

# Rural patients deserve equal treatment



Welcome to this briefing paper from the Dispensing Doctors' Association for MPs focusing on dispensing GP practice in England. The final paper 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.

**Over three** million rural patients in England are being denied access to the New Medicine Service – for the simple reason that there is no funding for the service in rural GP practices.

The New Medicine Service (NMS) involves community pharmacists providing extra support for patients prescribed new medicines in four areas: hypertension, asthma and COPD, diabetes and anticoagulation. A recent evaluation has found that it can improve the way patients take their medicine by 10 per cent, and as a result has recently been rolled out in all pharmacies in England.<sup>1</sup>

## Delivering adherence in rural areas

Rural patients could access the NMS, if funding was made available to the GPs in rural areas who offer NHS dispensing services to these patients.

In England there are around 1,000 dispensing doctor practices, serving a dispensing patient population of over three 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 prescribed medicines supplies to patients who would otherwise have difficulty accessing medicines.

Advice on using medicines, which is designed to support the patient to take the medicine as prescribed, is already provided to these three million-plus patients by the



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GP and the GP dispensary team under the terms of the Dispensary Review of patients' Use of Medicines (DRUM) service.

## What healthcare services are on offer in dispensing practice?

**Due to their remote and rural locations - and distance from other healthcare service providers - dispensing GP practices typically offer a very wide range of healthcare services that would complement - and be complemented by - provision of the New Medicine Service.**

- 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.

With only minimal changes, the specification of the New Medicine Service could be added to the DRUM service, and the benefits of the NMS to rural patients - and the NHS in England - could be materialised in rural areas.

## Co-located benefits

Another finding of the NMS report is that the benefits of the service are maximised where the pharmacy was co-located with a GP surgery. The researchers, who were commissioned by the Department of Health, said: "Co-location enabled closer working between pharmacists and GP to confirm and refer patients, possibly leading to a triangular relationship between patient, pharmacist and GP, rather than two separate bi-lateral relationships."

The Dispensing Doctors' Association, which represents the GPs serving these three million-plus rural dispensing patients, is a keen advocate of collaborative working with pharmacies, and as a result, many dispensing GPs also operate a community pharmacy business.

In a paper published in the British Journal of General Practice, the DDA states its position that pharmacies and general practice can work together on the management of common long term conditions, particularly citing the example of hypertension.<sup>2</sup>

## References:

1. Understanding and Appraising the New Medicines Service in the NHS in England (029/0124)' University of Nottingham and UCL School of Pharmacy. <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~pazmjb/nms/>
2. Journal of General Practice vol. 64 no. 626 477-478 Management of patients with hypertension: general practice and community pharmacy working together. West R et al. <http://bjgp.org/content/64/626/477>

# Collaboration in action



Credit: Alliance Healthcare/Hannah Edwards



## At the Woolpit Health Centre pharmacy, pharmacists and doctors work collaboratively for the benefit of patients

One of the first things you see when you visit the Suffolk village of Woolpit is the village sign depicting the 'green children of Woolpit', so-called because of the green tinge to their skin.

One modern explanation for this discolouration is that the children suffered with anaemia, caused by a lack of meat in the diet of the time.

### Village feature

The dispensing practice, located near Bury St Edmunds, has been a feature of

village life for at least 40 years, and today its resident nine-doctor, five practice nurse team (plus the plethora of healthcare service providers who are based at the practice) offers a wide range of healthcare services to the practice's 13,500 practice list.

Rural patients living in the many remote villages located within the practice's 100 sq mile practice boundary have long enjoyed the services of the practice medicines dispensary. In 2000, practice dispensing services were further expanded, when the practice opened a pharmacy. Today, the pharmacy's four pharmacists and seven technicians/dispensers dispense around 28,000 items a month, as well as offering patients the full range of pharmacy services.

### Dispensing income stream

With some patients living as far as 15 miles away from the practice, the practice uses the income from dispensing to provide minibus transport to the health centre from four local villages. The health centre also offers open access 'on the day emergency appointments' and an extended hours access scheme offering before and after work appointments once a week. There is also a daily home delivery service for the elderly or housebound; whether the patients are dispensing or pharmacy patients, they all benefit from the same 'hub' model of care, which aims to keep as many patients as possible out of hospital for as long as possible, according to pharmacist Deborah Marshall.

In the recent Patient Participation Report 2013/14, Woolpit Health Centre patients reported very high levels of satisfaction (96 per cent) with the amount of time given to the appointment by the GP appointment and with the opening hours (87 per cent satisfied).

### Collaborative working

Based in the same premises, the practice and its pharmacy offer a collaborative, multi-professional way of working.

Deborah says: "When people live 'in the sticks' we have to ensure that our services are complementary and with the nurses and doctors just down the hall it is easy for us to pop in and talk to them about the patient's medicines needs. By the time the medicine reaches the patient the queries have all been ironed out. Patients can just get on with taking their medicine."

### Just some of the services available from the Woolpit Health Centre

- 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
- Minor Surgery
- Health Promotion Clinics
- Daily Diabetes and Blood Pressure Clinics
- Child Health Surveillance
- Chiropodist Clinic
- Dietician Clinic
- Physiotherapy

## 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: 0330 333 6323 Web: [www.dispensingdoctor.org](http://www.dispensingdoctor.org)