

# NHS policy must support dispensing GP practices



Welcome to this briefing paper from the Dispensing Doctors' Association for MPs focusing on dispensing GP practice in England. The second of three to be published in England during 2014, its aim is to give you a better understanding

of the problems affecting much-needed medical services in rural areas, and to help you ensure that rural patients are protected.

**NHS policy** in England must be developed in a way that supports primary care to work to maximum efficiency and with 'whole patient' care in mind. When developing new policies for primary care, health ministers must take care not to do anything that negatively impacts on patients - or adds to the overall cost of care.

In England there are around 1,000 dispensing doctor practices, serving a patient population of around eight million patients. Located in the most remote and rural areas, dispensing practices provide a comprehensive range of general medical and other healthcare services, as well as access to vital medicines supplies.

Dispensing income allows rural practices to meet the extra costs of providing services in rural areas and to employ teams of GPs, nurses and healthcare assistants to offer a range of clinical services typically exceeding the range available from prescribing only GPs, as well as community pharmacies. See the information box (right above) for more information on the healthcare services typically offered by dispensing practices.

Services such as a free practice minibus can also be funded out of dispensing income and these help ensure that no matter how rural or remote the location, or how partial the local public transport provision, rural patients can always have access to a full range of medical and healthcare services, as well as access to the treatments they need. In short, they



When they are allowed to thrive, dispensing practices can make a significant contribution to medical care in rural England

provide England's most complex patients with a one-stop-shop for all their healthcare needs.

## Healthcare services on offer in dispensing practice

- Same day appointments
- Longer appointments
- Contraceptive pill Checks for patients aged under 30
- Dressings/wound checks
- Injections
- Leg ulcers
- Asthma care
- Diabetes care
- Travel advice and vaccinations
- NHS cardiovascular health checks
- Treatment of minor injuries
- General health check
- Advice on stopping smoking, weight control and other preventative health topics.

## Cost efficient care

Quite rightly, NHS policy also demands efficiency savings of its primary care providers. Dispensing GPs are among the most cost efficient of the dispensing contractor professions. Recent data looking at the drug costs to NHS between April 2013 and January 2014 (taken from NHS Prescription services figures) shows that due to their fee structure, GP dispensaries are 4.5% more cost effective than pharmacies.

**More information on the comparative costs of pharmacy and GP based dispensing can be found on the Dispensing Doctors' Association website at: [www.dispensingdoctor.org/comments.php?id=3149](http://www.dispensingdoctor.org/comments.php?id=3149)**

Referring MPs to the cost efficiency of dispensing practice (**see box below, left**) Matthew Isom, Chief Executive of the Dispensing Doctors' Association, says: "Dispensing practices offer patients and taxpayers excellent value for money. This is why they remain so popular with rural patients and why it was so disappointing that none of this was recognised in the recent NHS England Call to Action."

## Putting words into Action

As NHS England considers its response to the Community Pharmacy and GP Calls to Action, the DDA would urge policy-makers to consider the effect of additional community pharmacy service provision in terms of all other routes of service provision, particularly in rural areas that are served by a dispensing practice. Pharmacy policy must ensure that the long-term future of services provided by the GP practice is not compromised by any development in the pharmacy service and network.

**“ Pharmacy policy must ensure that the long-term future of services provided by the GP practice is not compromised ”**

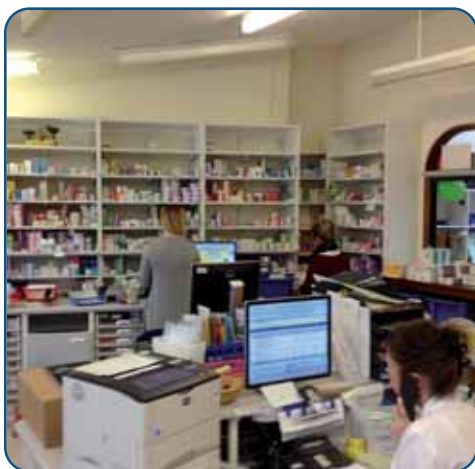
The DDA would also urge NHS England to appropriately fund dispensing practice through well-considered rural allocations, and realistic reimbursement and remuneration for the dispensing activity that is so vital to patients in rural areas, who typically have the most complex – and potentially costly – medical needs.

DDA Chief Executive Matthew Isom says: "Many GPs across England already have close working relationships with their pharmacist colleagues, and we favour the integration of pharmaceutical and medical services services. However, the underlying principle has to be that pharmacy provision should be considered holistically, alongside all other components in the patient pathway."

# Demonstrating rural resilience: dispensing practices rise to the challenge



Credit: Langport Surgery



## Langport Surgery dispensers provided a vital lifeline to flood-ridden patients in the Somerset Levels

For the first two months of this year, residents in the tiny village of Muchelney on the Somerset Levels were marooned by the floods caused by record rainfall in Britain.

For the more mobile inhabitants of the hamlet-turned-island, the boat service became their lifeline to the medical and dispensing services provided to patients registered with the local dispensing Langport Surgery. The same boat service was also used by the Langport Surgery practice staff to get patients' medications into the island, and also to provide clinical staff, who sailed in to provide mini-surgeries in the local church for those unable to manage the boat service out. The practice also became a portal for clinical homecare medicines and products normally supplied directly to village residents in their homes.

Langport Surgery GP Dr Richard Balai believes that the practice's dispensing

status was vital to facilitating the practice's ability to provide these emergency medical and medicine supply services. "When we dispensed for that patient, we were able to offer medical care in the full knowledge of exactly what medication they are taking; when the medication was a Controlled Drug we could ensure supply was made securely and safely. We were able to offer a very flexible and responsive service to our patients in what was a desperately difficult period for everyone affected."

## Practice services

Langport Surgery is sited in an architect-designed and striking 11-sided building, which is purpose built for providing medical services to local patients (see front cover picture). The practice offers an impressive portfolio of medical and healthcare services. There is also a dispensary, supplying medicines to around 7,500 patients. Thanks to the additional income accruing from the dispensary, the practice is able to employ seven GPs and eight nurses, as well as a raft of dispensing and administrative staff. There is extended opening between 8am and at least 7.20pm three days a week, and the practice is open on Saturday mornings. Patients are also always able to receive same-day medical care. Patients have made clear their satisfaction with the practice, and in the most recent patient survey they recorded very high levels of satisfaction with the practice. **(see box, right, for the headline results).**

Summing up describes the contribution of dispensing income to the practice as "vital

to enable the practice to provide its current wide range of services at the high level that our patients have come to expect." He continues: "Without the income from dispensing, the recruitment and retention of GPs would become increasingly difficult and the level of service which we currently provide would be seriously undermined."

## Message to Government

Dr Balai has a clear message for health secretary Jeremy Hunt: "Dispensing income enables us to practice family medicine. Without dispensing income we would struggle to deliver the same level of care.

"I'm sure The Health Secretary will be aware of the support patients have for their dispensing practices across the country, and he will recall the overwhelming demonstration of support from patients, witnessed by the previous Government, when they proposed catastrophic changes to dispensing regulations. This service is very popular and highly valued by our patients."

## Langport Surgery patient survey highlights

- 96% report good or excellent access to appointments
- 90% report good or excellent service from the dispensary
- 66% of patients have been registered with the practice for at least 10 years

## About the Dispensing Doctors' Association

About the Dispensing Doctors' Association The Dispensing Doctors' Association (DDA) represents over 6,600 doctors currently working in 1,450 dispensing practices across the UK. It is the only organisation that specifically represents the interests of dispensing doctors and their 8.8 million patients. The DDA meets regularly with ministers and other agencies to promote the contribution dispensing doctors can make to rural health, and achieve fair remuneration and reimbursement for their services. DDA members are always delighted to talk to politicians about the service of rural dispensing, and to host visits to their practices. If you would like any more information on dispensing, or are yet to visit a constituency practice, please contact the Dispensing Doctors' Association office on: Email: [office@dispensingdoctor.org](mailto:office@dispensingdoctor.org) Tel: 0844 824 6199 Web: [www.dispensingdoctor.org](http://www.dispensingdoctor.org)