Welcome to the latest edition of our countywide GP Newsletter (including GP surgeries in South Worcestershire!).

Sorry that it’s a bit later than usual (and we hope you haven’t been waiting by your letterbox for it to arrive!) but we were waiting until after the first User Forum at the end of September so that we could report on that.

One of the issues we discussed at the Forum was communication between the Trust and primary care users of the Pathology service. We hope that the Newsletter is a key tool in that communication – but in addition, we’re always keen to attend protected learning sessions or Practice Managers meeting, Practice Nurses meetings – or any other primary care meetings where you think our input would be of value.

Inside This Issue

- New Appointments in Haematology
- User Forum Meeting
- South West Midlands Direct Access bid
- Transport of Health Records
- EDTA Tubes for PTH
- Blood tubes
- Access to results
- Mixing samples
- Christmas and New Year Van Runs
- Access to Haematology Advice and Guidance

New Appointments in Haematology

We are very pleased to welcome Dr Michael Shields and Dr Philip Robson to the Haematology Department.

Dr Shields says “My first appointment as a Haematology Consultant was 1994. I have worked in small and medium sized District General Hospitals and also in a large Tertiary Referral / Teaching institution. Although much of my career has been focused on the management of patients with haematological malignancies (particularly Plasma Cell Myeloma and Lymphoma) I have maintained an interest in patients with general haematological problems and also laboratory haematology. I have held a wide variety of managerial roles and I am an enthusiastic teacher.

From September 2010 I spent two years as a VSO volunteer working in Malawi as a Lecturer at the College of Medicine in Blantyre. I taught laboratory science students, medical students and medical post-graduates. I also tried to provide a clinical and laboratory haematology service for the adjacent Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital.

I started work in Gloucestershire on 30th September and am currently based at Cheltenham.”

And a few words from Dr Robson:

Having trained in the Bristol region, I have returned to take up a full-time post, working within the Haematology team on the Gloucester site. Enjoying the wide variety of work in a district general hospital, I have particular interests in Lymphoma and Haemostasis, taking over the departmental lead role in haemostasis.”

These new appointments have meant that the Department is able to increase its access to clinical advice and guidance (see details in the letter on page 4, which is also being sent out separately.
User Forum Meeting

The inaugural meeting of the User Forum was held on Monday 30th September. There was a healthy attendance from primary care and from pathology and a number of issues were discussed and actions agreed. Detailed notes will be sent out as soon as they’ve been agreed by the Chair, but in the meantime, the main issues which were discussed were:

- Access to and format of results and reports – which we’re working on and hope to be able to give some definite news in the near future. In particular we’re working on the format of some Microbiology reports, including Chlamydia
- More information about tests, repeat intervals, etc. available on the Pathology website (and also included on the CCG portal)
- A reminder that there is an anti-coagulation inbox for less urgent queries: warfarin.dosingteam@nhs.net
- A reminder that timings of van runs are critical – and holding up a driver has a knock-on effect for all the other surgeries on that run and ultimately on the sample quality and the result.

Immediate feedback on the meeting was very positive with participants saying that it was a useful forum for the discussion and resolution of issues.

We are planning to hold the next meeting in mid January so we hope for a good attendance (weather permitting!) with maybe a few more GPs able to make it. If you are interested in being part of this group, please contact Dr Caroline Bennett: caroline.bennett@glos.nhs.uk

South West Midlands Direct Access bid

As reported in the last Newsletter, the Midlands SHA announced in April 2012 that it would be putting all of the GP pathology testing service for the Midlands out to tender for Chemical Pathology, Haematology, Microbiology and Immunology.

GHNHSFT expressed an interest in bidding for the work from Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire and Coventry – with a strategic partner.

The bid team put the process on hold to go back to CCGs to determine whether or not the potential savings originally envisaged were still deliverable.

Unfortunately, the CCGs decided that the cost/benefit analysis did not stack up so the tendering exercise has been terminated.

This is disappointing news because we felt that this provided an opportunity for us to further develop pathology services in Gloucestershire – as well as providing economies of scale, the benefits of which could be shared with local users of the service. However, we shall continue to explore ways of improving the quality and cost-effectiveness of the service we provide – and we will seek to work in partnership with neighbouring organisations to achieve this, where appropriate.

Transport of Health Records

We are currently experiencing difficulties with packages being labelled as Medical Records which are then subsequently being delivered to the Medical Records department at the hospital.

Can all practices please ensure that when returning GP medical records to NHS Shared Business Services at Exeter that the correct bags are used, as supplied by NHS Shared Business Services, and that the Exeter address is clearly displayed on the package? Thank you very much!

EDTA tubes for PTH

For the attention of anyone taking blood for a PTH test:

Earlier this year we changed the sample type required for the PTH test. In most cases we are receiving the correct sample – a separate EDTA tube (which cannot be shared with any other test). The ICE request form indicates the number of tubes which are required for any combination of tests requested so please use this to help you provide us with the correct samples. However, if you are taking blood from one of your patients for secondary care using the old handwritten forms (particularly for Renal Patients) please remember this change to sample type for PTH and send us an extra EDTA sample when PTH is requested. Many thanks.
Blood Tubes

We’ve had an issue with melted blood tubes over the summer – but we’re not sure whether it was a manufacturing fault or a storage problem. This is a cross-match tube:

And below is an EDTA tube:

We’ve contacted the manufacturers – who have said that it must be a storage issue (although it is hard to imagine storage conditions which would result in melting to this degree) however, please can we ask you to keep an eye on the conditions under which you are storing sample tubes – and please let us know if you notice any melted tubes when we send them out (we’ll also be keeping a look out!)

Access to results

We’ve been having continuing issues with patients phoning the laboratories or turning up in pathology reception areas asking for results to their tests.

We are only able to give results and reports to the requesting clinician – and/or to another clinician, recorded on the request form under “copy to”. The patients tell us that they have been instructed to ask us for their results by their GP and are disappointed when we are unable to help. This makes phone lines busier than they should be – as well as increasing stress for the patients. Please could you ensure that patients are aware that they will not be able to get their results directly from the Pathology Department?

Mixing samples

Sorry – another moan!

We are generally receiving blood samples in the appropriately coloured transport bags – however, we still sometimes receive a number of Haematology/Chemistry/Microbiology samples mixed in with Cytology samples in the Yellow transport bags… this is the worst case scenario for these samples, as they are all sent to Cheltenham and the bags may not be opened until the following day… even if they are opened the same day, these samples then have to be transferred back to GRH so causing a delay in analysis….

Christmas and New Year van runs

This year we propose to only have one collection on Christmas Eve, and the normal two on New Year’s Eve.

If you feel that you would like to have a second collection in the afternoon on Christmas Eve, please let us know by 7th November, and we will try to arrange this for you…. also, if you DO NOT require a second collection on New Years Eve, we would be grateful if you can tell us, as we may be able to merge some of the routes. Please could you let Jenny Webster know on 0300 422 4076 or e-mail jenny.webster@glos.nhs.uk?

Thank you!
11 October 2013

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your patience and understanding during the summer whilst senior medical staffing levels in our department have been particularly low. Following the recent addition of Dr Phil Robson and Dr Mike Shields to our countywide team, we have been striving to deal with the laboratory and non-urgent clinical work that has been displaced over recent months by the demands of the acute haemato-oncology service and our chronic disease patient cohort.

With immediate effect, we have established a **Haematology Choose and Book Advice and Guidance Service** to manage clinical and non-urgent laboratory queries that are not expected to result in a hospital appointment. This will replace traditional letters, fax and email referrals for advice. All referrals for appointments (except Suspected Haematological Malignancy - Two Week Wait referrals) should come through **Haematology Choose and Book Appointments Service**.

In addition, we are delighted to be writing to inform you that the **Haematology Advice Telephone Service** has been fully reinstated. The mobile phone (07766 424282) will be held by the laboratory consultant of the day between 3pm and 5pm during the week (incoming calls only), aiming to manage queries relating to laboratory tests and results. We hope that this will reduce the need to contact the laboratory or haematology secretaries and facilitate immediate discussion. Please be aware that during the previous pilot service many users of the service called simultaneously at 3pm.

We hope that these options will give maximum flexibility for your own working practices. We would generally not recommend directed email for patient related enquiries given the potential for delays during individual consultant’s leave, and the potential for important queries to be missed in the large volumes of email that we all now experience.

If you wish to speak to a particular consultant (for example, regarding an ongoing clinical problem or patient known to the department) you may choose to contact our secretaries at any time.

For clinically urgent problems the haematology registrar may be paged directly via the hospital switchboard (03004 222222) between 9am and 5pm during the week (or the on-call haematologist out of hours and at weekends).

Your feedback is invaluable in our endeavours to constantly improve the quality of the service that we offer, and we remain grateful for your helpful comments and suggestions.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adam Rye
Head of Department (Laboratory Haematology)

Dr Asha Johny
Head of Department (Clinical Haematology)