

Surgery News

It still amazes me that a little bit of snow can bring everything grinding to a halt. I'd better not say anything about soft southerners though – I've been down here too long to feel smug and superior any more! I have to admit too, that the recent falls were enough to cause a genuine nuisance. We used up a normal winter's worth of salt in just a week, trying to maintain safe pathways through the snow and ice to the main surgery door. The doctors and staff here deserve a real pat on the back for keeping everything going throughout the bad week. Everybody managed to get to work, which was fantastic. The only working days missed here were due to schools closing and there being no alternative childcare available, which must have been a problem everywhere.

A lot of patients cancelled appointments rather than struggling to get in, which I'm sure was the sensible option – and thank you to those of you who did let us know that they weren't coming. (The prize for the best call goes to a lady who felt that the roads were far too dangerous for her to drive in, so please would one of the doctors drive out to her.) Anyone who just didn't turn up but failed to tell us they weren't coming – please remember that you can always cancel an appointment by leaving a message on 01206 255071. Finally on the weather front, apologies to anyone who had difficulty getting an appointment after the snow while we were working through the backlog of people who needed to be seen. Hopefully things will be back to normal by the time you read this.

The festive season is nearly here and at the surgery we are looking forward to being closed for four days at Christmas (Saturday 25th – Tuesday 28th December inclusive) and then three days at New Year (Saturday 1st – Monday 3rd January). For anyone who hasn't already got them, I'll give below our tips on avoiding the Accident & Emergency Department at Colchester while we are having our breaks. The staff at A&E are brilliant I know, but who in their right mind would want to spend hours there waiting to be seen if there are suitable, quicker alternatives available. Well, in many cases there are.

If you just need **medical advice** when we are closed, it's available from NHS Direct on 0845 46 47. This is a nurse-led service which specialises in giving expert guidance on straightforward matters that don't need the immediate attention of a doctor. They might enable you to stay at home with your family, even if you aren't well enough to enjoy your Christmas dinner.

If you have a **minor injury** (note – **not** an illness or a major trauma) that needs attention, the Minor Injuries Units at Clacton and Harwich Hospitals will be open each day over the Christmas and New Year breaks from 9.00am until 9.00pm. You don't need an appointment and waiting time at either unit is usually a lot shorter than at Colchester A&E.

If you have an illness that definitely needs attention and you can travel, as an alternative to the Out of Hours Service which is always terribly busy over the holiday period, why not try the Walk-in Centre in Colchester? It's on Turner Road, quite close to the hospital (handy if it turns out that you need to go there afterwards), and is open from 7.00am until 10.00pm every day of the year. Again, you don't need an appointment.

If you think you are ill enough to warrant seeing a doctor, in the first instance please call the Harmoni Out of Hours Service. (Here at Great Bentley, if you ring the surgery out of hours on 01206 250691, you will automatically be transferred to Harmoni.) You will be assessed over the telephone and, if necessary given an appointment to be seen at one of their out of hours centres. If you are genuinely too sick to travel and it seems absolutely necessary, a duty doctor will be sent to visit you. **Please note that lack of transport is not a reason for a visit – neither is bad weather.** Only people genuinely too ill to travel will be visited.

As a last resort, there is always A&E at Colchester, but I for one would use any of the above in preference. Let's leave A&E to deal with major trauma and life threatening situations which, let's face it, are the really important parts of their job.

So it's now time to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas – or Yule, or Winter Solstice if Christmas isn't your thing – and a happy, healthy New Year. I think I'll hedge my bets and celebrate the lot. Meanwhile, it's time I went off and started thinking about New Year's Resolutions again. Watch this space.

Hugh Cronin
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