

# Come and visit the NHS rural front-line



The Betws-y-Coed dispensing surgery provides a unique healthcare service for residents and tourists

will make the greatest use of NHS services.<sup>2</sup> MPs and AMs 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

In its election manifesto Plaid Cymru told the Welsh people that they would provide more GPs in Wales, shorter waiting times and healthcare services where patients need them.

Representing dispensing doctors across Britain, the Dispensing Doctors' Association believes that dispensing practice has the solution to many of the service delivery challenges now facing the Welsh people and it calls on Welsh MPs and AMs of all parties 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 in rural areas and to incentivise GP recruitment and retention in the recruitment 'hotspots'. 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 unique services provided by a Welsh dispensing practice.

**2. Engage rural patients:** In Wales 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.<sup>3</sup>

## 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 discharge medicines review service, minor ailments services, and 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.

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 Welsh and national Government 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. Based on the findings of the mid-Wales Healthcare Study report, published only last year, we now know that access to healthcare services is directly linked to physical and mental health outcomes: there is evidence that rural-dwellers experience poorer outcomes than their urban counterparts for conditions such as diabetes and asthma as a result of people delaying their diagnosis; prognosis and survival rates in certain cancers are also correlated to length of distance to a GP.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, rural patients, with their ageing demographic, are among the most vulnerable members of society and they

## Did you know...

In North Wales over one in five patients (22.6%) has to travel over 15 minutes by car just to see a GP. This compares to under 12% of patient living in south Wales, and under 17% in Ceredigion <sup>1</sup>

# Dispensing practice in Wales – a hidden gem of a service



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

Not many GP surgeries get a mention on travel guide website Trip Advisor but the Betws-y-Coed Surgery actually has two reviews. The most recent of these describes the surgery as “a revelation, and set in a stunning location and very quiet and relaxing, unlike the suburban health centres we are more used to!”

Based in the small Snowdonia area village of the same name, the Betws-y-Coed Surgery is a vital healthcare facility both for residents and tourists to the area. With the nearest A&E department located over 20 miles away, the Betws-y-Coed Surgery naturally plays a vital role in the health of local people, but in the height of the tourist season it also becomes an invaluable resource for tourists, and it can be called on to provide medical services to up to six temporary residents a day. Both Trip Advisor reviews were left by visitors needing unexpected treatment.

Betws-y-Coed Surgery is open from 8am-6pm five days a week, and it is a point of principle for the practice that patients will receive same day advice from a GP. As a dispensing practice the surgery is also able to supply any NHS treatments that are prescribed, which again offers much-needed convenience given that the nearest pharmacy is over five miles distant. Every effort is made to offer as many one-stop services as possible (see box) and to save its 2600 patients from having to make trips to other healthcare facilities - particularly the local hospital, which is a five-hour round-trip away by public transport. For this reason, bus timetables are a key consideration for the practice when it gets a request for medical attention, particularly if these come from one of the area’s many elderly residents, and appointments and medical supplies are planned so that return buses are not missed. A home delivery services is also available for patients who cannot make it to the practice dispensary.

## Cross subsidising better medical care

Over 85% of the practice’s patients live too far from a pharmacy to use its services, and thus they are eligible to use the practice’s dispensing services.

Practice patient surveys, as well as donations and gifts at Christmas all tell the practice that patients love the convenience of the GP dispensary service. Clinical care is also improved, believes practice manager Michelle Roberts, who says that dispensary staff play a key role in “reminding patients to make the follow-up appointments that the GP has recommended”. If a patient fails to make their usual request for a repeat prescription, the dispensary team are immediately able to have a word with the GP and follow up with the patient as needed.

Michelle says that it is the income from the dispensary that gives the team the manpower and practice resources to be able to care for patients to such a high standard. She says that without dispensing the practice would “just not be able to offer the services that we do”. She says: “if dispensing disappeared, patients would lose more than just a convenient service, they would be giving up an incredibly efficient system that offers fantastic continuity of care. That’s why I urge our politicians - new and old - to think about patients when they make decisions that affect GPs. It’s not about the surgery or about GPs – but about the people who need our care.”

## Services available from the Betws-y-Coed Surgery

- Family Planning (including coil fitting and free condoms)
- Antenatal Care
- Mother and Baby
- Vaccinations
- Asthma
- Physiotherapy
- Smoking Cessation
- Mental Health Care Clinic
- Travel Clinic
- Weigh in Clinic

## References

1. Mid-Wales Healthcare Study
2. Government information Public spending and older people
3. Dispensing Doctors’ Association myth buster. Patients prefer the convenience of pharmacies.
4. Trip Advisor Review

Further information on these references is available from the DDA

## 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)