Indeed it was greater than during our busiest 2019 Winter month.”(3)

Dr Anu Rao, LLRLMC Board Member, Partner at Forest House Surgery, Shepshed, and IT Lead for the BMA GP Committee said “UK general practice has always been at the forefront of modern technology. The pandemic has demonstrated how rapidly surgeries can adopt new technologies to support new ways of working. For example, general practitioners who had to shield and even many who were off sick were able to continue to consult with patients remotely from their own homes.”

“There also needs to be an open public debate regarding the future of general practice. Even prior to the pandemic there was a national push for all practices not only to adopt remote consultations as first point of access, but to go further and require patients to navigate online questionnaires before any contact. The public need to be given the opportunity to decide whether this is what they want.”

Dr Nainesh Chotai concluded “General practice has been, and will continue to be, available to patients when they need us throughout this pandemic and beyond. It is crucial that patients who have concerns about their health are not put off from seeing their GP by false media reports.”

Ends

Further Information:

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Notes to Editors:

- 1) The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Local Medical Committee is an elected representative body with a statutory function to represent NHS GPs in this area.
- 2) Data provided by NHS Digital
- 3) Number of patients seen in the Latham House Medical Practice: 1823 in August 2019, 2120 in November 2019, and 2161 in August 2020.