

Come and visit the NHS rural front-line



Dispensing GPs play a unique and vital role in providing NHS services to patients in rural areas - so why not use the opportunity of this post-election period to visit a dispensing practice and see the NHS rural front-line in action?

Delivering healthcare services in rural areas presents unique challenges for patients and the healthcare professionals that care for them. Your seat in this new Parliament is your chance to do all you can to reduce these challenges and improve the lives of the people who live in your rural areas and use NHS services.

“ Your seat in Parliament is your chance to improve the lives of people who use NHS services in rural areas ”

Relative to urban areas, rural patients typically find it harder to access the same range of local healthcare services. Transport links can be poor, and in many places, public transport does not exist at all. Yet, rural patients, with their ageing demographic, are among the most vulnerable members of society and they will make the greatest use of NHS services.¹ MPs with their finger on the pulse of rural 'reality' will also be aware of the hidden poverty and deprivation that can affect rural people.

Delivering on rural promises

This new parliament is your chance to deliver on the broken promises made to rural Britain since 2012.² Representing dispensing doctors across Britain, the Dispensing Doctors' Association calls on MPs to work with rural GPs to achieve just three things:

1. Improve GP funding: In rural areas dispensing practices routinely reinvest the profits from the dispensing activity to cross-subsidise the increased costs of providing general medical services



Credit: Bere Regis Surgery, Mid Dorset/Poole

Dispensing GPs such as Bere Regis provide a unique service for NHS patients

in rural areas and incentivised GP recruitment and retention in the recruitment 'notspots'. These increased costs relate to home visits and delivering medicines in sparsely populated areas; maintaining vital medical supplies (particularly when there are shortages) and providing a wider range of healthcare services that acknowledges the lack of other local healthcare service providers relative to urban areas. Please see the following page for more information on the challenges facing the English dispensing practice service.

2. Engage rural patients: In England patient eligibility for the GP dispensing service takes no account of patient choice. When patients are eligible to choose to receive dispensing services from their GP the overwhelming majority choose to do so.³

3. Eliminate rural inequalities: Throughout Britain rural patients are denied services that are available to urban patients who access pharmacies. Pharmacy services currently unavailable to rural patients using dispensing practices include: the electronic prescription service, the new medicines service, the medicines use review service.

How you can help?

- With your help dispensing practice can be transformed into a hub for the delivery of integrated health and social services in rural areas.
- Why not contact the Dispensing Doctors' Association today to arrange a visit to a dispensing GP practice? There, you will see for yourself the vital role these practices play in rural areas.

What is a dispensing doctor?

Dispensing doctors are general practitioners (GPs) who provide primary healthcare to around nine million rural patients. Nearly 3.6 million patients of these live remotely from a community pharmacy.

At the request of the patient, dispensing doctors are allowed to dispense the medicines they prescribe for patients who live more than a mile from the nearest pharmacy. This service acknowledges that such patients may not have easy (or indeed any) access to a pharmacy and provides patients with access to medicines and general healthcare under one roof. This includes the operation of branch surgeries and near-patient tests for patients in rural areas.

Maintaining a fragile valuable resource

Credit: Bere Regis Surgery, Mid Dorset/Poole



GP dispensaries are a vital NHS resource that should be protected for patient benefit

Bere Regis Surgery, located in the village of Bere Regis, in the Conservative target seat of Mid Dorset/Poole, is a classic example of a dispensing practice that operates at the heart of its local community. Situated halfway between Poole and Dorchester, Bere Regis boasts a history tracing back to 2500BC. But, perhaps, this ancient Dorset village is most well-known for its association with the aristocratic Turbeville family – which provided the inspiration for Thomas Hardy's famous novel 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles'.

For modern-day villagers Bere Regis Surgery is the only healthcare provider for many miles: the nearest hospital some 15-20 minutes away (slow moving farm vehicles permitting) and the nearest pharmacy is in the next village - with no transport links; so the practice has evolved to offer its 3,600 patients a very wide range of NHS services (*see box*). These include a practice dispensary, which provides one-stop access to prescribed NHS treatments.

Delivering benefits for patients

But, it is the view of practice manager Nicky Chivers that the dispensary offers far more than just a supply route for medicines. Around one in four of the practice's 3,600 registered patients are aged over 65 and 12% of patients are aged over 75. The surgery is pleased to be able to offer these most vulnerable of patients the continuity and familiarity of care that only a surgery-

based dispensary can bring. Recently, the dispensary service has been improved further with the addition of new staff and a medication delivery service for housebound patients. As practice manager Nicky Chivers says: "Many of our elderly patients continue to live in the area they grew up in and now have family who care for them enabling them to remain in their own homes."

Delivering benefits for the NHS

As with other dispensing practices, the dispensary income is used by the practice to cross-subsidise the additional costs of providing healthcare services over a sparsely populated area – in the case of Bere Regis, the catchment area covers a number of villages over an eight mile radius. Dispensing income also provides the practice with vital financing for improvements both to the infrastructure of the practice and to the clinical expertise available to local patients, as well as providing much-needed employment for local young people. Further clinical rooms will become operational this year, supplementing those added in 2013.

This year has also seen Bere Regis Surgery become a training practice, and having dispensing on site will enable the practice team to offer its trainee GPs the widest possible and highest quality range of experiences. "Dispensing makes the clinical experience much more interesting for GPs as they can see at first hand the patient journey after they have written the prescription. It is really joined-up working and it provides a much more holistic experience of providing care. We hope it will play some role in encouraging more doctors to take up general practice."

It is expected that the new facilities and extra GP expertise will enable the practice to deliver political imperatives such as extended opening. Today, the practice with its team of three GPs, two nurses, and a

healthcare assistant, is able to offer appointments between 8.30am-7.00pm three days a week, with earlier morning appointments available on Mondays. As a result, patient satisfaction with the GP services is very high. But Ms Chivers says that without the income from dispensing, this standard of service would be very hard to maintain. "We aim to give patients what they want, but with funding continually being chipped away, increasingly it is dispensing income that is keeping us afloat."

References

1. Government information. Public spending and older people
2. Rural Statement 2012
3. Dispensing Doctors' Association myth buster. Patients prefer the convenience of pharmacies.

Further information on these references is available from the DDA

Healthcare services on offer from Bere Regis Surgery

- Acute illness management by established protocols
- Chronic disease management eg. diabetes, asthma, heart disease
- Treatment room procedures eg. travel immunisation, dressings, ear syringing
- Family planning
- Screening, including cervical smears
- New-patient checks
- Health Promotion, including smoke-stop and weight control
- Minor injury service
- Telephone advice/triage
- Minor surgical procedures
- Acupuncture
- Phlebotomy (blood-testing) clinics are held every morning from 8:10am
- Chiropody
- Counselling
- Community nursing for the housebound
- Health visiting
- Midwifery
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Stop smoking services

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 Tel: 0330 333 6323 Web: www.dispensingdoctor.org