NUFFIELD DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY CARE HEALTH SCIENCES
RC GP RESEARCH & SURVEILLANCE CENTRE

September 2026 / ISSUE 314

OXFORD-RCGP RSC DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

YOUR WEEKLY UPDATE FROM PROF. SIMON DE LUSIGNAN, DIRECTOR OF THE OXFORD-RCGP RSC

Welcome to our September Edition!

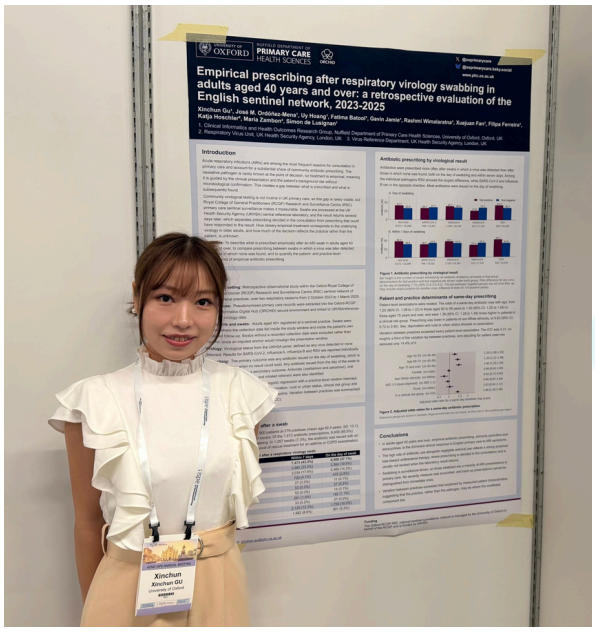
As we head into the autumn and winter season, **preparedness is firmly on the agenda**. Across the network, this means ensuring practices have the materials and supplies they need to **support virology sampling** and help us respond effectively as seasonal pressures emerge. Please contact our Practice Liaison Team if you have any questions: **practiceenquiries@phc.ox.ac.uk**.

In this edition, we also take a look at what our researchers have been working on, and how your **high quality in-practice coding and virology sampling helps** enable responsible research with real-world impact.

Finally, with **early rises in flu and COVID-19** already being observed, particularly in London, our GP team shares their perspective on what we are seeing and what this could mean as we move into the colder months.

Our Researchers Out and About: Updates from the Field

We are pleased to share updates from two members of our research team, who have recently presented Oxford-RCGP RSC work at international conferences. Their posters highlight how the **RSC network supports research** into respiratory infection, testing, prescribing and surveillance in English primary care.



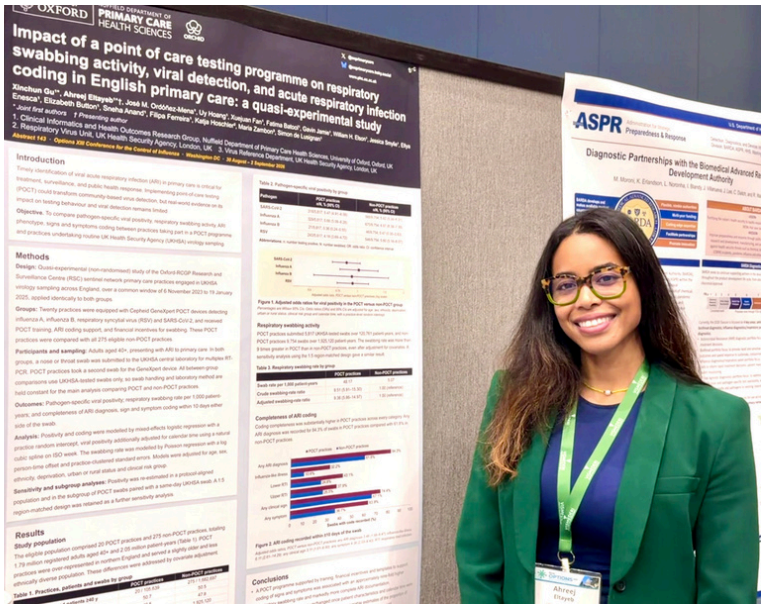
Dr Xinchun Gu, 42nd ISPE Annual Meeting

Dr Gu attended the **42nd Annual Meeting of the International Society for Pharmacoepidemiology** in Milan, which focuses on medicine use, real-world evidence, patient safety and population health.

Her poster examined empirical antibiotic prescribing after respiratory virology swabbing in adults aged 40 years and over in the English sentinel network. Using RSC data from 2023 to 2025, the work explored how prescribing varied by virological result, patient characteristics and practice factors. It highlights the value of **RSC data in supporting antimicrobial stewardship** and more targeted prescribing in general practice.

Ahreej attended the **Options XIII Conference for the Control of Influenza** in Washington, DC, a major international meeting focused on influenza and other respiratory viruses.

Her poster explored the impact of a **respiratory point-of-care testing** programme in English primary care. The study looked at whether point-of-care testing changed swabbing activity, viral detection and acute respiratory infection coding in RSC practices. This work reflects our interest in how **routine primary care testing can strengthen respiratory surveillance** and improve understanding of infections circulating in the community.



Ahreej Eltayeb, Options XIII Conference for the Control of Influenza

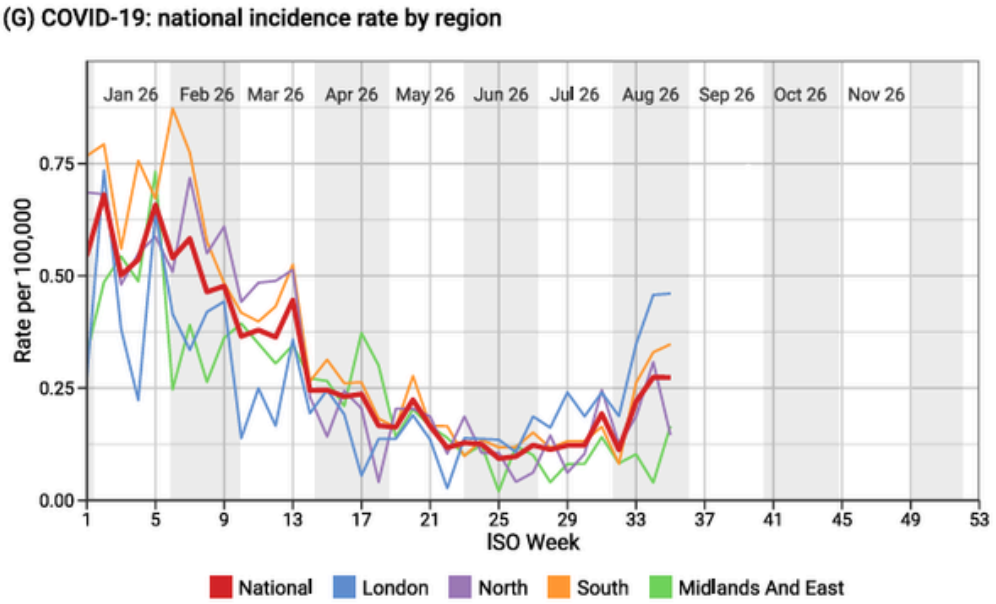
Sampling is Informing

Welcome to the newest segment of our weekly newsletter

Covid-19 and Flu: Early Signals as Autumn Begins

We have officially entered meteorological autumn and can start to look towards the season ahead. There have been low levels of infectious respiratory disease over the summer, but we are just starting to see signs of rates of illness increasing.

At the RSC we have two ways of monitoring disease levels which complement each other. First, we look at diagnoses coded in primary care records. This can detect changes quickly – within a week of codes being entered. We also have a lot of data from the two thousand practices in our network – representing around a third of patients in England. From these data we are seeing a rise in the number of patients who have been diagnosed with Covid-19, particularly in London.



The second method uses virology swabs taken by some of our practices from patients presenting with an acute respiratory infection. Due to the time taken to transport and test samples this can be slower and fewer patients are involved. The data are still valuable as we can see the exact virus involved. These data have shown a rise in the proportion of samples positive for influenza in the last few weeks, although overall numbers of samples remain low.

It is still far too early to say what this flu season will bring. We might see some cases of influenza that present in a similar way to Covid-19. These two signals may be unrelated and an artefact of the smaller number of cases at the moment. The picture should become clearer with more coded diagnoses and swabs as the autumn progresses.