

## Winter Pressures

Winter brings heightened challenges for general practices. The combination of increased patient demand due to seasonal illnesses, staff shortages, limited resources and potential weather disruptions can quickly overwhelm practices. Implementing effective strategies can help ease these pressures and ensure that practices continue to provide high-quality care.

### Optimise Patient Flow and Access:

- **Promote NHS app and Online Consultation:** Encourage patients to use the NHS app for booking appointments, ordering prescriptions and accessing health information.
- **Maximise Remote Consultations:** Offer telephone and video consultations for suitable cases to reduce in-person practice visits.
- **Streamline Triage:** Maximise the use of Online consultations and triaging teams to optimise assessment and prioritisation of urgent cases.

### Promote Public Health Campaigns:

Use social media and waiting room posters to inform patients about flu vaccinations, self-care for managing minor ailments, the pharmacy first scheme, and when to seek medical advice. Enhance Communication and Education

- **Update Practice Information:** Ensure website, opening hours and contact details are accurate and accessible. Promote the NHS App and Online Consultation system as much as possible.
- **Promote Self Care:** Encourage patients to manage minor illnesses at home with over-the-counter medications and rest.
- **Promote Pharmacy First:** Encourage patients to visit the pharmacy the aim of the scheme is to free up GP appointments for patients who need them most and will give people quicker and more convenient access to safe and high standards.
- **Targeted Messaging:** Send batch messages about flu vaccinations, COVID boosters, shingles and other relevant vaccinations.

### Empower Staff and Boost Efficiency

- **Flexible Working:** Offer flexible hours or remote working where possible.
- **Streamline Administration tasks:** Utilise Robotic Process Automation (RPA) for tasks like new patient registrations, lab reports and back-office functions, freeing up staff for patient care.
- **Optimise Rota Management:** Implement contingency planning, for sudden absence such as sickness and "Buddy up" clinicians for support.
- **Wellbeing Initiatives:** Support staff well-being through peer support groups, wellness champions and access to mental health resources.
- **Shared Resources:** Develop partnerships with other practices in the PCN to share resources, such as locum doctors and administrative staff.

### Utilise Technology

- **Winter-Ready Facilities:** Ensure facilities are prepared for winter conditions with appropriate heating, lighting and accessibility (don't forget arrangements for gritting).
- **Regular Stock Checks:** Ensure adequate supplies of clinical equipment, medication and vaccines.

### Electronic Prescribing System (EPS):

Fully utilise EPS to streamline prescription administration for both patients and the practice.

### Prioritise Infection Control and Prevention

- **Robust Measures:** Ensure strict infection control protocols, including improved ventilation, frequent cleaning, and appropriate use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- **Patient Education:** Emphasise the importance of preventive measures such as hand hygiene, mask-wearing, and staying home when sick.

### Data-Driven Decision Making

- **Predictive Analytics:** Use data analytics from to predict demand and allocate resources accordingly.
- **Real-Time Monitoring:** Ensure systems are in place for real-time monitoring of patient flow and healthcare