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12 March 2020

To: all Worcestershire practices

Dear colleagues,

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Local Guidance on Planning and Responding to Primary Care GP Practice Capacity Challenges

This letter provides information and guidance to GP practices on how to plan and respond to the above recognising the increasing demand upon practices. This is local guidance which may be superseded by national direction. The CCG will review this local policy at least weekly and will advise you of any changes to these arrangements.

We have been contacted by a number of practices who are seeking clarity on what aspects of QOF and other GMS services they can be exempted from, acknowledging the impact upon staffing levels and minimising the risk of further spread of Coronavirus.

The decision to suspend non-core services currently sits with NHSE but the CCG understands the growing pressures that practices are experiencing and has taken a local decision to suspend a number of services with effect from Thursday 12 March 2020, until further notice.

The aim of doing so are threefold:

1. To sustain practice/PCN resilience i.e. enabling practices to deliver services whilst short-staffed and having to respond to increased patient demand with no detriment to Practice income.
2. To enable the delivery of safe clinical care to vulnerable patients and identify those at highest risk now as advised by Public Health England, and are defined as:
 - Adults over 60 years
 - Persons of any age with:
 - Cardiovascular disease including hypertension
 - Chronic respiratory disease including asthma
 - Diabetes
 - Severe immunosuppression as per Green Book definition
3. To enable practices to participate fully in national and local responses to Coronavirus

The CCG recognises the need for certainty of income during this difficult period. We have, therefore, developed this guidance in accordance with the principles approved between NHS Employers on behalf of the General Practitioners Committee (GPC) of the BMA in 2008 for protecting GP practices' income in the event of serious and sustained pressure from pandemic influenza. This means that GP Practices NHS income from QOF will be protected in line with the previous years earnings and Doctors and Dentists Review Body (DDRB) uplift.

For & on behalf of:

NHS Herefordshire CCG, NHS Redditch & Bromsgrove CCG,
NHS South Worcestershire CCG and NHS Wyre Forest CCG

QOF

We agree to the suspension of QOF but please use your clinical judgement and any time released to continue to focus on the vulnerable and at risk groups as per the definitions referred to above and in a way which you feel appropriate to minimise any risk to you and them (e.g COPD or Diabetes reviews by telephone).

PCE

We have already relaxed the requirements to meet to review referrals, prescribing and emergency admissions to provide you with time to discuss a PCN approach to Business Continuity. If any of you would like to share the outputs of this with us to circulate wider and to know how we might be able to support you, then please forward to the new generic email hw.primarycare@nhs.net

We are now extending this suspension to all other aspects of PCE except those which support the identification and care planning for those who meet the vulnerable patient definitions specifically Rockwood scoring, Respect documentation, advance care planning, anticipatory prescribing and OOH information sharing. This also means that the End of Life audit that we've recently contacted you about is no longer required.

On-line Booking

On-line booking should only be available for telephone appointments. We hope that this reduces the risk of patients attending the surgery without any form of triage and on the understanding that patients are able to access on-line consultation and/or the NHS app, for example.

Video Consultations/Remote Working & Other IT

All this week the Digital Team have been working hard to come up with a plan of action to support video and remote consultations.

We do understand that the technology deployment is only one part of this, there will need to be a lot more thinking around clinical workflow, business operations and communications to patients. The Digital and Primary Care teams will be working with Practices and liaising with Clinical Directors, LMC and Federations to support deployment, and understanding how the current COVID 19 situation will impact on daily operations for practices and associated guidance and policies.

The current intentions in relation to enabling video consultations are:

- Enable the functionality within EMIS to undertake Video Consultations. Discussions are taking place with EMIS to establish how this can be actioned imminently. Further communications will be issued to Practices from Kal Panchal, Programme Lead for Online and Video Consultations.
- As an alternative option for practices and patients it is recommended that ACCURX, a free and easy to use, safe app that could also used for video consultations. This has been tested and viewed by some GP IT Leads.
Details of the app can be found here www accurx.com/

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Neither of these options predetermine a long-term direction of travel for Video Consultations and associated business change.

We will be undertaking a rapid audit of hardware and equipment to ascertain where there may be a need to provide greater resilience and functionality for each practice to support home/remote working. There will be limitations to what we can source and provide but we will do what we can. We will be contacting Practices over the next few days.

Conclusion

The position is changing daily and we need to continually refine our plans to reflect the developing situation. We hope you find this local guidance helpful and supportive. We have arranged weekly teleconference calls with the LMC who will also be updating you.

Can we also remind Practices to send their generic email addresses to: hw.covid19@nhs.net as directed in the NHSE/I General Practice Standard Operating Procedure dated 5th March 2020, the deadline for this was noon 11th March 2020.

In the meantime, please send any queries regarding the specific content of this letter to hw.primarycare@nhs.net

Yours sincerely



Lynda Dando
Director of Primary Care

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