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A statement from the partners of Kennet and Avon Medical Partnership

It has become apparent that over recent days there have been an increasing number of complaints and negative comments made on Pewsey Noticeboard and other social media sites about this year's 'flu immunisation programme. Much of what has been said has been based on a number of misunderstandings about the obligations of the Practice, and on a failure to consider the full implications for both patients and practice staff of simply repeating the system we have used in previous years. We have already tried to explain why we have decided to implement these plans, both directly to the PPG and with a detailed list of FAQs on our website, but it would seem that it is not yet clear to many patients.

Therefore we will aim to address some key points below regarding 'flu immunisations, particularly during the challenging conditions this year.

Most importantly of all, please remember that decisions about how we run the 'flu immunisations are made by the partners of Kennet and Avon Medical Partnership. **They are NOT made by the staff, or by the Practice Manager (who is an employee of the partners).** While we understand that not everyone is happy with the plans we have made, we will not tolerate any abuse of any of our staff, verbal or physical, for any reason.

Why is the flu immunisation programme so different this year?

Covid-19 has changed everything. Regardless of what you may have read in some newspapers, on Facebook or other social media, or have been told by politicians, GPs *did not close*. We DID, however, have to very quickly change the way we deliver primary care to minimise risks to our staff and, crucially, to patients. Overnight, we adopted new ways of working, adapted surgery buildings, adopted new technology, sourced massive quantities of PPE and undertook risk analysis on huge numbers of patients. We did most of this without guidance from the government initially. KAMP has a very large number of care home patients, and a higher percentage of older, more vulnerable patients in the community than many other local practices, and we have had to work very hard to keep them safe.

We are not about to undo our hard work by ignoring the very real risks of delivering 'flu clinics as we did in the past.

We know that the risk of transmission of Coronavirus is higher in an indoor environment, and particularly where there are large groups of people passing through a small area with multiple contact points and surfaces. It is also the case that the ONS surveys show, at the time of writing, that between 1 in 400 and 1 in 500 people are currently infected with Coronavirus and most will have no symptoms and be unaware of their infection. This number is rising, and there are confirmed cases locally, with and without symptoms.

In previous years, each staff member has given approximately 200 injections per session, in a small room with minimal airflow. Would you be happy to be that person? Each patient may only be in the room for a couple of minutes, but they will be in the building for longer. Neither surgery building is at all well ventilated – we keep the

numbers in the waiting rooms as low as we can for this reason – which increases the risks. It does not make sense to run several sessions with huge numbers of the most vulnerable patients in our community queuing in poorly-ventilated spaces to have their vaccinations. The social distancing needed will make these queues many times longer than usual, also meaning that the time spent queuing outdoors before even getting into the building will be much longer. People have found having to queue outside for long periods very unsatisfactory in previous years. The only answer to this is a large marquee, where we can remove side sections to increase ventilation, whilst keeping large numbers under cover even while they are socially distanced. Crucially, a marquee will also have the minimal number of contact points such as door handles or other surfaces which could spread the virus.

Why Marlborough College?

As we have already explained in the invitation letter, we needed a site that:

- Is big enough to accommodate a marquee that is itself big enough for a large number of staff to do the vaccinating, as well as keeping as many patients as possible under cover and still socially distanced. More staff vaccinating means quicker patient flow, shorter waits and less risk.
- Has a large amount of space so those who need to drive can park close to the marquee.
- Is also able to accommodate a drive-through vaccination station.
- Is big enough to do all of this with minimal disruption to traffic flow on the main roads approaching the site.
- Is hard-surfaced so cars and marquees don't sink!

It has been suggested we should be using the Bouverie Hall or the Leisure Centre or one of the local Sports clubs. Some of these may have large enough buildings, or possibly have enough space for a drive-through station, *but none of them meet all the criteria above.*

Every year it is the case that a large number of patients do not live within walking distance of the clinic sites. We are aware that the need to change the arrangements this year will affect a different group of patients, and so have prioritised a site with excellent access by road, as much parking as possible and the capacity to offer a drive-through immunisation option for the least mobile.

We are aware that other surgeries have already done some of their 'flu clinics, and they have done them as they always used to. We cannot speak for other local surgeries – they all have different numbers to vaccinate, different buildings and different demographics – but we have rigorously checked all the other options, including doing things as we did previously, and they all have unacceptable levels of risk, both for patients and staff.

Some other facts about 'flu immunisation:

- Giving flu vaccinations is not, in fact, part of our contract. The core obligations of a general practice are laid out in the General Medical Services contract we have with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Each year we have opted to engage with the locally-offered flu vaccination programme for the benefit of our patients.
- We order our 'flu vaccinations very early – at around Christmas of the year before we give them. This has always been the case, which means that we have to estimate how many we will give based upon uptake the previous year and knowing that we may not be able to order additional supplies nearer the time. Surgeries placed their orders before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. We expect that demand will be high this year (in previous years approximately 75% have attended) and this is why we are not giving any vaccinations before the clinic dates: we want to ensure that everyone we have invited can have their vaccination if they attend as we have prioritised those at highest risk.

- We have no control over the dates the vaccinations are delivered by manufacturers. Only when we are told these dates can we make any firm plans, and even then we have to allow for unexpected delays, which we have experienced a number of times in the past.

We hope this information will have addressed any concerns you have. Our aim is, and has always been, to find a way of delivering the 'flu vaccination programme to our most vulnerable patients whilst at the same time minimising risks to both patients and staff. If our staff become infected and are therefore unable to work this jeopardises the level of care we can offer to all our patients.

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