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Being a nurse in GP land during a global pandemic

Karen Landi is a GPN at the Speedwell Practice, North Finchley, Barnet.

The Coronavirus pandemic has been very challenging at times, meaning we have had to learn to work in different ways, while managing concerns for our patient's health and wellbeing as well as that of colleagues and our own families. Initially many of us felt that we were protected in our practices, with potential Covid patients being seen in hubs rather than regular practices. We felt for our hospital colleagues and district nurses and we know that their workload was immense and scary.

But we stayed open, and we did our bit! We called all our patients aged 80 and over as well as contacting all our most vulnerable and shielding patients (twice), offering support and advice. We also changed reviews to telephone calls whilst diabetes checks and reviews continued - once we'd worked out about PPE and cleaning schedules etc. Nurses became receptionists while staff were either unwell or isolating. It was a steep learning curve!

HPV screening continued and we even took part in a pilot for self-screening. We never stopped immunising babies and children and expectant mothers. We also completed a project around the bereavement services we offer and have made some positive and effective changes to our practice. This happened as we continued to support nursing students throughout the duration of the pandemic – they found this very useful as many of their placements had been cancelled.

We developed a student welcome pack and shared it with all GPN colleagues in Barnet and we are currently working on a project to incorporate art in the surgery. The aim of this project is to help reduce stress and anxiety levels for both patients, their families, and our staff members.

Our GPN WhatsApp group has proven to be an invaluable source of information updates and support. I feel very fortunate to be working with the nursing team we have at Speedwell, however all members of staff have pulled together to help out during this time. A huge thanks to all my colleagues: GPs, receptionists, secretaries, prescription team, scanners, admin support and our pharmacist (I hope I haven't forgot anyone!).

Our GPs have vaccinated all care home residents including housebound patients - and we had a very successful flu campaign too. One Sunday in September we vaccinated just under 1,000 of our patients aged 65 and over!

Challenges have been there of course as consultation room doors are closed with people consulting via phone. This then led to the communications between clinicians being very difficult. It felt like being a talking pamphlet some days and working in a call centre on other days!

Management has been inundated with streams of emails and changes have happened quickly - often with very little notice. Despite this their support has continued.

Without a doubt there are some changes in our ways of working that we will keep, and some we look forward to losing. However, we will continue to look forward in hope and optimism to meet the challenges that working in GP land brings!