

Surgery News

Where's the snow and ice – or at least the chilly weather? I can't possibly get in the mood to write about Christmas arrangements when it's mild and pleasant outside. I'll have to try really hard to work up the enthusiasm even to tag a bit on the end of the page about them.

You might remember that I've had a bee in my bonnet for a couple of years now about the NHS starting to upload individual patient Summary Care Records (SCRs) to the national computer system – the spine. I promised I would let everyone know when it was imminent so that anyone who doesn't want their SCR to be available to NHS staff throughout the country can say so.

Basic data, such as name, address, date of birth and NHS numbers were uploaded quite a while ago. Nobody was given a choice about that. Well, it now seems that our patients will have the first part of their medical data uploaded around mid-March 2012. This batch will include details of medication, adverse reactions and allergies. Further data about medical history will be added, but only with each individual patient's specific consent, from a later date still to be decided.

If you don't want this data available on the spine, please ask for an opt-out form next time you contact the surgery. The Department of Health, in its wisdom, has decided that anyone who doesn't express a wish either way will be assumed to want their SCR on the system. I think that used to be called "inertia selling".

If you do want your SCR uploaded, you don't need to do anything. It will happen automatically.

I'm afraid that nobody here can advise you on the pros and cons of having your data uploaded. Everyone has to make up their own mind about that.

Last month, I mentioned that we are trying to put together a Patient Participation Group (PPG) to help with planning and mapping out the surgery's future. I'm afraid the response hasn't been great to date and plenty more volunteers are needed if we are to make the idea work. As I indicated, everything will be done by e-mail as far as possible, and the commitment will amount literally to a few minutes perhaps half a dozen times a year. If you feel that it's a good idea, please don't leave it to other people – we need your help. E-mail a few details about yourself to me at "postmaster.gp-f81021@nhs.net" and I'll put you on the provisional list.

We are still dishing out flu jabs at a furious rate, but there are a surprising number of people who don't seem to be taking the threat seriously this winter. Just because the government isn't running an advertising campaign this year, it doesn't mean that there won't be an epidemic. Don't forget that if you catch flu, even if it doesn't kill you, it can make you very, very ill for several weeks. Also, if you catch it, you'll probably pass it on to your nearest and dearest – husband, wife, kids, grandchildren, neighbours – you owe it to them to make sure that you are protected to ensure that you don't cause them to suffer. We expect to have plenty of vaccine available this year, so book yours now. If you are in the government's target groups, the jab is free and you would be mad to ignore the protection that it will bring.

Whilst on the subject, if you are unfortunate enough to catch flu, or even just a bad cold, please don't bring it into the surgery. Stay at home so that you don't spread your germs. Drink plenty of fluids and use over the counter remedies from your pharmacy to help ease the symptoms. Both flu and colds are caused by viruses and we still can't do anything at all to cure them. Antibiotics won't help one little bit and the more you use them unnecessarily now, the less effective they will be when you genuinely need them. Please don't try to talk the doctor into prescribing them if he/she says that they aren't appropriate.

Okay, I've just about managed to massage my Christmas spirit back to life. The surgery will be closed from the evening of Friday, 23rd December until 8.00am on Wednesday, 28th, then again from Friday 30th until

8.00am on Tuesday, 3rd January. During those times, **urgent** medical care can be accessed from Harmoni by ringing the normal surgery number. As ever, **minor injuries** can be dealt with at the special units at Clacton and Harwich hospitals. The Walk-in Centre at the Primary Care Centre building on Turner Road, Colchester will be open to deal with people who are **ill but well enough to travel**. Finally, for genuine, **life-threatening emergencies**, A&E will be open at Colchester General. Please don't put yourself through using it if one of the other options will do the job though. Staff there will be far too busy coping with really serious cases to attend to tummy-aches, hangovers, bumps and abrasions – you won't be welcome and it'll be a long wait.

I'm going leave giving full details about opening the hours for these services over the holidays until next month otherwise they will have been recycled long before they are of any use.

Hugh Cronin
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