

Blog 29/3/202

How fast Covid-19 has become central to our lives, our first death today in Greymouth where I was born, someone's mother, someone's grandmother, no doubt. Our love and regards to her bereft family.

THAT IS WHY WE ARE OPEN FOR BUSINESS Monday to Friday 7.45am-6pm
TO LOOK AFTER ALL OF OUR PATIENTS.

We are open but we are only seeing about 20% of our patients at the most at the practice, and then we are talking with them on the phone first to see how to meet their needs and provide the best safety standards for them and for us. The rest we are talking with by phone and email currently but have the webcams installed a ready to use: we have just found out the problem with our IT server/ medical computer program is on a very narrow bandwidth and needs to be expanded before we can go to video consultations and even Facetime. But we are now set up to go as soon as that happens. We are reopening H:365 so you can make appointments for on-line phone calls. We may decide we do need to see you from talking with you: something like a breast lump or changing mole does need to be seen, but I am surprised how much I can work out from a photo you send. If you want to do that in advance, please email it to <admin@tiakinateora.co.nz>.

Our office is now enclosed with a perspex screen to protect our receptionists from hard-to-control coughs. At the end you may be invited to leave by a side door to avoid others in the waiting room. Just go. We will arrange to bill you later. Minimising cross-infection has the highest priority to us.

We are very fortunate at our surgery to have multiple entry doors. People coming for dressings and childhood or tetanus immunisations will be directed to come in the first side door by Queen St. [That's the one that says Dont come in here, Staff only ! And to avoid other patients sometimes you will be directed out of here, even without going to the counter to pay]. After being temperature and cough checked by a gowned up Dr Cathy most patients will come in by the usual front doors, except for those needing influenza vaccinations. Influenza vaccinations are being done by our two gowned up nurses along from the front door 10am-12pm everyday out of Dr Mick's old room which has been completely rebuilt and relined after bearing the brunt of the water damage from the big leaks through the roof upstairs. All patients who have cold symptoms and are contacts of known cases [you have to have their name] or have come in from overseas in the last 14 days are referred direct to Takanini Care for swabs to be taken after phoning us first- or by Healthline. They then go home and isolate even from their family and wait for swab results. This currently takes two days. Two days seemed like two years this weekend while my daughter Arena and her husband Max waited for a swab to come in for my mokopunas nanny- but gratefully it was negative.

Once there are sick patients at home, we want to be helping . If you are sick please inform us if we did not arrange the swab even before we get notification you are a positive or negative swab as we will call daily- this is a no charge call- and if we needed to help make the decision whether you need to go to the hospital or we can manage it with antibiotics [oral or IV] then we can see you at the surgery. The doctor seeing you will probably be me, gowned up and masked, and we have set up the surgery down the back just for this so we can disinfect between patients, and it has its own separate entrance. That is the second door along from the top carpark, on the Queen St Side. Keeping our patients out of the hospital means less infectious risk for them ,unloads hospital medical staff and lets you go home to your own bed and meals. We can do it together: careful communication at our end can help us triage accurately. And we know you better than any hospital staff. Such a system makes sense.

It is a fraught time for all financially. We all don't know what is happening. Please don't let finances

stop you from booking appointments. If you are not working, especially if you were a casual worker or part-time, just talk with us. Our Practice Manager Meriana will sort it out. We can work it out and often won't charge. All our staff have had their wages and salaries guaranteed whether they are at work or home in isolation. We will look after all our patients too.

“If I am working outside the home, how do I stop bringing the infection home to my family. We can't have a closed bubble.” This is what I am being asked often this past week by my patients. So I thought I would detail what I am doing on and above the usual handwashing, cough into elbow, social distancing advice. I come home to a retired husband who has underlying medical conditions which make him high risk if he gets Covid-19.

I wash my hands thoroughly before I leave work avoiding door handles as I go. My own car: I have been wiping the door handles, seatbelt and steering wheel down as I leave so I can get in without repeating it. I have found handgel sticky on the driver's wheel but you have to be careful of bleach and some disinfectants which can affect the vinyl. If I have to fill up with diesel at the pump then I have been using gloves, then before getting back into the car carefully removing the gloves inside out, opening the door and dropping them into a box of used gear [They can be reused after 4 days - the longest the virus can survive on any surface according to scientists]. Once I get home, Alan doesn't come to meet me like usual. I let myself in, immediately go and wash hands, remove my outer clothes, take them inside out carefully avoiding touching the outer surface to the washing machine then wash my hands again. Then I shower, put on new clothes, and finally go and greet Alan, avoiding his attempt to kiss me - but only because he is relishing not having to shave daily! Clothes don't need to be always washed: they can be put aside for three days which will deactivate any virus someone has coughed on them.

Given the virus can live on cardboard [and so paper] for 24 hours I don't bring in anything from the car with me except my phone which is cleaned too, [alcohol wipes or simple soap and water with a microfibre cloth to apply and another one to dry avoiding the portals carefully so I don't get water into it]. Since this virus, called SARS-CoV2-19, can live on plastic and metal for up to three days even a bottle of spray disinfectant could carry the virus into the house on its surface. I have been avoiding shopping but I can't do that forever [wish I could], and then I will have to think about whether I disinfect items coming in or not. Even vegetables and fruit can go through a bucket of water with a splash of bleach in: soaking 10 minutes is perfect, re-rinse in clean water briefly and drain. Bottles and tins can be put aside for three days easily, but what I do about meat? I was thinking gloves if needed but am hesitant to use up our limited supplies. I will just have to think about how important it is everytime, and watch what is happening in our world around me. There is no doubt that if the hospital is overflowing, that's a time to be hypervigilant. We are so fortunate our NZ way is to keep everyone as fully informed as possible. If we add that staying at home with all illnesses, whether it seems just a simple cold or 'touch of the flu' instead of going to work, that will make the biggest difference. Do as much as you can, but don't worry about what you can't. No-one can be perfect.

As a small note of caution. We are starting to see a bit of hand dermatitis. Superfatted soaps like Dove Sensitive help, but most important is rinsing thoroughly. The guidelines say for a further 10 seconds. Also avoid overwashing when at home in the bubble, but wash frequently coming back into the bubble and when outside the bubble.

These precautions don't stop after lockdown is eased unfortunately. It will be probably September or October until the peak is over but cases will continue to occur, and might even peak again, until we get an effective vaccine. Our world is going to be a different place after this pandemic. How and what way is still to be seen. We are very fortunate to live in New Zealand which is so stable, and I hope we in NZ can show the rest of the world the best way to fight it off.

Keep well, keep safe, look after yourself and those around you, Jacqueline