



# March

Holsworthy & Hatherleigh Newsletter 2026 Issue 3

## Getting most out of your GP Appointment

### Your Doctors

**HOLSWORTHY &  
HATHERLEIGH**

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### OPENING TIMES

Monday to Friday.

Please check individual practices for times as they vary for each site.

### EXTENDED ACCESS

Evening and weekend clinics available for pre-booking. Please call your practice to be advised of availability.

Please call 111 for medical advice & direction or 999 for life-threatening emergencies when we are closed.

## Before Your Appointment

- Decide your main concern (prioritise 1-2 issues).
- **Write down** your symptoms: when they started, how often they occur, what makes them better or worse, and how they affect daily life.
- **Bring a list** of all medications (including over-the-counter and supplements).
- **Bring relevant readings** (e.g., blood pressure, blood sugar) and recent letters or results.

**Arrive 5 mins early** and use our self check Pod to record your readings

- **Think about** what you are hoping for (advice, tests, treatment, referral, medication review).

## During Your Appointment

- **Start with** your main concern: "The main thing I'm worried about is..."
- **Be open and honest**, including sensitive concerns.
- **Ask questions** if unsure: What is the likely cause? Do I need tests? What are the treatment options?
- **Check you understand the plan** before leaving (next steps, results, follow-up).



## After Your Appointment

- **Take** medication as advised.
- **Arrange** any tests or referrals promptly.
- **Seek help** if symptoms worsen or change



A standard  
Doctor's  
appointment  
is 10  
minutes.



## Extra Tips

- Arrive a few minutes early.
- Bring glasses or hearing aids if needed.
- Consider bringing a trusted person for support (if appropriate).
- Use online consultation tools for simpler issues when available.



90%

of women do not know the four main symptoms of ovarian cancer.

[ovarian.org.uk](http://ovarian.org.uk)

## OVARIAN CANCER SYMPTOMS

- Tummy pain
- Bloating
- Feeling full
- Needing to pee more

Ovarian cancer symptoms can also include indigestion, back pain, changes in bowel habits, post-menopausal vaginal bleeding, and extreme tiredness.

[ovarian.org.uk](http://ovarian.org.uk)



### WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

If you're experiencing persistent or frequent tummy pain alongside other symptoms such as bloating, feeling full quickly, changes in bowel habits or unexplained weight loss, then it's worth speaking to your GP.

Early action can make a big difference.



Two thirds of those with ovarian cancer are diagnosed too late when the cancer has already spread. We're now in an awareness crisis.

<https://ovarian.org.uk/ovarian-cancer/>

### The Facts:

- Ovarian cancer is a type of cancer that affects the ovaries, which are part of the female reproductive system.
- Every 2 hours another woman dies from ovarian cancer. It kills more women in the UK than womb, cervical, vulval, and vaginal cancers combined.
- Ovarian cancer most commonly affects women over the age of 50, but ovarian cancer can affect women of all ages.
- One in four women mistakenly think their smear test will detect the disease.
- Symptoms are often mistaken for less serious conditions like IBS.

**7000+**  
women are  
diagnosed with  
ovarian cancer  
each year

**1 in 5**  
women know  
that bloating is a  
symptom of  
Ovarian Cancer

**40%**  
of women believe  
that cervical  
screening detects  
ovarian cancer

# National Health Campaign - Prostate Cancer Awareness Month

In the UK, **Prostate Cancer Awareness Month** takes place every March, shining a spotlight on the most common cancer in men across the country. Led by charities such as Prostate Cancer UK, the campaign **encourages men** to understand their risk, speak openly about symptoms, and consider getting tested.

“In the UK, about 1 in 8 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime” - Prostate Cancer UK

We don't know exactly what causes prostate cancer but there are some things that may mean you are more likely to get it – these are called risk factors.

There are three main prostate cancer risk factors, which are things you can't change. These are:

- getting older – it mainly affects men aged 50 or over
- having a family history of prostate cancer
- being Black.

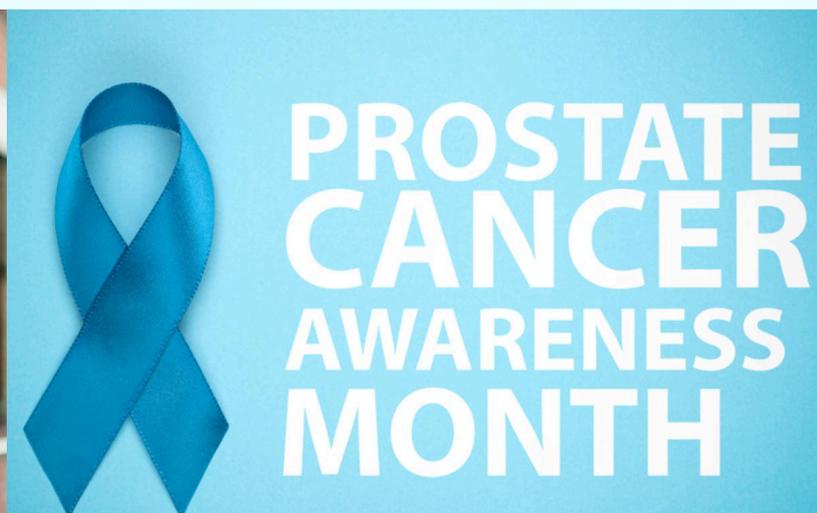
"Men are particularly bad at asking for support when faced with an operation on their prostate and the after effects" - Errol (Macmillan Cancer website)

<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-awareness/prostate-cancer-awareness-month>

One of the key messages during March is the importance of **knowing your risk and discussing testing with a GP**. The PSA (prostate-specific antigen) blood test is available **free on the NHS for men over 50 who request it**, even if they do not have symptoms. Early detection can make a significant difference, as prostate cancer is often treatable when caught in its early stages.

Many men may feel uncomfortable talking about urinary symptoms or seeking medical advice, which can delay diagnosis. The March Campaign focuses on promoting honest conversations among families, friends, and workplaces, reminding men that checking their risk is a responsible and potentially life-saving step.

You can find out more at <https://prostatecanceruk.org>





# Measles spreads fast.

## It can make children seriously unwell.

## Vaccination is the best protection.

### Important

Stay off nursery, school or work for at least 4 days from when the rash first appears.

Also try to avoid close contact with babies and anyone who is pregnant or has a weakened immune system.

We are seeing a **rise in measles cases in parts of England.**

**Vaccination** is the most effective way to protect children from serious illness.

We're **encouraging parents** to check their children are up to date with their vaccinations. Check your **child's red book** or **speak to their GP practice.**

More information:

<https://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations/mmr-vaccine/>

Measles usually starts with cold-like symptoms, temperature, followed by a rash a few days later. Some people may also get small spots in their mouth. Spots can be measles raised and join together to form blotchy patches. They're not usually itchy.



## THE POWER TO QUIT IS IN YOUR HANDS

Get the free NHS Quit Smoking App



## Breathe easier and celebrate a smoke-free life.

**National No Smoking Day, March 11<sup>th</sup> 2026** is an annual health awareness day in the UK, aiming to inspire and support smokers to quit for good.

"The power to quit smoking is in your hands"



If you **live in Devon** and currently smoke, you could be eligible for **FREE** support. It's easy to get started and we will be there throughout your journey to help you stop smoking for good.

<https://stopforlifedevon.org/>

Copies of this letter can be found in our waiting room and details are on our news section on our website  
<https://www.rubycountrymedicalgroup.co.uk/news/introducing-emma>



Dear Patient,

We are writing to inform you about some important changes we are making to improve access to our services and to ensure Ruby Country Medical Group remains safe, responsive, and sustainable for the future.

Over recent months, we have seen a sustained and significant increase in demand for our services. Telephone calls to the surgery have risen dramatically, and despite our very best efforts, many patients are experiencing long waits for their calls to be answered. This is understandably frustrating for patients and places considerable pressure on our staff, impacting our ability to deliver care as effectively as we would like.

We have carefully explored a range of options and, after much consideration, have decided to introduce new technology to help reduce telephone queues, support our hardworking team, and provide a more responsive service for our patients.

## Introducing EMMA

During March and April 2026, we will begin trialling a new system called EMMA. EMMA is an AI-supported telephone tool that answers incoming calls to the surgery and asks the same questions you would normally be asked by our Reception Team. Your responses are recorded and securely sent to the surgery, where they are added to your medical record and reviewed by our Doctors and Clinicians, who will triage and manage your request in the usual way.

Importantly, EMMA does not have access to our clinical system or your medical records. We want to reassure you that this is not a move to a fully automated service. Our reception staff will continue to answer calls that cannot be managed by EMMA, and callers will always be transferred to a member of the team if there are any difficulties with hearing, understanding, or communication. We remain committed to ensuring our patients can speak to a real person when needed.

Benefits of EMMA for patients include:

- Calls answered promptly, with no extended hold times or call-back queues
- A calm, friendly, and professional voice that feels very human
- A consistent, respectful experience every time you call
- A private, judgement-free space to share your health concerns
- Accurate recording of exactly what you tell EMMA, which is shared with the Clinical Team

## Supporting our Reception Team

Introducing EMMA will ensure that, even during staff shortages, your calls are answered without long delays, repeated call attempts, or the need to attend the surgery in person because you cannot get through on the telephone.

Continued/.....

# Your Practice

Our Reception Team play a vital role in providing safe patient care. In addition to answering calls, they manage appointments, registrations, online and external queries, reception desk duties, chaperone services, and many administrative tasks on behalf of our doctors. This is a highly pressured role, and recent staff illness has had a significant impact on service delivery.

## Reducing queues at reception

We are also taking steps to reduce queues at the front desk. Many patients currently attend the surgery because they are unable to get through on the phone, to submit prescription requests or check in for appointments.

- **Prescription requests:** Please use the prescription post boxes. In Holsworthy there is a box outside the front door and one between the two sets of sliding doors; in Hatherleigh there is a box outside the main door and one in the waiting room. Using the post box does not delay processing – prescriptions are collected regularly throughout the day.
- **Appointment check-in:** A self-check-in screen is available in both Holsworthy and Hatherleigh. Using these will significantly reduce waiting times at reception.
- **Online requests:** You can request prescriptions, sick notes, and submit non-medical or administrative queries via our website:

<https://www.rubycountrymedicalgroup.co.uk/>

## Reception desk opening times

From 2 March 2026, the reception desk in Holsworthy will not be staffed between 1:00pm–2:00pm or after 5:30pm. During these times, please use the check-in screen. A member of staff will be available for urgent queries only; please use the bell provided to request assistance. This change will allow us to manage workloads more effectively and provide essential staff training. Hatherleigh Surgery opening times are not affected.

## Trial period and feedback

EMMA will initially operate for a few hours each day so that any early issues can be identified and resolved quickly. We would welcome constructive feedback on how the system is working and any suggestions for service improvement that are within our funding constraints. We kindly ask that you give these changes time to embed and make a difference.

## Ongoing improvements

We are also making further changes to our appointment system, including increasing the number of routine appointments available, enabling bookings up to six weeks in advance, and improving continuity of care. This work is ongoing, and we appreciate your patience while these improvements are implemented.

We are listening, and these changes are a direct response to the feedback we have received from our patients about access and appointments.

Thank you for your continued understanding, support, and cooperation.

With kind regards,

Dr Harpreet Jones-Pahdi Jane Wason  
GP Partner Senior Nurse Partner

