

Parliament 2017: your chance to change Wales' rural health for the better



Elected MPs are asked to be brave, to be active, and to have your say

On behalf of Wales' most rural family GPs, the Dispensing Doctors' Association challenges you to take five simple actions to secure the future of rural health services and safeguard the health of your rural constituents:

- 1 Will you do all you can to protect the unique rural GP one-stop-shop service that improves people's access to scarce healthcare resources?
- 2 Will you recognise that rural medical practices are the hub of their local communities, offering traditional family doctor GP services, creating skilled jobs for local people, and reducing social isolation?
- 3 Will you join in the lobby for urgent improvements to the rural infrastructure, particularly, public transport and broadband?
- 4 Will you support the call for an updated rural NHS funding formula that recognises the increased costs of delivering a robust and resilient health service in rural areas?
- 5 Will you recognise that dispensing income is vital for the sustainability of high quality rural general practices?

PLEASE ACT NOW!
Support your rural general practice and the community it serves!

Why rural people value rural family doctors

There are many reasons why elected MPs should place a high value on family doctor practice in rural areas:

1. A unique one-stop-shop service

Extra services: Rural GPs typically offer a range of 'extra' services, over and above core NHS GP services. This recognises that specialist healthcare services are often difficult or impossible to access elsewhere locally. Home visits made by rural GPs recognise that access to the surgery can be difficult for a large number of patients.¹ NHS Wales has admitted that rural GP practices provide a unique service that requires unique solutions.²

2. A community hub

Accessible services: Rural GPs are located in the centre of local communities. This allows patients to see a GP when they need to: increasing distance from health services is known to reduce use of primary care services³... resulting in more deaths⁴ and lower than expected survival [rates].⁵

Familiar services: Rural GPs offer usual GP appointments, including for elderly populations at risk of more complex healthcare conditions. When patients can see the same GP more consistently there are fewer hospital admissions.⁶

Trained staff: GP recruitment is accepted as a major challenge facing Wales, and special incentives are now in place to support the GP workforce pipeline in Wales.⁷ Dispensing GPs provide much-needed skilled employment and training in areas identified by DEFRA as offering fewer skilled people and less access to training and to employment.⁸ GP partnerships offer career development potential in places with few other employment opportunities.

3. Rural infrastructure challenges

Challenging infrastructure: DEFRA identifies that rural populations have the poorest access to services, compared to urban people, as a result of distance, transport links, slow broadband speeds and variable mobile coverage.⁷ Wales' most rural GPs have to rise to some of the most challenging catchment areas in the UK, when delivering vital healthcare services.

4. Out of date funding

Increased service costs: Major political parties recognise the increased costs of providing services in rural areas.⁹ GPs in Wales receive Carr-Hill formula based-funding – a formula, which the NHS has admitted is now "out of date".¹⁰

MPs must ensure the NHS funding formula is updated to recognise the unique rural service offering as a priority.

5. Vital dispensing income

Established, quality, cost-effective GP services: Dispensing GPs provide a unique, established and cost effective solution to GP services in rural areas thanks to the income they earn from dispensing NHS medicines.

According to GP regulator, the Care Quality Commission, compared to non-dispensing GPs, dispensing GPs account for almost double the number of 'outstanding' practices and fewer than half the number rated as 'inadequate'.¹¹ The GP regulator typically congratulates outstanding dispensing practices for 'going the extra mile' for patients.

A key difference between dispensing and non-dispensing GP practices is the additional income received from the NHS dispensing service, which can be used to cover the extra costs associated with staffing and equipping practices to deliver outstanding, patient-centred GP services.

Be brave... have your say

DDA chairman Dr Richard West MBE urges newly-elected MPs to be active, and to have their say on behalf of rural constituents. He says: "The current model of dispensing GP practice is proven as the most cost

effective solution to delivering rural health services, and that it is popular with patients, and has been shown by the regulator to deliver safer, more effective, more caring and responsive services, with better quality leadership." He adds:

"Please ensure that any policy to restructure GP services does not damage the excellent and cost-effective service model already available in rural areas"

Understanding the dispensing doctor difference...

Dispensing GPs are located in Wales' most rural areas. Due to the remoteness of their locations, dispensing GPs are able to supply vital prescribed NHS medication in areas where access to a community pharmacy is difficult, or non-existent. This income typically pays for the following selection of the 'one-stop' services provided by dispensing GP practices:

- Same day appointments • Longer appointments • Home visits • Home deliveries • Medicine reviews • Emergency medicine supplies • Specialist medicine supplies • Medicine dispensing based on full patient history • Emergency healthcare services • Specialist healthcare services • Injections • Vaccinations • Cost-effective on-site repeat prescribing and dispensing • Dressings/wound checks • Injections • Vaccinations • Full range of GP health and well-being services

MPs are warmly invited to visit their local dispensing GP practice. Please contact the Dispensing Doctors' Association to arrange a visit. Email: office@dispensingdoctor.org Tel: 0330 333 6323 Web: www.dispensingdoctor.org



Building a resilient rural NHS in Wales

Before and after: The Benllech surgery now offers a high quality setting in which to deliver the highest standards of GP and dispensing services ▼



Dispensing income made a significant contribution to the transformation from the old facilities (inset pictures)

GP recruitment and retention problems in Wales are well-documented, as GPs in Wales increasingly reject the harsher geographical challenges and lower NHS GP funding compared to England's general practices.

For one practice in Wales, though, the future looks much more promising; and to thank for that is Gerafon surgery's dispensing income.

At peak times, the Gerafon surgery - with its main site in Benllech and its branch surgery in the market town of Llangefni some seven miles away - cares for around 8,400 patients. The practices' list size can swell by over 10 per cent in the summer as holiday makers come to Anglesey, and in particular to Benllech, with its fine golden beaches and clear blue waters. Year-round, the practices care for a predominantly retired population, as well as the native Welsh farming community around the market town of Llangefni, and there is no doubt that the practices are well-located. Considerable local deprivation within Llangefni and the predominantly older demographic of Benllech combine to make both practices a popular and very frequently-used source of healthcare advice and provision.

“Dispensing allows us to keep our heads above water and even improve the care we offer”

Growing with its patients

As the communities around Benllech and Llangefni have grown and, in common with other deprived and ageing populations, have increased their need for healthcare services, so the Gerafon surgery has developed and improved its service offer.

Nine years ago, after a long and difficult application process, the practice started dispensing, in recognition of the value to local people of a one-stop NHS medical and pharmaceutical service. What started off as a temporary dispensary in a Portakabin has recently been transformed into state-of-the-art facilities within a new, purpose-built surgery building. The Benllech surgery now offers a high quality setting in which to deliver the highest standards of GP and dispensing services and to cater for the growing medical and pharmaceutical

needs of the local populations: patients can now access the dispensary between 9am and 6pm; the practice has become the only GP dispensary in the locality to make drug home-deliveries to patients three times a week.

Extended healthcare services

GP services have also been extended: there are more afternoon clinics, and no lunch-time closing. There is a GP telephone triage (mainly morning) on both sites which allows patients to discuss issues such as repeat sick notes, medication queries and receive reviews by phone without the need to make a journey for a face-to-face appointment. When patients do need to see a GP, they have the choice of pre-bookable and same day urgent appointments. Patients can book these in the morning or afternoon, which caters for those patients who become ill during the morning.

The new Benllech surgery facilities also allow for extended services coming into the surgery: audiology, physiotherapy, specialist cardiac nursing, counselling, retinopathy, midwifery and health visiting. There is also an attached health board pharmacist and pharmacy technician, who visit the practice weekly to train dispensary staff and develop high quality operational standards. There are also regular dispensary meetings to

discuss service improvements, and to consolidate links with prescribers.

Paying for these services is the income generated by the dispensing service, which covers not only a delivery driver and the dispensing staff, but also an additional part-time GP partner and a deputy practice manager, boosting practice services as a whole.

Building a resilient rural NHS in Wales

Starting in September, the practice will also contribute to national efforts to boost rural GP recruitment and retention by training medical students and GP registrars. The hope, says lead dispensing GP Dr Ewan Thomas, is that the practice “will encourage the next generation of GPs back to Wales to sustain rural practices”.

As a GP so involved in the GP recruitment and retention issues facing Wales, Dr Thomas is well aware of the challenges faced by the Welsh government and its GPs. “We have sadly seen a number of practices forced into giving up their GMS contract and becoming health board managed practices.

“Dispensing allows us to keep our heads above water and even improve the care we offer. I would urge election candidates to do all they can to ensure we can continue to do this for many years to come.”

References

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About the Dispensing Doctors' Association

The Dispensing Doctors' Association (DDA) represents over 6,600 doctors currently working in approximately 1,200 dispensing practices across the UK. It is the only organisation that specifically represents the interests of dispensing doctors and their 9.1 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