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Dear St Luke's Patients

As we slowly emerge from lockdown after 15 months of global pandemic, I thought now would be a suitable time to update you on news and developments at St Luke's Surgery.

I am very proud of the team at St Luke's. Throughout the pandemic we have managed to keep the surgery open and functioning albeit with limited direct access for obvious reasons (predominantly to do with patient safety). We had to embrace alternative technology such as e-consults, video consults, and screening of all calls by telephone prior to inviting the patient to attend the surgery. The main objective was to continue offering GP services but minimise the risk of importing Covid positive patients into the surgery, and the risk of causing an infection in the surgery, which would result in the surgery having to close. These measures were successful and although we had two members of staff who had Covid (one very severely), I am pleased to say that this did not affect the running of the surgery and the service we were able to offer our patients. I apologise if we appeared to be less accessible for face-to-face consultations. Throughout the pandemic, we have continued to see patients (including suspected Covid cases). Many patients were too scared to venture to the surgery and we have tried to maintain contact with our frail and vulnerable patients. In the past 12 months we have provided more appointment than ever before in a bid to keep up with a significant increase in demand. We now offer 44 more weekly appointments this year than last.

The pandemic forced us have a radical rethink about how we deliver our services, and the advent of technology has been helpful. However, we recognise that technology cannot replace the benefits of face-to-face contact, and we are delighted that as the lockdown is easing that we are moving back towards the more conventional form of consulting, where hopefully the vast majority of our patients will actually be seen face to face, as this is clearly what both patients and GPs want!

Last summer we took advantage of the reduced patient footfall to have a major building upgrade. Now we have additional consulting rooms for GPs and nurses and a second waiting room upstairs. If you have not visited the surgery in the past year, you will be in for a surprise! Both waiting rooms have been made as Covid secure at possible with individual partitions between every chair and air conditioned and well ventilated with open windows to ensures good airflow .

In the past 12 months, in addition to continuing to operate GP services as normally as possible with the constraints of the pandemic, we have also been involved in setting up a drive-through flu clinic last October, which was extremely popular with patients who were understandably anxious about the prospect of any mass gathering, and it may well be that we repeat this again this winter. St Luke's Surgery is also at the sharp end of delivering the Covid vaccination service at G-Live. My Partner, Dr Vickers has been the clinical lead at G-Live and led the creation of this service in March of this year, and the Partners and Practice Nurses have also been working additional shifts at G-Live as part of the vaccination delivery service. This has been additional work over and above the normal day-to-day GP work and has resulted in some reduction in capacity for GP appointments as Partners have been working elsewhere (often at weekends and on their days off). The G-Live campaign has been a great success, and again I am very proud of all the Doctors, Nurses and volunteers who have thrown their hat into the ring to support this vital service.

There is a lot of media coverage at present about workload in general practice with many GP surgeries claiming to be overwhelmed and on the verge of collapse due to unmanageable workload. I am glad to say that this is not the situation at St Luke's. Although we are having to rearrange the way we order our service delivery to try to cope with this dramatic increase in demand for our services, particularly same day attention. We wish to maintain the values of traditional family General Practice with GPs really getting to know patients and their families, and offering some continuity of care. Not an easy challenge! Our workforce is somewhat battle fatigued after the past 15 months but determined to maintain high standards of care. Your support and comments are welcomed.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Cross", with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**Dr Andrew Cross on behalf of the Partners at St Luke's Surgery**