STAFF NEWS. We have welcomed new team members to the Health Centre since the last newsletter! A warm welcome to Mike Hall, who came in October as our new Practice Manager from Hungerford Surgery in West Berkshire, where he spent eight years as Practice Manager. Mike is married with four children and amongst many other interests is a football referee in his spare time. A warm welcome too to Lisa Grainger, who has joined our practice nursing team. Lisa trained as both an adult and paediatric nurse and has many years of NHS experience in hospitals and the community. Lisa is currently working in the treatment room whilst undertaking some specific training, and will then care for our asthma and COPD patients as well. And finally, a warm welcome to Leila Smith whom you may have already met behind the reception desk.

You might have noticed Dr Richard Coates on crutches at the surgery. He was knocked off his bike in early October, suffering a dislocated ankle and a broken leg. Ouch. He has been wired back together again and is on crutches for the time being. Richard is back to work but is not yet able to do any home visits.

Drs Shams Aljoboori and Faye Hext have both gone on maternity leave. We wish them both well. Dr Claire Webster will be covering Dr Aljoboori’s sessions. Shams will return to the Health Centre in the spring, but Faye will be continuing her training elsewhere after the arrival of her baby. Dr Morgan Farrington will return in February 2016, and will be with us full-time for one year to complete her GP training.

BACK GENERAL PRACTICE. GPs are aware that some patients are finding it increasingly difficult to get the appointments and services they need from us, and we feel that you should be made aware of the reasons for this.

Over the past few years, successive governments have reduced the investment in General Practice from around 10% of the NHS budget to nearer 7%. In spite of this reduction in funding, GPs still provide 90% of consultations carried out in the NHS. There is access to GP services 24 hours, 7 days a week, and the demand to see GPs is rising dramatically. There are currently 340 million GP consultations a year, an increase of 40 million in the last 5 years.

This has not been matched by an increase in GP and staff numbers or an expansion in the infrastructure. Added to this GPs are expected to take on more and more work previously carried out in hospitals, and are obliged to attend meetings with the Clinical Commissioning Groups, NHS England management and spend hours preparing for and meeting the Care Quality Commission. All of these mean less time to see patients.

In addition, there are huge difficulties in recruiting new doctors and nurses to work in General Practice. Currently there is a shortfall of about 10,000 GPs across the country and it is impossible to see how this shortfall can be addressed when it takes a minimum of 10 years to train a GP.

We simply want you to know that we are aware of the problems you have accessing some services and that we are working as hard as we can to provide those services. We hope you will bear with us as we strive to continue to provide quality General Practice in this area.

Patients can help enormously by making sure that they attend the appointment they have made with a doctor or nurse or by letting us know, in good time, when they are unable to keep the appointment. On average 125 patients per month fail to attend their appointment here at Sonning Common and significantly reducing those 1,500 lost appointments per year would be of huge benefit to everyone as well as saving valuable NHS funds.

SONNING COMMON HEALTH WALKS, 20TH ANNIVERSARY. The Health Walk committee are organising a celebration of their 20th anniversary of the Health Walks on Sunday 24th April at the Sonning Common Village Hall from 2.00 pm. Drs William Bird and Tess Harris will be attending and all walkers past and present, and anyone else who is interested, are welcome.
INTERESTING FACTS FROM YOUR SURGERY!

We currently have 8,660 patients registered here at Sonning Common Health Centre and during the last 4 months (August to November) 277 patients have registered and 230 patients have left the surgery.

There are 22 families at our practice celebrating the safe arrival of their newborn baby with 8 girls and 14 boys born! Congratulations to all the new parents.

28 patients celebrated their 80th birthday since the last newsletter; 7 patients were congratulated on reaching their 90th birthday; and 1 patient reached the admirable age of 100 years or older. Our warmest wishes to them all.

During the last 4 months, 429 patients did not attend their appointments, which led to over 70 hours of unused appointment time not being used by patients. **If you cannot keep your appointment, please let us know. It will help!** We appreciate that at times it is hard to reach us on the telephone. If we have your mobile number on record, you can reply to the text message reminder to cancel, or you can also e-mail us on schcreception@nhs.net.

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Winter can be serious for our health. Cold and damp weather, ice, snow and high winds can aggravate any existing health problems and make us more vulnerable to common winter illnesses. Being cold can raise the risk of increased blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes. Here are some things you can do to stay well this winter:

- **Make sure you get your flu jab.** Flu can lead to serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia. Flu jabs are free if you are aged 65 or over; if you have a long-term health condition; and for children aged two, three or four or in school years one or two. Carers of an older or disabled person may also be eligible for the free flu jab and those aged 65 or over are also eligible for the pneumococcal vaccine.

- **Keep warm** over the winter months to help prevent colds and flu, and problems such as heart attacks, strokes, pneumonia and depression. **Heat your home to at least 18°C (65°F)** but you might prefer your main living room to be slightly warmer. **Keep your bedroom window closed on winter nights** as breathing cold air can increase the risk of chest infections.

- **Keep active when you are indoors** and try not to sit still for more than an hour or so. **Wear several layers of light clothes** to trap warm air - this is better than one bulky layer.

- **Make sure you receive all the help you are entitled to** and learn how to make your home more energy efficient. **Check your heating and cooking appliances are safe.**

- **If you feel unwell – get advice from your nearest pharmacist.** Winter can make existing health problems worse - do not wait, if you are coming down with something, even if it is just a cough or a cold.

- **Is your medicine cabinet ready for the winter?** Most common winter ailments (cold, sore throat, cough, sinusitis or earache), can not be treated with antibiotics - instead rest, drink plenty of fluids, and keep your energy levels up. A pharmacist can advise you on which medicines you should have in your cabinet, to get you through the winter season. **Take any medicines as directed** if you have been prescribed any.

- **Look out for other people** like older neighbours, friends and family members. **Keep in touch** with your friends, neighbours and family. **Make sure they are stocked up with enough food supplies** for a few days and encourage them to **wear shoes with a good grip and a scarf around the mouth** to protect them from the cold air. **Make sure they get any prescription medicines before the holidays start** and if the forecast isn’t good.

If you do need help over the holiday period when the Health Centre or pharmacy is closed, please call NHS 111 and speak to a call adviser for advice.
When you need advice on how to manage a long
condition
or improve your mental or physical health,
Before ringing your GP, 111 or visiting A&E
24-hour support you can access from anywhere
To find health support groups in your area

When should I use COACH?

● Before ringing your GP, 111 or visiting A&E
● When you need advice on how to manage a long-term condition
● When you want to improve your mental or physical health
● To find a local hospital, pharmacy or doctor's surgery
● To find health support groups in your area

NB. COACH has been built to support Internet Explorer 8 and above (i.e. the vast majority of users). If you use Internet Explorer 7 at home, follow the instructions on the screen when you log on for the first time.

What are the benefits to me of using COACH?

● No more slogging through irrelevant sites on search engines
● Knowing that you will be directed to trusted advice
● 24-hour support you can access from anywhere
● Knowing that you will be directed to groups and services in your local area

COACH WEBSITE. This is a new website that is evolving and updating all the time. The home page introduces you to COACH, the four pillars of information, a need help/choose well guide, symptom checker, the Twitter account that will be used to send out information and an opportunity to change the language.

COACH is a one-stop port of call for all health and wellbeing advice, with trusted, relevant and local advice, that will put an end to trawling search engines for the right advice. It has digitalised the way that patients can find help and advice, and is available at any time from your mobile, tablet or PC. Have a look now at: www.my-coach.org.uk

PREMISES UPDATE. We are always looking at ways to improve the patient experience at Sonning Common Health Centre and we are currently working on a number of initiatives such as:

● Introducing a selection of new chairs in the waiting room to accommodate the specific needs of our patients such as those with knee and hip problems.
● Looking at re-surfacing and improving the surgery car park.
● Installing automatic (button release) doors into the main reception area from the foyer
● A rolling programme to decorate and refurbish the consulting and treatment rooms
● Improving the waiting room facilities and access to patient information.

We would be pleased to hear from you if you have any suggestions or ideas.

CAR PARK. Can we ask any of you who use our car park when you are NOT visiting the Health Centre to park elsewhere and leave the car park spaces for patients? This deprives our patients of valuable parking spaces, and causes unnecessary stress. Please park with thought and consideration for others.

The parking spaces for patients visiting the surgery are on the right hand side as you enter the car park, by the path. The dentist has clearly marked their parking bays, and the remaining bays are for our staff parking.

In the Spring newsletter we reported very positive results from the PACE-Lift trial, a pedometer-based walking intervention in 300 60-75 year olds from Sonning Common Health Centre, Balmore Park and Priory Avenue Surgeries. We showed significant increases in walking at the moderate-to-vigorous intensity level, which is very beneficial to health, which were sustained at 12 months.

These findings were published in a prestigious medical journal called PLoS Medicine (www.journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1001783) and were highlighted in the National Institute of Health Research annual report as an example of a very successful primary care trial.

However, some very important questions still remain unanswered. Did the people who were walking more at the end of the follow-up get the walking bug and make permanent changes? Are they still walking more? Has the increased walking had effects on other important health outcomes such as back pain, arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, depression, anxiety, falls, disability levels etc?

A researcher from St George’s University of London (Mrs Cathy McKay) is contacting them all over the course of the next year. If you are contacted for the follow-up, please try and take part if you can. The answers that we get from this study will be very important to the NHS and researchers in deciding how to try and promote physical activity in this age group and what the expected benefits might be.

Tess Harris
GP Sonning Common Health Centre & Reader in Primary Care, St George’s University of London.
CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR OPENING.  We will be open as normal in the run up to Christmas, including Christmas Eve. We will be closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day, Monday 28th December and New Years Day and open as normal on the days in between Christmas and New Year.

Please ensure you have adequate repeat medication for the festive period - we recommend that you submit any repeat prescriptions by 6.00 pm Friday 18th December for collection by Thursday 24th December. If you need medical advice whilst the surgery is closed please contact the out of hours service on NHS 111.

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.  The best way to find out what safeguarding issues and risks young people face in Oxfordshire today is to speak to the young people themselves. This is what the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board have done. With their help they have designed a mobile phone app and a website.

How to keep you and your friends safe: Young People can download the Oxford City Council ‘Bungee’ App which is free to download on android and smart phones, and gives a guide to support services and activities in Oxfordshire. Look at the ‘Keeping Safe’ section for helpful advice and information.

For more information you can also visit a website for children young people and their families: www.THINKUKNOW.co.uk. You can click on one of their buttons for advice for your age group:

Who can I talk to?  No matter what the problem is, you can get help:

ChildLine: A free confidential helpline for children and young people in the UK. You can call them on 0800 111 111 to talk about any problem. They have counsellors who are always there to help you sort it out.

NSPCC: Run a wide range of services across the UK (children and adults) including national helplines and local projects.

You can also speak to a local social worker:
Oxford City – 01865 328563
South Oxfordshire – 01865 323041
Emergency Duty Team – 0800 833 408

To report online abuse, visit www.ceop.police.uk (Child Exploitation and Online Protection).

Visit Think U Know to find the latest information on the sites you like to visit, mobiles and new technology. Find out what’s good, what’s not and what you can do about it.