

Wednesday, 22 July 2020

## Community urged 'don't neglect your health'

Local doctors have joined forces to urge the community not to neglect their health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

General practices across south western Sydney have noted a reduction in patients visiting their surgeries and are concerned about the long-term consequences of delaying routine healthcare, especially for patients with chronic health problems.

Launching the joint South Western Sydney Primary Health Network and South Western Sydney Local Health District campaign this month, local GPs and emergency doctors are reassuring the community it is safe to seek medical care and that your regular health should not take a backseat during the pandemic.

They warn, neglecting your regular health or chronic conditions now could lead to serious health issues and worsening chronic conditions down the track.

A health consumer survey about access to healthcare found 32 per cent of respondents had missed appointments with their GP during the pandemic.

The survey of 729 people was conducted by the Continuity of Care Collaboration, a national communication collaboration of 15 peak bodies, industry and healthcare organisations.

It found 36 per cent of people were worried about taking public transport to appointments; 36 per cent were worried health services were too busy; 31 per cent did not feel safe visiting healthcare services in person; 28 per cent found telehealth could be difficult to use due to technology or poor access to internet/phone; and 23 per cent were worried they could be breaking lockdown rules.

Last month the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and the Federal Government issued a plea to all Australians not to put off seeing their GP.

Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt said whether in person, or through the expanded telehealth network, it was critical that people continued to manage their general health throughout the COVID-19 health emergency.

"Your GP is there to help you follow your treatment plan and improve your health," he said.

GPs have urged the community to continue to have regular check-ups, have blood tests and fill prescriptions for chronic conditions, get flu vaccinations and book cancer screenings.

Bowral GP Jo Senior said doctors knew how to keep their practices safe.

"Your health is important to us and every GP is taking steps to provide you with safe medical care," she said.

"We want you to continue to come and visit us or talk to us over the phone, especially if you have a chronic disease like diabetes or heart disease. With telephone and telehealth consultations available it's never been easier to stay in touch with your GP.

"It's also really important that you continue to fill your prescriptions.

"If you're feeling unwell the first place to call is your GP."

Elderslie GP Matthew Gray agreed, emphasising the message that patients should not delay seeking medical care.

**CONTINUED NEXT PAGE**

## FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

“Now more than ever it’s vitally important for your health and wellbeing to seek care if you need it,” he said. “As GPs, we can help you with short-term problems and chronic conditions. Getting to know you is what we as GPs do, so we can care for you your entire life.

“Your health is important to us – please don’t delay seeking treatment.”

Emergency physicians have echoed the GPs’ calls for patients not to wait for the end of the pandemic before seeking medical care.

Dr Matthew Smith, from Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital, said it was safe to seek medical help even during the pandemic as emergency departments had procedures for safely dealing with people who may have COVID-19 as well as other presentations.

“If you’ve got symptoms such as a sore throat, cough or fever, visit your nearest testing centre for a COVID-19 test or phone your GP to discuss which options are available for you,” he said.

“If you have problems you should present to the Emergency Department. Now it’s more important than ever to take care of your health. Your health is really important to us.

“Remember to keep the Emergency Department for emergencies.”

Visit the SWSPHN website for community information about COVID-19:

[Information and support](#)

[Testing options](#)

[Mental health support](#)

South Western Sydney PHN is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting general practitioners, practice nurses and other primary health providers to deliver the best possible care for their patients. Our aim is to improve access to quality local health care for the all residents living in the local government areas of Bankstown, Fairfield, Liverpool, Campbelltown, Camden, Wollondilly and Wingecarribee.

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