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News from the Black Country Integrated Care System (ICS)

Healthier Futures
Black Country Integrated Care System

Partnership News

ISSUE 03
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Introduction from Jonathan Fellows

Dear colleagues,

Welcome to the November edition Healthier Futures newsletter. Here you will find stories sharing the success from across our place-based partnerships, our NHS provider collaboratives and our frontline health and care staff.

Our Integrated Care Board has met for its second public board meeting and agreed the objectives which link to our ICS purpose to:

- Improve outcomes in population health and healthcare
- Tackle inequalities in outcomes, experience and access
- Enhance productivity and value for money
- Help the NHS support broader social and economic development

Our Integrated Care Partnership has held its second development event. Just short of 50 colleagues attended, and we will now meet every six to eight weeks as we continue to develop the interim Integrated Care Strategy. Working together in this way is a great sign of the commitment and interest to make the partnership real, for the benefit of the people we serve.

Over the coming winter months, the relationships which we have built upon since the COVID-19 pandemic will be vital if we are to succeed in meeting the local health and care needs. Collectively we have been building on this experience and preparing for a winter that is likely to be challenging. Our services are already under pressure – we have high levels of emergency patients, the continued impact of COVID-19, flu and other respiratory conditions.

We have invested in more virtual wards and community services, expanded the opening of our Urgent Treatment Centres so that they all

operate 24/7 and across primary care there are now GP appointments available on evenings and weekends. Perhaps the biggest positive though, is in the new community pathways and support developed in each place between our NHS and Local Authorities to ensure that people are seen in the right place, at the right time, by the right people. The role of the community and voluntary sector in supporting local people and communities is also being realised and to support this we have invested funding into each place to support targeted spend to tackle areas of health inequality.

Despite pressures in urgent and emergency care and staff continuing to deal with COVID-19 in hospitals, in the Black Country we eliminated over two year waits for elective care and we are making progress on the next ambition to eliminate waits of more than 18 months by April 2023.

I would like to thank all our health and care workforce for their efforts and ask that as key stakeholders in the Black Country you do all that you can to help us by sharing key messages with your networks and the wider public. Local people can play their part by coming forward for care when they need it and by using services like NHS 111 online for non-urgent advice. It also remains as important as ever for those eligible to come forward for their COVID-19 boosters and flu jabs too.



Best wishes

Jonathan Fellows -
Chair of the Black Country Integrated Care Board
Chair of the Black Country Integrated Care Partnership



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Health and Care Key Messages

GP appointments now available evenings and weekends



From Saturday 1 October, people in the Black Country can book an appointment with their GP practice on evenings and weekends.

Appointments are now available between 6.30pm and 8.00pm Monday to Friday, and between 9.00am and 5.00pm on Saturdays.

There will be a range of appointments available for different services, which will be delivered by a multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals, to ensure patients see the right person at the right time, more quickly. These will be a combination of face-to-face, video and telephone appointments.

To book an appointment during these hours, people should contact their GP practice by phone or visit their practice website.

Local practices have been working together to ensure these additional appointments are available for all patients. This means that appointments may be at their registered GP surgery or another location.

Sarb Basi, Director of Primary Care for the NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board, said: "Local GPs are seeing as many patients as before the COVID-19 pandemic, but demand for services has increased. Our teams are working extremely hard to improve people's experience and access to primary care, to ensure everyone gets the care they need. We're pleased that GP practices are now able to offer additional appointments on evenings and weekends, to assist those patients who struggle to access appointments during the day or prefer an evening or weekend appointment to fit in with their personal and family commitments. This means that people have greater flexibility for routine, bookable appointments, and can be seen by the most appropriate person at a time that suits them. However, this isn't a walk-in service so if you need urgent medical advice after 6.30pm or at a weekend, please contact NHS 111 in the first instance."



Sarb Basi, Director of Primary Care for the NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board

People are also being reminded to cancel any unwanted GP appointments.

Sarb Basi added: "We understand that sometimes you can't make the appointments you have booked, but at a time when the whole NHS system is under pressure it is really important to let us know if you can't attend. If you know you can't make an appointment, or you no longer need it, please let your GP practice know as soon as possible so that we can offer it to someone else."

For more information on how GP practices are working and information on your GP practice team, go to <https://blackcountry.icb.nhs.uk/your-health/find-right-service-you/primary-care-open-and-here-you>

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Boost your immunity this winter

Respiratory viruses (those affecting the lungs and airways) spread quickly in winter and can be life threatening to vulnerable people. Getting the flu or COVID-19 vaccine offers the best protection against getting seriously ill and spreading these viruses to others.

Those eligible for an autumn COVID-19 booster and free flu vaccine include:

- everyone over the age of 50
- pregnant women
- people with certain underlying health conditions
- care home residents
- front-line health and social care workers.

Sally Roberts, Chief Nursing Officer for the NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board, said: "With COVID-19 and flu circulating this winter, it's vital that everyone prepares for potential winter illnesses, especially those who are at higher risk. Getting vaccinated helps you and the NHS, which is already facing extreme pressures in the run up to the very busy winter season. That's why we're urging all those eligible for an autumn COVID-19 booster and a flu vaccine to come forward as soon as possible and top up their immunity. The COVID-19 and the flu vaccine can be given on the same day and some people might get both vaccines at the same time. However, this may not always be possible, so we encourage everybody to get each vaccination as soon as they can, rather than waiting to get both at the same time."

John Denley, Wolverhampton's Director of Public Health, said: "With winter fast approaching, I would encourage anyone who has received an invitation for a COVID-19 autumn booster and flu vaccination to get booked in as soon as you can. It is important to have both vaccinations to reduce your chances of becoming unwell and needing hospital treatment. Both vaccines are proven to be safe, effective and offer the very best protection to those at risk. I would also remind anyone who hasn't had a first or second dose of the COVID-19 vaccination that it's not too late."

To find out more about what vaccinations you may need, and information about how to book an appointment, visit www.nhs.uk/flujab and www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccine



Top up your immunity with the flu vaccine and autumn COVID-19 booster

Help us, help you this winter

By choosing the right health care service you can help free up emergency services to help those most in need this winter.

To find out which service is most relevant for your needs please read the information on this page and use the web links to choose the right service for your health needs.

The NHS is here for everyone, and we aim to ensure health services are available for you when you become ill, but to do this, we need everyone's support – choosing well ensures you get the right care for your needs.

- **Self-care** – the best choice to treat minor illnesses, ailments, and injuries.
- **Pharmacy** – expert advice and treatment to help you with your minor health concerns.

Did you know: If you are exempt from prescription charges then you can get over-the-counter medicines for free from a pharmacy, rather than needing to see a GP to receive the medication. [Click here to read more about Pharmacy First.](#)

- **NHS 111** – get the right advice and treatment for urgent medical problems online 111.nhs.uk or by dialling 111.
- **Dentist** – find the best service for toothache or if you need an emergency dentist.
- **GP** – contact your GP for illnesses and injuries which aren't life threatening, but which won't go away. If you become ill and your GP surgery is closed, contact 111 online 111.nhs.uk or by dialling 111 and they will signpost you to an appropriate service that can help.

Did you know: GP practices across the Black Country are working differently to offer patient appointments. Find out about their new ways of working here, and remember from Saturday 1 October, a range of appointments will be available on evenings and at weekends.

- **Mental health** – If you need urgent help with your mental health or you are struggling to cope the Black Country 24/7 helpline is here to help you.
- **A&E** – for life-threatening emergencies only. If you are not sure, contact NHS 111 first - online 111.nhs.uk or by dialling 111.
- **999** – call 999 in a medical emergency. If you are not sure, contact NHS 111 first - online 111.nhs.uk or by dialling 111.



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Urgent and Emergency Care Update

Colleagues in all organisations across the Black Country who support people's health and care needs are all contributing to local and system-wide plans for winter. As you know, our winter plans are now things that we need to be putting in place all year, and we have not seen any usual seasonal lull in urgent and emergency care needs. Despite this, acuity of demand and volume of patients needing hospital admission, do get even higher in winter.

Health and care colleagues are to be commended for the way in which safe care is being maintained, often among very challenging circumstances.

At the start of October the Urgent and Emergency Care Board heard from each acute and community provider about the winter plans that in most cases include the contributions from partners in the four places – Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. These plans take account of the expected increases in acute illness and injury that are forecast in the winter months and our unit of currency is acute hospital beds. All four Places had projected bed gaps to some degree or another, during the winter. From these mitigation plans we know that some areas will be under more strain than others, and the role of the UEC Board is to review and assure these plans, supporting those areas that need additional assistance.

What was common to each, however, was the vital importance of establishing really strong partnerships across health and social care, as well as working closely with our mental health colleagues to establish swift and streamlined support for those in crisis.

Every part of the health and social care system is challenged and working across organisations has never been more important.

Each area within the Black Country has prioritised schemes to avoid admission to hospital and improve timely discharge to home or to an alternative location. This should help shorten the time that a patient has to spend in hospital as well as keeping as many patients as possible comfortable within their own homes.

The plans to achieve this vary by place but most organisations and partnerships are focusing on:

- Urgent community response services and virtual wards
- Improving discharge arrangements for people with complex healthcare needs
- Establishing or strengthening integrated care at the "front doors" of urgent and emergency care services, all designed to gatekeep and avoid admission where safe to do so
- Reducing ambulance handover delays at hospital

We know that we have more to do, to ensure our plans add up to the service capacity that our population needs.

Everyone I have spoken to is clear about things that will help to make a big difference and keeping people well is one of those. That means we have to pull together to ensure our staff and communities are vaccinated against flu and COVID-19; we have to support and work in partnership with our vital voluntary services to check on people at home; and, we have to ensure that all health and social care professionals are well supported with their own health and wellbeing so that they can continue to care.

None of this is easy and the impact of the huge increases in cost of living will take their toll on all of our communities, if they aren't already.

We are committed, through the UEC Board to continue to work closely together to prioritise patient safety and keep delivering the services that we know our populations expect and deserve.



Richard Beeken

Chair of the Black Country and West Birmingham Urgent and Emergency Care Board and Chief Executive, Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust

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Digital Download

GP patient data access via NHS App

From 1 November 2022, users of the NHS App and other online NHS platforms will be able to view any information their GP practice holds about them.

People don't need to do anything – the ability to view information in their health record including free text, letters, and other documents, will automatically go live in the App from that date.

The benefits of making this information available include empowering patients to play a more active role in their care, as well as helping to support data quality by enabling people to see and flag any issues or inconsistencies.

We are also putting in place processes to ensure patients do not see sensitive information such as test results before their GP has the chance to review and discuss with them.

The change relates to prospective information only, meaning it covers any new information added from 1 November, but not pre-existing information. This does not replace patients' right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to request existing information an NHS body holds about them.

Black Country Connected

Digital technologies are undoubtedly revolutionising patient care, but in the Black Country we are determined that nobody should be left behind by our ambition for a "digital first" NHS.

Half the population of the Black Country live in the 20% most deprived areas in England, which means there are significant inequalities in digital access for people across the ICS.

The ICB digital team has a dedicated inequalities workstream that is working to address some of the key barriers to digital for local people, including access to skills and support, connectivity, and kit.

Black Country Connected is an exciting programme that will help address access to kit, by loaning Geobook laptops to people with no current access to a computer, to help them learn IT skills and build confidence to access health and wellbeing services and information online.

Any health and care professional or voluntary and community group can make a direct referral for individuals who they feel would benefit from the scheme. To find out more visit: <https://blackcountryics.org.uk/our-plan/our-work/digital-technologies/black-country-connected>

The ICB has teamed up with Sian Computers, a Wolverhampton-based business with extensive experience working with people who are new to using a computer. The team are leading on distributing the laptops via "hub days" in all four Places, as well as providing start-up training and ongoing support to those who need it.

Liz Kirkland is a social prescribing link worker who visited one of Sian Computers' recent "hub days" to pick up two devices to help clients who are experiencing social isolation.

She said: "One of the devices is for a lady who is living in temporary accommodation and will enable her to attend virtual services at her old church, which will make such a difference to her mental health. The other is for a lady who has health conditions that are holding her back from going out, especially during winter, so this will mean she can do online social events. People aren't meant to be on our own, we're meant to be with each other, but many people are still worried about COVID, or with the cost of living rising they're worried about being able to afford the bus fare to get to places. There's so much going on online, whether that's socialising or education, and people can make connections from the comfort of their own home – but for most people a computer is a huge purchase, especially if they haven't had one before and they don't know if they'll like it. This is a fantastic opportunity for people to test drive a computer with no obligation and see if they like it. It's easy to access the service, it's local, and they provide all the guidance you need to get started. I can't recommend it enough."



Dharminder Sian, co-owner of Sian Computers, demonstrates a Geobook to Liz Kirkland.

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Positive Partnerships in Place



Dudley

Healthwatch and health working hand in hand



Health professionals from Dudley Integrated Health and Care NHS Trust (DIHC) and Solutions4Health participated in the community event at Wellington Road Community Centre in Dudley.

Healthwatch Dudley has been working with Syrian refugees to host a community event for local people who have migrated to the Dudley borough.

In October, 19 families came together for a celebration at Wellington Road Community Centre in Dudley where they were joined by health professionals from Dudley Integrated Health and Care NHS Trust (DIHC) and Solutions4Health.

The event enabled families to get together and build their support networks, as well as providing a real insight into what it is like to be a migrant living in Dudley borough. DIHC also provided health checks for around 30 participants.

Dr Lloyd Baron, Clinical Lead for Health Inequalities at DIHC said, "It is so important that we spend time in our communities and develop trusting relationships. The health checks were a perfect way to get to know our people better and check for high blood pressure, high cholesterol and potential diabetes.

"The information from the health checks has been shared with the GP practices that patients are registered with and those who are high risk will be contacted by their practices for further support and advice."

Helen Codd, Head of Communications, Engagement & Partnerships at DIHC said, "We have a really positive relationship with Healthwatch Dudley and by working together we can achieve so much more and make sure there are opportunities for getting into the heart of our many diverse communities."

Jehad Khattab, Volunteer at Halesowen Welcome Group, said: "I have enjoyed working with local families to plan this event with Healthwatch Dudley, which involves people who often struggle to have their voice heard. We have loved coming together with friends and family to talk about our experiences of living in Dudley borough and to also have important health checks at the same time as having a fun Syrian celebration."

Healthwatch Dudley will produce a report about the activity that will inform how Dudley borough communities are supported and involved in future health service planning.



Dudley residents participating in the community event at Wellington Road Community Centre in Dudley.

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Sandwell Health
and Care Partnership

Hot off the press: Sandwell public health annual report

Sandwell Council has published its new Director of Public Health Annual Report.

The report showcases the work that the Council's public health team has been doing with community groups to get people physically active. There's a big focus on the importance of getting young people moving, as Sandwell is proud to now have the fourth most active young people in the country.

Click the link to read the report, which includes highlights from the past year plus lots of inspiring real-life stories from Sandwell citizens:

<https://view.publitas.com/renaissance-creative/23047-sandwell-dph-annual-report-v5/>



Sandwell opens 29 venues as 'Warm Spaces' for winter

Sandwell Council has named 29 local venues that will open their doors as Warm Spaces this winter.

The 19 libraries, three community centres and seven leisure centres offer free, safe, and supportive spaces that anyone can visit to connect digitally, charge devices and have a hot drink. They will also provide a chance to have a chat with staff about support services available, including help to access benefits and energy support.

The cost of living crisis is impacting households across Sandwell, with rising energy, fuel and food prices affecting everyone. The Council is working in partnership with community organisations to give everyone the opportunity to access help when they need it – including those who may not have faced financial challenge before.

The Council has also launched a small grant programme for voluntary and community sector organisations to keep their buildings open over winter as Warm Spaces.

Leader of Sandwell Council, Councillor Kerrie Carmichael, said: "As we enter the winter months, we are taking practical steps to support people in their community who need it the most. These include Warm Spaces across all six towns in Sandwell as well other important initiatives that are aimed at both addressing immediate hardship and building longer-term financial resilience and wellbeing."

Anyone worried about the cost of living can find useful information from local organisations on the council's website: www.sandwell.gov.uk/supportingsandwell

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Sandwell Health and Care Partnership

Gotta have faith!

In October, Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust (SWB) welcomed community faith-based leaders to discuss plans for the spiritual faith centre at Midland Metropolitan University Hospital, which is currently under construction. The purpose-built faith centre will form part of the new hospital and will be open to all staff, patients, visitors and local communities.

Often when in a hospital setting, those of both religious and non-religious backgrounds turn to existing hospital facilities and the support of chaplaincy teams. Having that support system and connection to faith and an awareness of cultural and spiritual needs brings comfort for patients and their families.

As SWB Trust makes plans for opening, they are seeking the views of a broad cross-section of religious leaders and groups to ensure the space meets the needs of those that will use it.

Jayne Salter-Scott, Head of Public and Community Engagement, said: "The initial faith meeting saw several faith-based community organisations and leaders attend and proved positive in helping to begin to realise the potential of the new spiritual faith centre.

"Beginning this conversation was a constructive first step. It was also a valuable opportunity to listen and learn from community faith leaders, after all, they know their communities best."

Reverend Mary Causer, Lead Chaplain at SWB, led part of the discussions at the meeting. She said: "The importance of faith and spirituality is something we closely examined at the initial meeting. There was a general agreement around the vital role religious groups and customs play in the healing process and the support and comfort having this service and these facilities bring to patients and families in their time of need.

"While the hospital will provide the medical care patients need, we will provide the spiritual care and support to those who call on us. We have a diverse chaplaincy team, and we look forward to building on existing ways of working to create a space we can all be proud of."

The next meeting to progress the spiritual faith centre at Midland Met will be during Inter-Faith week between 13-20 November. To find out more, email swbh.engagement@nhs.net.



Colleagues from Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust (SWB) and community faith-based leaders stood outside The Education Centre at Midland Metropolitan University Hospital.

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Meet the couple helping to connect their community

Lunch clubs, activity classes, financial support, peer support and food banks (to name a few) – meet Sharon and Paul Felton from Darlaston who are bringing people together and really improving the lives of the people in their community.

Sharon said: "It all started when our son was 8. He was being bullied at school so to help him with his confidence I took him to a martial arts class. He absolutely loved it. So much so that when he left school, he began to teach it.

"I decided to see if I could hire a centre locally where he could run his own classes and in no time at all he was running weekly classes. It got me thinking about what else we could use the space for, so I set up a cheerleading class.

"It was so amazing to see people coming along and enjoying the classes – it gave me the inspiration and drive to want to do more."

Since then, Sharon, with the help and support of Paul, has dedicated her time to writing funding bids and setting up groups to benefit the people of Darlaston and beyond. She was successful in securing the Town Hall as a base and has since restored it into the heart and soul of the community.

There are now more than 10 groups held at the Town Hall every week, with the help of four members of staff, and over 20 volunteers. During the week, over 600 people come along to enjoy classes including falls prevention, skittle, Zumba, wrestling, lunch clubs, line dancing and much more. They also offer support to those who need it, helping people access support such as food boxes, financial support, citizens advice, housing and health, social and well-being services.

During COVID-19, they were instrumental in supporting with the response, hosting testing sites and packing and delivering food parcels to those most in need.

Sharon and Paul have also used their own experiences to set up peer to peer support groups. [Find out more about their work here.](#)



Sharon and Paul Felton (left to right) from Darlaston.

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Cost of living support scheme launched to support Walsall families

A new scheme to provide support and advice for Walsall families struggling with the rising cost of living has been launched.

The cost-of-living support scheme has been developed by Walsall Council, working in partnership with organisations from across the Borough.

The service includes a web portal to provide residents with the latest information and advice. Additional support for those who need help getting online or accessing Council services will also be offered by Walsall Connected at all libraries across Walsall and through community associations. The Council hopes the link will provide practical advice and signposting for those seeking help.

Included within the scheme is information on accessing grants, payments, or discounts through the Council and external agencies such as energy and water companies. Information on benefits, foodbanks and debt advice is also available.

The cost-of-living support scheme follows the Council's recent drive to make more services available online and accessible to residents 24 hours a day and follows the launch of Walsall Connected, a service designed to help those who don't have access to the internet.

To view the web portal [click here](#). More information on Walsall Connected can be found on the [Walsall Council website here](#).



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Hundreds get to know their numbers at blood pressure pop-up in Wolverhampton

Almost a thousand shoppers took the opportunity to have their blood pressure measured at a special pop-up shop in the Mander Centre throughout September.

Organised by the City of Wolverhampton Council's Public Health Team in collaboration with the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust to mark Know Your Numbers! Week, more than a third of those who had their blood pressure checked recorded a high reading.

They were given advice about the steps they can take to control their blood pressure and referred to their GP for further support. 21 people with particularly high blood pressure were also referred for a same day clinical assessment.

High blood pressure can lead to heart and circulatory disease, also known as cardiovascular disease (CVD), which causes a quarter of all deaths in the UK – the equivalent of around 2,300 deaths each month in the Midlands alone. Community pharmacies offer a free blood pressure check service for people aged 40 and over with no previous history of high blood pressure.

Councillor Jasbir Jaspal, the City of Wolverhampton Council's Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing, said: "Know Your Numbers! Week was a great opportunity to engage with shoppers and

to help them understand the importance of things like blood pressure.

"People were very appreciative of the chance to check their blood pressure in a convenient location like a shopping centre, and with the help and advice that they were able to get from healthcare professionals. Meanwhile, high blood pressure remains the biggest risk factor for strokes, so if you are

aged 40 or over, please make sure you know your numbers and get a free blood pressure check."

To find your local pharmacy, visit www.nhs.uk/service-search/pharmacy/find-a-pharmacy. Blood pressure checks also form a part of the NHS Health Check, offered to people aged between 40 and 74 once every five years.



Councillor Jasbir Jaspal, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing, gets a free blood pressure check from Godfrey Chiwoeka, NHS Assistant Practitioner, during Know Your Numbers! Week.

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Faster, Better, Safer Care

Putting Black Country Pathology Services on the international map

An algorithm developed in Black Country Pathology Services (BCPS) laboratories that aims to detect people with a genetic condition causing high cholesterol has been showcased at a conference in Chicago.

Lauren Hughes, Principal Clinical Scientist Clinical Biochemistry at BCPS, went to the American Association for Clinical Chemistry's annual conference this summer. She highlighted "A Novel Laboratory-Based IT-Driven Clinical Pathway to Improve Detection of Familial Hypercholesterolemia: the Intelligent Lipid (iLipid) Concept" which has been developed with Dr Clare Ford and Professor Rousseau Gama.

Familial Hypercholesterolemia (FH), a genetic disorder, can be caused by a gene inherited from a parent and can result in high cholesterol levels, which can lead to the early development of heart problems.

The condition is treatable, but many patients go undiagnosed. However, Lauren explained that the development of the Laboratory Information System-based (LIMS) algorithm aimed to improve detection and streamline

the patient pathway.

She said: "Most people with FH are unaware of their condition, and many won't have any symptoms – it may not become evident until much further down the line when heart problems occur. Using this IT-based approach means that there can be earlier intervention and treatment."

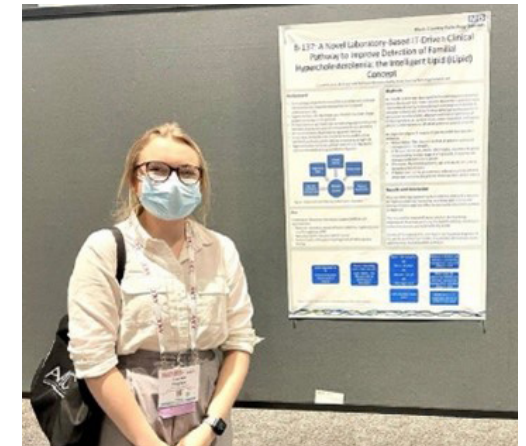
When a GP requests a test, they will be asked to input information on family history, clinical history, physical examination, statin treatment and a mobile phone number to confirm patient consent.

An algorithm was built into the LIMS that does the following:

- Rules out secondary causes of hyperlipidaemia in patients with results suggestive of FH
- Calculates an FH risk score (Welsh score)
- Automatically refers patients at high risk of FH for genetic testing

Lauren, who joined BCPS in 2016 via the Scientist Training Programme, added: "To be

able to attend and present a poster on this work that has taken place in our labs here in the Black Country felt really good – it was a proud moment. Our work was well-received with a lot of interest, and we are now going to roll this out across primary care."



Lauren Hughes, Principal Clinical Scientist and Clinical Biochemistry at the American Association for Clinical Chemistry's annual conference.

A smooth move

Microbiology staff from The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust transferred to join colleagues at the hub laboratory based at New Cross Hospital in September. This means that BCPS Microbiology is now complete at the hub.

Huge thanks to everyone who made it a smooth move. These moves are not easy – especially when it comes to IT systems. Behind the scenes there was also a group of people working incredibly hard to ensure things went well.



Microbiology staff from The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust

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The Dudley Group set their 'sights' on improving patient care as the first NHS hospital in England to introduce new eye injections.

A Black Country Ophthalmology Department is paving the way in utilising new specialist clinical procedures that can significantly improve patient care.

Faricimab is an eye injection that can help treat ailments affecting the eyes such as macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. It will help retina patients maintain vision and has been praised for its treatment longevity in comparison to similar treatments used in the past.

Mr Shahzad Shafquat, Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon, at The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, has performed the first NHS usage of the brand new Faricimab eye injections.

He said: "As retina lead for Dudley, I endeavour to be at the forefront in providing innovative treatments and technology to our Black Country population. The evidence from using Faricimab has shown to improve patient treatment plans exponentially, with around half of patients only requiring a treatment every four months after a loading dose. This increase in longevity can ultimately allow us to reduce the treatment burden on patients and their families, as well as reducing footfall in NHS clinical sites."

Patients receive one injection per month over four months, which gives them a 'loading dose' and from here they are then assessed on a four-month basis.

Faricimab is NICE approved, making it obligatory for usage if a patient requests it. It was also the fastest approved eye drug in history, as a result of its hugely successful outcomes.

Diane Wake, Chief Executive for The Dudley Group, said, "We are incredibly proud to be leading the way in being the first in the country to be offering our patients revolutionary treatments such as Faricimab and this is great news for patients across the Black Country. Our Ophthalmology team have an incredibly high number of patient procedures to perform every year, and through innovation they have been forward thinking in looking at what could be done to ultimately deliver a higher quality care for patients and reducing the overall amount of visits for treatment."

The Dudley region has one of the highest rates of diabetes in the country, so the introduction of this new drug has been key in working towards reducing patient waiting times, clinical footfall and improving patient care.

Breast screening services



October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and the Dudley, Wolverhampton and South West Staffordshire Breast Screening Service is taking the opportunity to encourage women to get checked out.

It is also resharing two videos produced to help deaf and hard of hearing women recognise the signs and symptoms of breast cancer.

The videos, '[How to be breast aware](#)' and '[A guide to the breast screening appointment](#)' feature interpreters using sign language to get across vital, potentially life-saving information on how to be breast aware, and to help deaf and hard of hearing women understand what to expect during a mammogram.

They were commissioned by Zebra Access - a local charity dedicated to ensuring all deaf people enjoy equal participation and access without communication barriers - to help ease fears and anxieties during breast screening appointments.

Robina Ajimal, who was born deaf to hearing parents, has worked for an interpreting agency for nine years and appears on one of the videos.

She said: "I have regular appointments with the dentist, GP and at hospital and these can prove difficult if there isn't an interpreter. It can make a 10-minute appointment an hour long as notes are passed back and forth writing down our conversations and misunderstanding jargon. These videos are great and a very useful resource. Deaf people like to see information visually to get an explanation of what's going to happen and see the process in our minds."

Linda Beasley works for Zebra Access and has been deaf from birth. She said: "A guide to breast screening is a very clear, step-by-step guide of what to expect during a mammogram which gives much needed confidence to deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind people. Deaf people like to see by example rather than going into the unknown. Not knowing what to expect can make them nervous. This video will reassure many deaf people."

Diane Wake, Senior Responsible Officer for Elective, Diagnostics and Cancer, said: "One in seven women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime and this causes 10,000 deaths annually in the UK. Research shows some women don't attend their breast screening appointments out of fear, language barriers and a lack of breast cancer knowledge. Equal access for all women is vital and these videos specifically aimed at the deaf community hopefully provide the reassurance they need to attend an appointment without fear or anxiety."

A video guide to the breast screening (mammogram) appointments has also been produced for the hearing community.



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Health and Wellbeing

Bringing the community together to talk about mental health

The local community recently came together for two important conversations about mental health and suicide prevention.

In September, Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust held a 'hope and inspiration' conversation for World Suicide Prevention Day. Almost 150 people joined to hear an update on how organisations across the Black Country are working together to prevent suicide, listen to people's personal experiences and get advice on how to keep ourselves and others well. They were joined by mental health activist and educator, Dr Sangeeta Mahajan, who sadly lost her son Saagar to suicide in 2014.

You can watch the event on Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust's YouTube channel.

In October, people celebrated and supported World Mental Health Day with a discussion about health inequalities and mental health, safety planning, mental health training and wellbeing. Inspiring poetry was also shared and attendees discussed what we can all do to make mental health our priority.

Conversations around mental health will continue throughout the year. To keep updated on the regular programme of events, please email bchft.communications@nhs.net.

Mental health and inequalities

Anyone can experience a mental health problem but our chances of having a mental health problem, or not, are not equal. Our ability to access support is also not equal which sometimes makes the issue worse.

With the return of World Mental Health Day on 10 October, Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust used the day to shine a light on mental health inequalities.

Throughout the week the Trust used social media to show how we are working with partners to tackle health inequality. Using the hashtag #BreakingDownBarriers we shone a light on themes including homelessness, unemployment, information and digital access to show how we are working to break down barriers that restrict our communities from living happier and healthier lives.

The relevance of mental health inequality was highlighted by World Mental Health Day coinciding with World Homelessness Day. The two are sadly interlinked, showing how injustices and inequality in society are closely linked to mental health.

We used the day to show how we are breaking down barriers for homeless people through our Access to Employment Scheme which supports people with a lived experience of homelessness into healthcare support worker roles.

The project provides participants with on-the-job training and support for future job searches, along with boosting their confidence and skills, while bringing new talent into healthcare roles.



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A new approach to involving people and communities

What does it mean to really #StartWithPeople? A sharing and learning day

In September, the ICB involvement team hosted colleagues from NHS England's Public Participation Team at the Civic in Wolverhampton for a day of sharing and learning framed around the questions 'What does it really mean to start with people and genuinely work together to build healthy communities?' and 'How do we create the conditions for it to happen?'

The workshop was the product of an ongoing dialogue between Black Country and national involvement colleagues about how we might explore new and different ways of working which could enable more strength based, participatory approaches to flourish across the Black Country.

Over the course of the day, colleagues took part in exercises to help enable positive connections when working with people and

communities, including identifying the phases a group goes through on the way to creating participatory decisions

Everyone involved took something powerful away from the day and the techniques, principles, values, and conversations will truly benefit the involvement team's work. The day reinforced everyone's commitment to working in a new way that starts with people, recognising them as equal partners, and to build positive and lasting relationships with our communities as set out in our [ICS People and Communities Involvement Approach](#).

Kat Meredith, Involvement Specialist for the Black Country ICB, said:

"It was great to meet NHSE colleagues. I didn't know what to expect from the day but the team were lovely and enabling of a supportive learning space, where everyone was able to contribute."



Visual representation of what it means to start with people and work together to build healthy communities.

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Launching World Cafés in the Black Country

Throughout September and October, the ICB Involvement Team invited local people - including community leaders, advocates, spokespeople, trusted voices, champions, campaigners and activists - to participate in World Café style workshops in Dudley, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Sandwell.

The World Café is a method which makes use of an informal setting in the community, such as a café, to allow people to come together and explore local issues that affect them and promote collaborative and mutual conversations that matter.

Stephen Terry, Head of Involvement for Black Country Integrated Care Board, said: 'Our aim is that the World Cafes will evolve to become a regular series of conversations that allow us to gather public opinion and insight regarding current Place and System priorities.

"This will help us to elevate what's important and what really matters to local people - especially those who've found it hard to have their voices heard in the past.

"Our role as host is to create the space and conditions for people at the coalface of the problems faced daily by our people and communities to share insights and ideas, as well as collaborate when patterns and common themes are identified to inform the work of the ICB and our place-based partners."

More than 100 people joined and contributed to the cafes at community venues across the Black Country and early feedback suggests that participants welcomed the fresh, alternative listening spaces.

Local resident, Annette, attended the World Café in Dudley and said: "The Cafe was exceptional. I felt able to say it like it was with no fear of come-back. I learned that there is a wealth of knowledge, skill and enthusiasm that can be harvested to make a significant difference to support within the community and to influence decision makers that are both practical and low cost."

If you'd like to find out more, participate in a future World Café or help host, contact the ICB Involvement Team on Involve.blackcountry@nhs.net



A world café workshop taking place in Wolverhampton.

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Our people

Welcome...

The Black Country welcomes our new Chief People Officer, Shajeda Ahmed.

Shajeda has used her expertise and people management experience of over 20 years in both public and private sectors, to progress to her current position as our Chief People Officer. Shajeda joins the Black Country from her role as Executive Director of People, OD and Inclusion for North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare, where under Shajeda's leadership, the people team earned national recognition for their work.

As an advocate for cultural transformation and inclusivity, Shajeda will lead the People Plan for the Integrated Care System with the aim of making the Black Country the best place to work with inclusivity at the heart of all we do for our people.

Shajeda Ahmed, Chief People Officer, Black Country Integrated Care Board said, ***"In the few weeks I have been in the Black Country, I have seen the commitment of our health and care staff, I recognise the challenges we face at present and I am committed to working with partners to nurture an inclusive environment where everyone can be themselves and feel empowered to succeed."***

"My own lived experience and passion on addressing inequalities provides me with deep insight to share on the subject of inclusion. I firmly believe that a diverse workforce leads to better decision making and increased innovation which enables all of us to improve the care that we provide from wherever we work."

"I will be working to make the Black Country a place where everyone has the same opportunities, where our workforce is treated fairly and equally, and where we recognise and accept that difference is a dynamic to be celebrated, a skill to be harnessed and something to be proud of."



Shajeda Ahmed, Chief People Officer for the NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board.

Birmingham Pride

The LGBTQ+ staff focus group and allies from across the organisation showed their support to the LGBTQ+ community at the Birmingham Pride march on Saturday 24 September.

More than 400 members of staff from 14 different NHS organisations took part either by marching with the network or as part of other organisations.

Christopher Morgan, Chair of the ICB's LGBTQ+ staff focus group, said: "It's been 25 years since the first Birmingham Pride, and LGBTQ+ people still face inequalities, discrimination, and barriers to accessing services including Healthcare provision.

"Organisations involved in the march showed a clear commitment to their staff and patients in understanding the community and identifying and addressing health inequalities and barriers to engagement. We would like to say a big thank you to all involved.

"Moving forwards the LGBTQ+ focus group remains committed to working towards an organisation that understands the needs of its LGBTQ+ staff and how the community can be reflected in commissioned services."



ICS colleagues taking part in the Birmingham Pride Parade.

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Race Equality Code... Time For Change conference

Local NHS health leaders agree time for change at RACE Code event

In October, colleagues from across the Black Country ICS attended the "RACE Equality Code...Time For Change" conference to talk about progressing race equality within their organisations using the RACE Equality Code.

The RACE Equality Code is designed to help organisations tackle boardroom race equality and make their leadership more representative of the communities they serve. It provides one set of standards and an accountability framework based on the latest laws, codes and best practice.

Attendees at the conference heard from senior leaders in the ICS, including those whose organisations have already adopted the code. There were also workshops to look at how to achieve the ICS's ambition to eradicate racism and discrimination in the workplace.

Shajeda Ahmed, Chief People Officer for the NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB), said: "It was heartening to see so many colleagues from across the ICS come together for the RACE Equality Code conference. Our aim is that workforces across the system will be truly representative of all sections of society and each employee feels respected and able to give their best.

"The RACE Code is designed to challenge managers to identify ways in which they could improve diversity and race equality within their services – ensuring staff and service users feel both valued and understood. Adopting the code will help our partners lead by example in making the Black Country a more inclusive place to work.

"It will also ensure that we do more so that the impact of a fair, equitable and inclusive culture is truly felt by all our people, this is simply the right thing to do."

Organisations that use the RACE Equality Code to create real and lasting change will be awarded the RACE Equality Code Mark. To gain the Mark, organisations must go through an in-depth assessment of how inclusive they are and develop an action plan for further improvement.

Alan Duffell, Chief People Officer for the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust and Interim Chief People Officer for Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, said: "The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda is so important both personally and for organisations across the system, so it was great to see so many colleagues at the RACE Code conference.

"The RACE Code is a key step on this journey and provides an in-depth analysis of where and how we need to improve.

"Last year, the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust became the first in the Black Country to secure the RACE Equality Code Quality Mark in recognition of our improvement in race equality and ability to tackle discrimination in the workplace. It's been great that we have been able to get all the Black Country providers to sign up and start this journey, with a number of Trusts already receiving their RACE Code accreditation.

"This is clearly not the end and there is still much work to be done, however, the conference has helped to set out a clear list of actions for us all to follow and be held accountable."

Zara Seehra is a Digital Analyst at Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, as well as staff network chair for the ENRICH Equality Network for Race, Inclusion and Cultural Heritage and Engagement Partner for the Trust. She attended the conference and said: "It was great to attend the RACE Equality Code conference with my colleagues across the Black Country. I was overwhelmed with the turnout, which goes to show how much people care about race equality.

"Adopting the RACE code is pivotal in how we move forward as organisations, but it is equally important to learn how we can live and breathe its values to make the key changes needed. That's exactly what the event helped us to collaboratively think about.

"The accountability, support and great ideas shared by all those that attended was a step in the right direction. If we continue to listen to each other, I'm confident that together we can achieve our mutual goal of tackling race inequality head on."



Attendees at the RACE Code Conference