

This newsletter comes to you from **The Health Liaison Group**

The Health Liaison Group is a small independent group of local residents concerned to improve the perceived quality of health services. Set up in March 2007, its main objectives are to:

- 1 discover and represent what local patients want from the NHS,
- 2 make contact with the Primary Care Trust and other official bodies,
- 3 improve communication between the local doctors' practice and its patients,
- 4 understand better how the practice runs, and the key issues affecting its future.

Bob Lee, the chairman of the group, is now a member of the Suffolk Patient and Public Involvement Forum (PPIF). Other members are Claire Jay, Business Manager for the Long Melford Practice, Trish Jackson, Christine Ruggles-Brise, Maggie Shackell and Don Watson together with Roger Kistruck from the Long Melford Parish Plan.

It meets roughly once a month in the evenings, so if you have a few spare hours a month and would like to join the Health Liaison Group and represent your village/community and comment on this newsletter, or express a point of view, do please get in touch with:

Bob Lee on 01787 881487 or

Roger Kistruck on 01787 311165.

Future Issues

The editors hope to publish at least two editions of this newsletter each year.

Ideas for the next few numbers include a look at *mental health* provision in this part of Suffolk, and a report about how an existing primary care centre that almost ranks as a '*polyclinic*' actually works. Other possible topics include alternative medicine and the doctors' new contract with the PCT. If you have ideas about topics you would like discussed, please get in touch with one of the editors:

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Issue No.2

Spring 2008

from an independent Health Liaison Group

a Newsletter

for:- Long Melford Lavenham
Acton, Cockfield, Lawshall, the Waldingfields and others

Dr Pearson.

Dr Pearson is leaving the Practice in early February after completing a happy six months attachment with us as a Registrar. Her next post is in the Accident and Emergency Department of the West Suffolk Hospital. Dr Chambers writes "We thank her for her hard work and contribution to the care of our patients during her time with us and wish her well for the future."

Lavenham Surgery Expands.

The Practice is delighted to have three additional rooms at Lavenham, where parking is plentiful. This enables the Practice to increase its consulting and some of the administration will move to Lavenham during the Spring.



Appointments with the doctor

information from the Business Manager

The structure on which the appointment system is based has to balance finely a number of elements: three doctors work full time and three part time, along with a registrar who works full time.

There are times when a doctor is required to make a 'home visit' to a patient who is too ill to attend surgery. All the doctors spend some of their time at both surgeries (Long Melford and Lavenham).

During each full day's session the doctor will have 27 scheduled appointment slots, each normally ten minutes long. The total number of appointment slots for the practice in a full year is around 32,500. If one doctor happens to deal with a high proportion of elderly or chronically sick patients, it could well mean that this doctor is booked for up to two or three weeks ahead, while others with a different mix of patients have appointment slots free within the next day or two.

When patients ask for an appointment they sometimes ask to see a particular doctor. This is not always possible, due perhaps to one of the reasons given above, so the patient is given an alternative, and asked which surgery they would like to attend. This system also applies for appointments with the practice nurse.

The practice guarantees that any patient in need will be seen by a doctor within 24 hours; however that doctor may not be the patient's first choice. A few appointments are kept for urgent and emergency cases. These are covered by the duty doctor and add up to nine slots each day; one hour in the morning and a half-hour in the afternoon.

In the appointments system, the doctors and practice administrators have to work within the constraints and guide lines laid down by the Government, NHS and Suffolk Primary Care Trust. At the same time the doctors have to focus on the wellbeing of patients. Not an easy task to do both at once!

Good News: from the 18th February Dr Rachel Edwards will join the practice. Dr Edwards qualified in 1995 and has previously worked in Scotland, Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket.

Bad News: in January, 75 of the appointments made were not kept; 30 of these were with doctors, 32 with nurses and 13 with health care assistants. This amounts to 12.5 hours of consulting time lost. This

means the doctors get less work done and prevents other people from being able to get an appointment. It may seem hard to believe, but these are the facts. We all ought to try and reduce these numbers.

Answers to readers' questions

Question: If I go to the surgery but don't have an appointment will I be seen?

Answer: Yes, but you will need to wait till a vacant appointment slot is available, or even to the end of the session.

Question: Can I book an appointment a month in advance?

Answer: No. We have found that bookings made more than three weeks ahead are much more likely to be missed when the time comes.

Question: Why is it considered necessary to relocate the Long Melford Practice? Surely monies would be better spent in purchasing in-house equipment. For example on the Continent CT scanning is carried out in the premises by the Practice Nurse, and then read by the patient's doctor.

Answer: The Long Melford surgery needs bigger premises to offer any additional facilities that will allow e.g. in-house treatments. We are a long way from being able to offer anything like scanning, space being one of the major considerations. There is no scope to extend further on the current site. To maintain the current consulting levels at Long Melford the staff has had to sacrifice the most basic of facilities.

Sometimes being a lady doctor doesn't help!



"Well you can have a look,
but only if you close your eyes."

Cartoon by
Bill Stott