

WINTER ISSUE DEC'25

THE MURMUR

VTS MAGAZINE

**A CHICKENPOX
UPDATE**

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW!

**CARE FOR THE
VULNERABLE AT
CHRISTMAS**

HOW CAN WE HELP?

FLICK TO
PAGE 8 FOR
SOMETHING
A LITTLE
CHEESY

CRACK OUR CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD



FROM *the* EDITORS



As another busy year in general practice draws to a close, we're delighted to bring you this festive issue – a small pause in the midst of winter pressures, on-call rotas and end-of-year reflection. Inside, you'll find: a look at the newly introduced chickenpox vaccination and what it means for everyday GP work; some thoughts on supporting and protecting our elderly patients over the Christmas period; a crossword for those moments between clinics; and a festive baking recipe perfect for sharing in the practice (or quietly enjoying after a long day).

This winter has already proved a challenging period for the NHS, amid the festive rush, winter pressures, and ongoing BMA strikes, it's more important than ever to look after yourself. Long shifts, high patient demand, and emotional fatigue can take a toll, so make space for the small things: short walks, regular meals, staying hydrated, and checking in with colleagues or friends. Remember that setting boundaries, asking for help, and taking even brief moments to breathe are important

Whether you're reading this on a night shift, a train home, or with a well-earned cup of tea, we hope this issue brings a moment of warmth and connection this Christmas.

Your editors,
Ella Saitch & Gabrielle Sanders



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A FEW BRIEF NOTES



Practitioner Health

Please remember to look after yourself through the upcoming Christmas Period, and throughout your career! Practitioner Health is a confidential service dedicated to supporting doctors, dentists, and other healthcare professionals in the UK who are struggling with mental health, addiction, or occupational stress. The service provides specialist assessment, therapy, and treatment, ensuring that practitioners can access care without fear of judgement or impact on their professional registration.



<https://www.practitionerhealth.nhs.uk/>



source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/6/63/Dana_Scully.jpg

Is a Career in Medicine Really That Alien?

Just a note on one editor's favourite fictional doctor - Dr Dana Scully. Played by Gillian Anderson from 1993 to 2002 on the X-Files, this iconic doctor turned FBI agent is widely credited with inspiring a generation of women to see themselves in science, medicine and other STEM careers.

A survey by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media in 2018 showed that 63% of women surveyed said that watching Scully increased their belief in the importance of STEM, with 43% then considering working in STEM fields, 27% studying in STEM fields and 24% going on to work in STEM fields

Thank you Dr Scully!

Author: Ella Saitch



THE VULNERABLE, COLD WEATHER, AND CHRISTMAS

Author: Ella Saitch

Christmas in General Practice often brings familiar seasonal pressures: winter coughs, medication reviews before pharmacy closures, and families trying to coordinate care before travelling. For many older patients, however, winter and Christmas can also amplify vulnerability—through cold homes, isolation, frailty, and disrupted support networks.

London's ageing population is diverse, often living alone, and frequently reliant on stretched social and community services. In General Practice, we are uniquely placed to identify risk early and intervene before small problems become crises. This article offers a practical guide to supporting vulnerable elderly patients during the winter months.

Why Winter Is High Risk for Older Adults

Cold weather is associated with increased morbidity and mortality in older people.

Contributing factors include reduced mobility, multimorbidity, polypharmacy, and social isolation. Specific risks include:

- Hypothermia, even indoors
- Exacerbations of COPD, asthma, and heart failure
- Falls related to poor lighting, icy pavements, or hypotension
- Delirium triggered by infection, dehydration, or medication changes
- Poor nutrition and dehydration
- Loneliness, depression, and cognitive decline

Christmas can disrupt routines—carers take leave, family visits are unpredictable, and services may be reduced. For some patients, a GP appointment may be the most reliable contact they have.

Social Prescribing and Signposting in London

Knowing what support exists locally is crucial.

Useful Supports

- Social prescribing teams: Befriending services, warm hubs, community groups
- Age UK London: Advice, social support, benefits guidance
- Local council adult social care: Care packages, equipment, home assessments
- Winter fuel support schemes: Including Warm Home Discount and Cold Weather Payments
- Carer support services: Particularly around holiday periods

Practical Winter Consideration:

1 – Immunisations and Preventive Care

Opportunistic interventions can be invaluable:

- Flu vaccination
- COVID boosters (as indicated)
- Pneumococcal vaccination
- Vitamin D supplementation where appropriate

Small preventive steps can significantly reduce winter admissions.

2 – Falls, Frailty, and Functional Decline

Ice, clutter, and dark days can increase falls risk.

- Ask proactively about recent falls or unsteadiness
- Check vision, footwear, and mobility aids
- Consider referral to falls clinics or community physio
- Review blood pressure sitting and standing if appropriate

A fall in winter can be the beginning of a rapid decline—early action matters.

3 – Safeguarding, Capacity, and Consent

Cold homes, neglect, and carer burnout may surface more clearly in winter. Be alert to:

- Self-neglect
- Inadequate heating or food
- Cognitive impairment affecting decision-making

Assess capacity carefully and document clearly. Safeguarding referrals are about support, not blame—and can be lifesaving.

CHICKENPOX VACCINATION

WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW?

Author: Ella Saitch

Starting January 2026, the UK is introducing a routine chickenpox vaccination programme for the first time – a major update to the childhood immunisation schedule with direct relevance for GP trainees in practice

What's Changing?

From 1 January 2026, children in England will be routinely offered the combined MMRV vaccine – protecting against measles, mumps, rubella and varicella – instead of the standalone MMR vaccine at their 12-month and 18-month appointments.

Who Is Eligible?

- Most infants due for their first or second MMR dose after 1 January 2026 will be offered MMRV instead.
- There will also be a selective catch-up programme for preschool children (up to around 6 years old) without prior chickenpox disease or vaccination, to ensure broader protection early on

Why This Matters

Chickenpox is usually mild but highly contagious; it can still cause serious complications that lead to hospitalisation – particularly in infants, elderly, pregnant women and immunocompromised individuals. The NHS believes that routine varicella vaccination will:

- Protect around 500 000 children annually.
- Save NHS costs, estimated at around £15 million a year by reducing treatment needs for chickenpox and its complications.

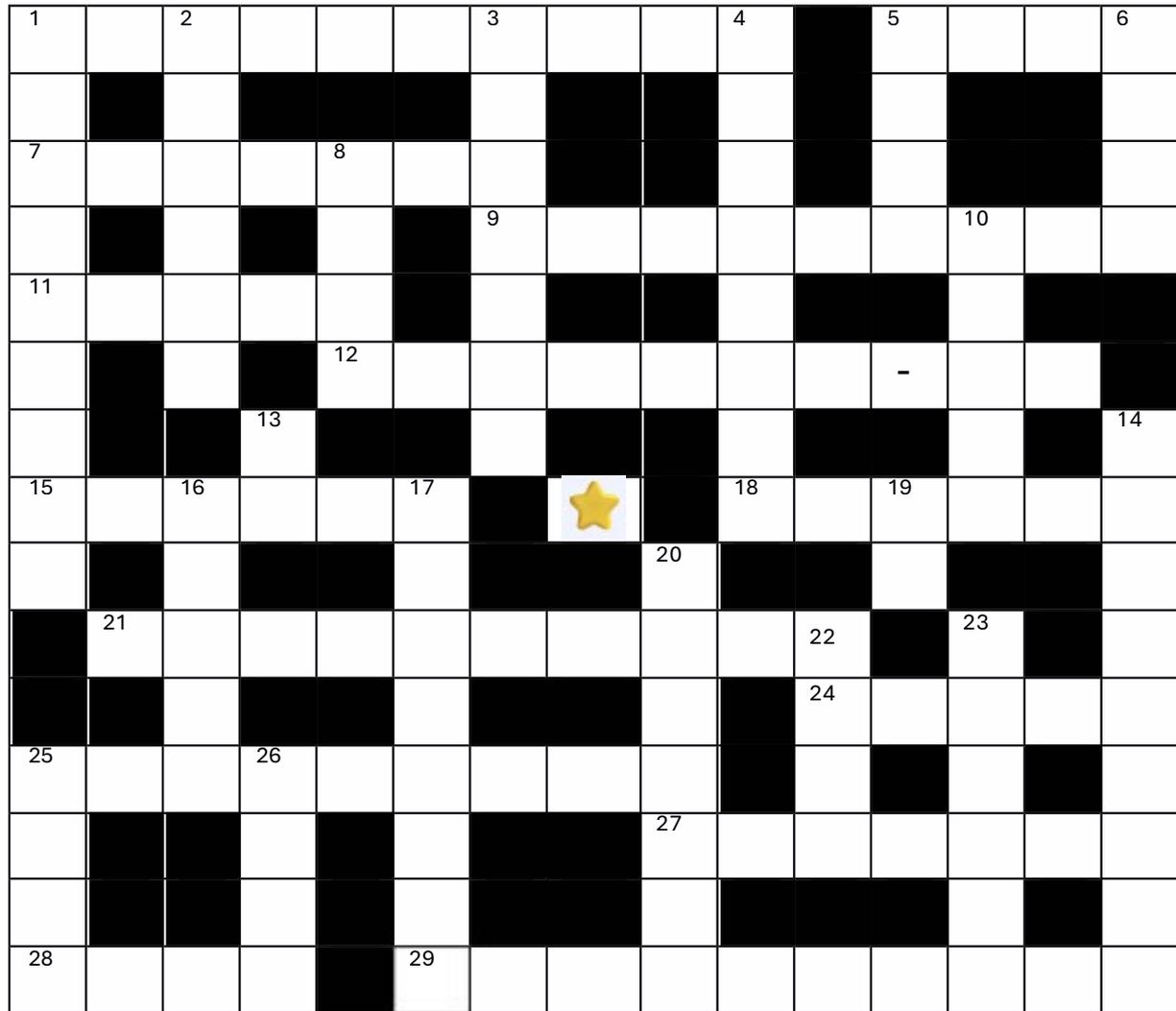
Other high-income countries (e.g., the US, Canada, Germany and Australia) have already included varicella immunisation in their routine schedules, with significant reductions in disease incidence



source: <https://www.happyhealthylives.uk/services-programmes/covid-19-flu-vaccination/>



Cross(mas)word



Across:

Down:

Author: James Lancaster

- 1) Christmas Disease affects..... (5,4)
- 5) Hygge (4)
- 7) When a banger like All I Want For Christmas Is You gets stuck in your head (7)
- 9) Wealth (9)
- 11) Angelic singers (5)
- 12) A really massive lazy say in bed in the morning (4,3-2) (please allow some poetic licence here!)
- 15) Easily the worst one in a tub of Cadbury's Heroes (6)
- 18) The guy who stole Christmas (6)
- 21) Christmas lunch accompaniment (5,5)
- 25) Putting your unwanted gifts on eBay (9)

- 1) My true love gave me three of these (6,3)
- 2) Festive lady's name (6)
- 3) The fact that Santa travels all over the world makes him very.... (7)
- 4) Elevating something or someone (8)
- 5) Candy shape (4)
- 6) ... log (4)
- 8) Shrek (4)
- 10) ... room at the (2...3)
- 13) Location of the next summer Olympics (1,1)
- 14) The most wonderful time of the year (9)
- 16) These guys were leaping (5)
- 17) Whose nose is red? (8)
- 19) Rudyard Kipling poem (2)



Author: Ella Saitch

CHRISTMAS Spiced Shortbread

© Nadja M from Pex

INGREDIENTS:

- 100g caster sugar
 - 150g unsalted butter
 - ¼ tsp cinnamon
 - ¼ tsp mixed spice
 - ¼ tsp ground cardamom
 - ¼ tsp ground nutmeg
 - 250g plain flour
- For the icing
- 100g white chocolate
 - edible silver pearls,

Recipe sourced from
Tesco Real Food Team

1. Put the sugar, butter and spices into a large mixing bowl and use a wooden spoon to beat them together to cream the butter and create a smooth mixture. Add the flour and mix together. Use your hands to bring together into a dough and gently knead until smooth.
2. Roll the dough out on a lightly floured surface to just under 1cm thick. Use a 5cm Christmas tree cookie cutter to stamp out biscuits, re-rolling the offcuts until you have 12.
3. Space out on 2 baking trays lined with nonstick baking paper and chill for 40 mins. Preheat the oven to gas 6, 200°C, fan 180°C.

4. Bake for 15-18 mins until pale golden and they smell like biscuits. Leave to cool on the tray for 5 mins, then transfer to a cooling rack to cool completely.
5. To make the icing, break the chocolate into a heatproof bowl and set it over a pan of just simmering water. Slowly melt the chocolate, stirring occasionally. Spoon the melted chocolate into a disposable piping bag and snip off the very tip. Pipe the chocolate over in a zig-zag across each biscuit tree like tinsel. Carefully stick silver pearls into the icing on each tree. Leave to set for at least 1 hr.

Time for a dessert:

Cheese or Disease?

The idea behind this came from a great drinking game that we used to play in the sports night circles – on the beat of claps and taps on the table, we would recall on the spot a cheese or a disease. The person who could not think of either one in time would forfeit their drink – a great one for the upcoming Christmas parties!



Author: Gabrielle Sanders



Answers



1

https://floridaskinddoctor.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/squamous_cell_carcinoma_1_opt.jpg



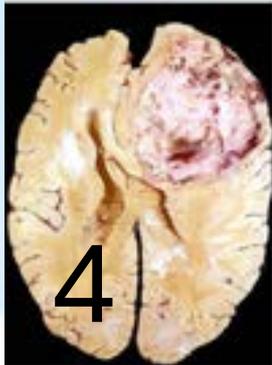
2

<https://www.chemistanddruggist.co.uk/CD137453/Impetigo-causes-symptoms-and-diagnosis/>



3

<https://thecolorfulkitchen.com/2015/04/13/cranberry-cashew-cheese-vegan-gluten-free/>



4

<https://medizny.com/feed/122268>



5

<https://happietrio.com/rasmalai-recipe-how-to-make-rasmalai/>



6

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cowgirl_Creamery_Point_Reyes_-_Red_Hawk_cheese.jpg

1. Squamous cell carcinoma 2. Impetigo 3. Cranberry and cashew cheese 4. Glioblastoma 5. "Rasmalai" cheese balls 6. Red Hawk Cheese

SAVE
the
DATES

AKT Days:

2 March 2026 - Reservations Close
11-13 March 2026 - Booking Period
27 April 2026 - AKT Test Date
19 May 2026 - Reservations Close
27-19 May 2026 - Booking Period
7 July 2026 - AKT Test Date

SCA Days:

28 December 2025 - Reservations Close
5-9 January 2026 - Booking Period
3-6 March 2026 - SCA Test Date
1 Feb 2026 - Reservations Close
9-13 Feb 2026 - Booking Period
7-10 April - SCA Test Date