

Blog: 30th June, 2024

I hope you all enjoyed the midwinter break of Matariki, the beginning of the Maori New Year, though it would have taken a very keen gardener to be out planting the kumara and garlic, onions, potatoes etc that go in once we pass the shortest day.

A very overdue blog as there is a lot of news, but it's been very busy and we have all noticed the strain with the incoming winter colds and flus. It is going to get busier unfortunately as on Thursday just before Matariki, we found out that the registrar who was meant to be coming to join us when Dr Callum leaves to his next rotation at the end of the next month, won't be coming after all and so far it just isn't possible to get a replacement. That registrar has stayed on at his first attachment as a practice employed doctor, which leaves us in a lurch at very short notice, especially with Dr Ranche still away on sick leave [but there's cautious good news there, and now hope]. Rather unethical practice I would have thought from both the Teacher and the Registrar.

While influenza A is starting to ramp up, [that H1N1 that is covered maybe up just over 60%] by the current vaccine, and there is still Omicron variants of covid around, there is the RSV and a rhinovirus out there causing traditional cold like symptoms. Influenzas are characterized by sudden onset- well enough to go to work, but so sick home by lunchtime scenario- and spread fast within 1-4 days of breathing in enough virions so that the whole family or whole workplace is hit. High temperature, headaches, body aches are the usual first 1-2 days before a runny nose and scratchy throat set in. Paracetamol [2x500mg tabs] four times a day is the best but adding ibuprofen ["Nurofen"] as well if its severe is helpful We have always been wary of adding ibuprofen to influenza as there is this very rare syndrome called Reye's syndrome, thought to be even less than one in a million, that can affect the brain and liver and cause death over some following weeks. We did have an Auckland case in a young teen maybe 10-15 years ago, but I know when I had influenza last, I used a few ibuprofens as well as my paracetamol as I was so sick and they really did help. Influenza is miserable: it is definitely a week off

and some weeks of feeling exhausted afterwards in most cases. There are complications too, so we really do want to see you if you have a racing heartbeat and shortness of breath, have gone onto bronchitis, especially if there is chest pain worse on large breaths and mucky sputum and high persistent fevers. It's because influenza attacks muscles and the heart is a muscle too. That's why the strong advice not to play sport or workout hard until three weeks after Influenza, There are new vaccines built on the same base as the shingles and covid vaccines nearly ready to come into general supply which are far more effective than our current vaccines that cover a far wider ranges of strains too, Some are already in Stage 3 trials. The talk too is they could only be needed as little as once in 5-10 years!

The Rhinovirus is one of the common cold groups. Now pseudoephedrine is back in the chemist shop, usually mixed with an antihistamine in 'day and night' packs, this can help ease the initial symptoms for congestion but should be stopped if the phlegm gets thick and coloured as it will make it more difficult to clear away from the lungs. Antibiotics are often needed in this phase, usually at least 4-5 days or more into the illness when you really thought you were starting to come right. [You were. You were successfully beating the virus, it's just that the bacteria decided to invade past preoccupied defences!]

The Respiratory Syncytial Virus that filled KidzFirst and Starship with kids with bronchiolitis last August and September is doing the rounds of the adults now. It's hard of the patients with asthma and smokers chests, what is known as COPD [Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease]. It is characterized by a very sore throat from day one, and a stuffy nose, and the sore throat spreads down the pipes so that coughing hurts particularly behind the breastbone. Over the counter preparations help: Diffiam range if particularly bad throat making it hard to swallow, propolis preparations if numbing out not needed, or my favorite is the Blis range of probiotic lozenges developed by Otago University's Department of Microbiology for throats that work on the principle of crowding in benign oral bacteria that help the gut and boost the immune system, and don't leave

gaps for the baddies to get through. And those volcanic Kuroi lollies full of menthol and eucalyptus to blast the clogged nasal passages or Vicks wands which are milder. All good stuff to add to the next grocery shop although you will need to get the Blis lozenges from the pharmacy. And don't forget, the advice your mum gave you to drink heaps, stay warm [viruses multiply best at sub body temperature of 33°C] and rest. It does have good scientific evidence and justification behind it now. I don't take anything else, but I do eat lots of fruit when sick for the Vitamin C and antioxidants and to avoid gut cramps and constipation from the glands getting bigger in the bowel wall as my immune system rises to the challenge.

Prescription charges come back in the middle of July. Do ask your chemist if they will be charging patients these. We have heard to our dismay that some of the Takanini ones who didn't pass on the cost to patients last time, will be doing so this time. This time there will be more exemptions- children under 14, community card holders/beneficiaries, and people over 65yrs old] - so stick with your pharmacist if you have got a good relationship with them as they will look after you. If the pharmacist knows you and knows what medications you are on, if you run out they are allowed to advance you up to 10 days worth of most medications until you can get a script to them. I hope you won't need to add up the 20 items until prescriptions become free each year, but even that's an incentive to stay with the same pharmacy.

I am still hoping to have a break in the second half of September which is especially needed working these long hours and I am searching hard for a locum: please let me know if you know a doctor who could be available for a couple of weeks. But I live in hopeful anticipation and bought 7 books today to take with me....

Ma te wa, whatever will be will be, and with the great team we have at Tiakina Te Ora, we will manage yet again. Jacqueline

