

SOHO SQUARE GENERAL PRACTICE

Penceat is the name of the new provider (management company) of this long established Soho GP surgery. They took over the running of the practice on the 1 April, just as we moved into lockdown. The Soho Square Medical Centre, where the practice is located, was turned into an emergency Covid Reception Centre and the practice had to move out from the Frith Street premises suddenly in the last week of March with only a few hours' notice. They lodged with the Covent Garden Medical Centre until they were able to move back at the end of May. There is still a Covid Centre at the Health Centre but it is completely sealed off from the other facilities at the Centre.

This cannot have been an easy time for either practice, squashed into premises meant for one practice. However, friendly relations were maintained, and space problems were probably helped by the fact that nearly all communication with patients was now by telephone, as in all surgeries throughout the country. The Soho Society was also able to put Penceat in touch with Shaftesbury Plc, who were able to offer Penceat space for some administrative staff, and were also very generous in their support for Penceat, for which we thank them.

The established working group of the PPG (Patients' Participatory Group) has maintained regular dialogue with Sree Agawal, the Chief Administrative Officer, and Dr. Helen McCalvey, the Chief Medical Officer, and have been impressed by their willingness to listen and respond to our concerns and suggestions for returning the practice to one that patients and the Soho community can be proud of.

Penceat have made great strides in this respect. They have experienced GPs on the permanent staff, which will enable continuity of care which has been one of the PPG's concerns, so patients can get to know their GP and vice versa (the GPs work regularly on the same days each week). A senior (male) nurse who is an advanced nursing practitioner (ANP) is full-time. He has experience of working with those in the LGBTQ+ community. A female nurse also works at the practice.

Our surgery was originally set up to support the Chinese community in Soho. Until nearly three years ago almost all staff, including GPs, spoke Cantonese. But staff were despairing of being able to provide a high quality of health care under the then provider, and all left (many now working in other local practices). The PPG tried, without success, to persuade the provider to take on Cantonese speaking staff to enable Cantonese speaking patients to have better access to healthcare. Our new provider has listened to us and there is now a Cantonese speaker on reception throughout most of the day and they are seeking to employ a Cantonese speaking GP for part of the week.

So I think it is fair to say that Penceat have made an excellent start, in extraordinarily difficult circumstances, to return the practice to one we can be proud of.

Although initial consultations with a clinician are on the telephone, we would like to stress, as does the Practice, that it is safe to visit the practice for face to face appointments where the clinician or patient feels this is necessary.

Wendy Harcastle

SREE AGARWAL

Chief Officer

We have appreciated greatly the opportunity to run Soho Square General Practice on behalf of the patients this last seven months..

Since being told we would be doing this in December 2019, I am sure many of us feel that the world is now a completely different place.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has had a significant and far reaching impact on almost all parts of everyone's life, and of course as an NHS GP surgery it has changed the way we do things a great deal.

Starting to run the practice on 1 April of this year, we were right in the middle of an exceptionally challenging period where not just the NHS but the whole world was trying to come to terms and mount a response to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Whilst it is our approach to look to the future and see how we can change things for the better, we are obviously very aware of the legacy we inherited, and patients' feelings about the past few years operation of the surgery and the resulting consequences to their care.

During this challenging period (which regrettably is still ongoing) we are very grateful to our NHS colleagues in Central London CCG, our neighbouring practices in our Primary Care Network and particularly to Covent Garden Medical Centre who accommodated and supported us for several months.

We would also like to thank the Patient Participation Group, individual patients, Westminster City Council and Shaftesbury Plc for the support and assistance they have provided.

At this time it is really important that patients do not neglect any health concerns or medical needs that they have. We have been and will continue to operate through lockdown. You will not be putting a strain on the NHS by contacting us.

We have a system whereby initially all consultations are remote, however we have face to face appointments available every day where these are required.

Our aim is to create a stable sustainable GP surgery that genuinely meets the needs of patients from this area.

To that end we have already been joined by several new administrative staff who speak Cantonese and Mandarin and by a clinician who has experience and expertise in understanding the needs of the LGBTQ+ community. We hope to recruit a Cantonese speaking clinician soon.

We feel that over the past seven months, there has been an improvement in the service the surgery offers and we intend to continue that so that we become one of the best GP surgeries in the country.

We would appreciate any patient feedback or ideas that will help us make this happen.

SOHO SOCIETY HOUR

The Soho Society Hour goes out live online from 9.00am to 10.00am every Thursday on award winning local radio station Soho Radio.

During the first lockdown, when the studio closed, Clare Lynch, with the help of Soho Radio technicians, was able to set up and broadcast from her home, and co-host Leslie Hardcastle and guests joined her remotely. This continued through the summer and early autumn months, bringing local news and a wide range of speakers, including local residents and owners of independent retail outlets, Councillors, our MP Nickie Aiken, musicians, representatives of local interest groups such as the Soho Media Club, authors, the local landowners and property developers, the new CEO of Soho Housing Association, and representatives of the theatre, film and post-production industries. Many of the discussions, not surprisingly, revolved around the difficulties that everyone and every sector of the community has been experiencing.

Clare also hosted her own programme, the Soho Hour, on the other days of the week. Her programme now goes out on Saturdays and Sundays.

In September Clare had to step down from co-hosting and presenting the programme and Leslie was joined by Joel Levack, a member of the Soho Society Executive, who is an artist with portfolio career working in live events, film and television.

We continue to welcome guests to one of Soho Radio's two studios in Great Windmill Street and Broadwick Street. Guests have included a small independent retailer (So High



Soho); a favourite Soho Café (Flat White in the market); the newly appointed Curate at St. Anne's Church; Westminster's Cabinet Member for Business and Planning, Councillor Matthew Green; and a new fledgling group representing many of the hospitality venues – mostly on the east side of Soho where street closures

and al fresco dining have been concentrated – the Soho Business Alliance ('SBA'). Unsurprisingly conversations tended to concentrate on the successes of al fresco dining over the summer months and into autumn, the difficulties this gave rise to for some residents and those working from home, and hopes and concerns for an expected continuation of the scheme into the winter months.

As we go to press and move into lockdown again we hope to have some programmes with guests talking about "their" Soho in contexts less constrained by Covid-19 issues, although sadly that is unlikely to be far from all our minds for some months to come.

New co-host and presenter Joel Levack describes the Soho Society Hour as

"A weekly talk show intercut with Soho inspired music chosen by the guests."

A range of relevant guests join Leslie and Joel each week in the studio or on the telephone, and talk about all things Soho. The past, the present and the future of our little village is discussed informally over a few snippets of music tracks linked to the area."