

Blog:7.4.24

A long interval between blogs but having a fortnight chilling out and recovering in March has given me a new lease on life. Lots and lots happening around the practice, around the world in medicine, but nothing helpful from the new government to support General Practice, especially the dire shortage of doctors and nurses and allied health professionals. A number of practices around the motu have actually closed down, and most are trying to see the same number of enrolled patients with less doctors and nurses. So it was not a surprise this week when we were asked to reduce our referrals to Middlemore because it too is overloaded! General practice could reduce the demand on expensive secondary care if it was better funded in everything from doing more minor surgery, working up complex medical cases more completely before passing to them onto the right specialist clinics for procedures, and most importantly do it faster, more efficiently and much, much cheaper. Asking us to reduce our referrals is ignoring the fact that our expanding population needs the medical care: so what gives? Patients don't get seen and are eventually sent to hospital later in their illness, wait longer even for the first specialist appointment [in private as well as at the public hospital], end up requiring more days in hospital, more expensive tests and treatment? And then have longer recovery times [if they do recover] and take a much longer time to return to productive work, so are not paying taxes meant to keep them in good health and treat them in a timely manner. Reminds me of the old proverb: 'A stitch in time saves nine'!

And yet another re-organisation of the Health Sector with the Te Whatu Ora changes: just a way of wasting more money that could be spent on patients and staff, and covering up the serious lack of funding in Health by politicians looking for mythical savings from 'duplication of services'.

On a much more positive note, many of you now will have met Dr Callum Hammond who we are very grateful to have with us since the end of January: he is really enjoying meeting our patients, working with the team, and very helpful and caring too. Meriana's daughter Brooke is starting with us next week on reception working alongside Jamie and under the watchful eye of her mum learning this new and more complicated computer system.

We are now doing both the new influenza and covid vaccinations at the practice. Be like me, one in each upper arm on Thursday before I came home and seriously, only a slight sore arm over the next 24 hours but nil else. Just arrange it with the nurses.

The influenza one might even be our last annual flu shot as I have counted four companies already who have new RNA based influenza vaccinations in Clinical 3 trials [that's the last stage before going public]. Like both the shingles and covid vaccinations these last longer than the current sort and are far more effective. So far the claim is that they should last 5 years, but good evidence involving tens of thousands of people on the shingles one which was the first one developed this way is showing really high persistent immunity at 88% coming up to 10 years!

The new covid vaccination covers these Omicron variants that we have had for the last 18 months to 2 years, particularly the XBB strain which is just starting to gain a foothold in NZ. That's why I have had it, and for me that's my 4th covid vaccination. I still haven't had Covid and given we were all testing at least weekly here at the surgery I did not have what is called an occult infection either. I am grateful I haven't especially given the lack of locums to look after our patients temporarily while I am ill, and some of the horror stories about long covid coming from overseas. The recent report from the States showed an average intelligence decline of 8 points in patients who were still having effects three or more months from the onset of the illness. It reminded me of one of my favorite cartoons of all times which came out just before the early 1990's when the UK and Europe were dealing with Mad Cow disease in humans, a very scary dementing illness which was eventually traced to contamination in the food chain by new mechanization making processed meats.

Two cows were talking over the fence. The first cow says to the other: "Are you worried about Mad Cow disease? ". The other cow replies: "No. It doesn't bother me, I'm a duck. Quack!"
From Jacqueline and all the team at Tiakina Te Ora.