

## **Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)**

**17 November 2020**

### **Community Phlebotomy**

#### **1. Introduction and summary of changes to community phlebotomy**

In response to a Public Representation made to the HOSC meeting in September 2020, members requested that the CCG prepare a paper about community phlebotomy (blood testing) for HOSC to be discussed at their meeting in November 2020. The purpose of this paper is to brief members on the rationale for the changes to the way community phlebotomy is provided in the county and to provide an update on recent revisions to arrangements in the Cirencester area.

From the previous updates on this topic in March, July and September 2020, HOSC members will be aware that community phlebotomy has historically been provided in a range of settings and locations across Gloucestershire, including 'drop in' hospital clinics and at GP practices. Blood tests are requested by a range of clinicians: GPs and hospitals based clinical teams.

Whilst some patients have always accessed a local phlebotomy service from their GP Practice, there were also many other patients who had to travel into a hospital setting to have their bloods taken. High levels of demand within the hospital setting led to long waiting times for many patients. At least once a week on average, hospital services had to close earlier than scheduled in order to manage safely the number of patients waiting, with some patients then needing to come back on another date.

The CCG wanted to improve this service for patients by ensuring all patients have timely access to a safe and high quality community phlebotomy service at a location as close to their home as possible and ensuring the provision of a consistent service across the county.

There are a variety of clinical scenarios where a patient might be asked to have a blood test. In general terms, following the change introduced this summer the responsibility to provide phlebotomy services for blood tests generated by a GP or practice nurse now falls to primary care and the responsibility to provide phlebotomy services for blood tests generated as part of a hospital outpatient appointment are the responsibility of the hospital managing the patients care.

Therefore, from 1 July 2020 (from 17 August in Cirencester) the CCG has funded all 73 Gloucestershire CCG Member GP practices to provide this service to their patients in their own practice for primary care requested blood tests. In the Cirencester area, in response to feedback from patients regarding accessing services, additional temporary arrangements have been put in place, with permanent alternative additional arrangements commencing from 2 December 2020, for patients to book secondary care blood tests at Cirencester Community Hospital at the request of their consultants.

#### **4. Changes in more detail to community phlebotomy**

Changes were made to the way in which community phlebotomy services were provided across Gloucestershire in July and August 2020. This involved providing all GP surgeries in Gloucestershire with additional funds specifically to provide phlebotomy services to manage local requirements. As a result the CCG spending on community phlebotomy services has increased such that it is higher than in previous years to help ensure patients receive a timely and high quality service.

With this funding, all GP practices agreed to provide a service that accommodates both routine and urgent blood tests, including a same day service when clinically required. GP practices are also able to offer suitable appointment times for patients requiring specific blood tests e.g. fasting blood tests. It was expected that patients would not have to wait longer than clinically necessary from the time of referral for their phlebotomy appointment. With individual GP practices now offering this service to their patients there is more certainty around appointments. However, it should be noted that social distancing requirements associated with COVID-19 may mean that it takes longer than usual to get an appointment.

Prior to the changes some patients had, for some time, been offered blood tests within their GP practice. In other parts of the county patients have had to attend a hospital for a blood test; either at Gloucestershire Royal, Cheltenham General or Cirencester Hospitals.

Previously the total demand for phlebotomy at each of these three hospital sites was often so great that it outstripped the resources available. As a result the services frequently (at least once a week on average) needed to close early due to high levels of patients waiting over and above the available capacity within the opening hours. Feedback was also received from phlebotomy leads about verbal abuse directed at staff due to early closures and long waiting times.

GP practices, which previously would have used these hospital services, have now established in-house phlebotomy capacity to manage their own community phlebotomy needs. As a result, the hospital based phlebotomy services at Gloucestershire Royal and Cheltenham General Hospitals are now able to manage their outpatient secondary care phlebotomy demand successfully. A reduction in footfall at these sites has also allowed

them to provide a COVID-secure service, which would not have been possible prior to the changes.

For those patients who already accessed GP requested blood tests in their local GP practice, there is no change for the patient; but GP practices are now remunerated for providing this service to their patients. For those patients who would have made use of hospital 'drop in' phlebotomy clinics for GP requested blood tests, the move to a new service model with phlebotomy provided from their GP practice, is intended to result in reduced travel and waiting times and the avoidance of hospital car parking charges (at Cheltenham General and Gloucestershire Royal Hospitals).

## **5. Changes to the phlebotomy service available from Cirencester Hospital**

At the same time that changes were made to community phlebotomy across the county, there were additional, but separate, changes made to the secondary care phlebotomy services at Cirencester Hospital provided by Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. These changes resulted in some patients needing to travel to further for secondary care requested phlebotomy appointments where their GP practices were unable to accommodate urgent requests.

As a result, Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust very quickly reinstated a bookable Monday morning phlebotomy clinic at Cirencester Hospital for patients needing bloods as part of their consultant outpatient care. This service was extended to two bookable morning clinics a week from the week commencing 12 October 2020.

As of Monday 2 November 2020, Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust assumed responsibility for providing the phlebotomy service at Cirencester Hospital, such that patients aged 16 and over whose consultant requires them to have a blood test will be able to access this service three days per week (Monday, Tuesday and Friday). To manage resources effectively and ensure safe social distancing measures, this service will continue to be a bookable service. Bookings will be made by telephone and patients can access the booking line (0300 421 6215) every weekday between 9am and 3pm to arrange their appointment.

Pending the successful recruitment of additional staff, the service expects to extend the service to five days a week from December 2020.

## **6. Future plans**

COVID-19 concerns around patients attending an acute hospital setting, coupled with the general direction of travel towards more non-face to face consultant appointments, has led to a significant increase in demand within primary care for blood tests, including blood tests for oncology patients and patients with long term conditions.

This rapid increase in demand is such that it is frequently outstripping the phlebotomy capacity available within primary care and is not covered by the funding that has been provided to them. Work is therefore underway with ICS partners to help develop a more sustainable and countywide approach to phlebotomy required as a result of this change and the ongoing transformation of outpatient services and more virtual appointments.

November 2020