

# NHS policy must support dispensing GP practices

Welcome to this briefing paper from the Dispensing Doctors' Association for Assembly Members focusing on dispensing GP practice in Wales.

The second, and final, paper to be published in Wales during 2014, its aim is to give you a better understanding of the challenges facing much-needed medical services in rural areas, and to help you ensure that rural patients are protected.

The recruitment and retention of doctors in hard-to-staff areas of Wales is a serious and longstanding issue, and this must form an essential part of national and local primary care policy, Welsh GPs are telling Assembly Members.

Responding to the Welsh Government's consultation undertaken as part of the White Paper: 'Listening to you: your health matters' Welsh GPs highlight the vital role played by dispensing income in rural general practices.



Practices such as the remote Uwchaled Medical Practice in Cerrigydrudion depend on dispensing income to retain staff and optimise the medical service

In these rural practices dispensing income has become a vital stream of funding for the provision of primary care services. The revenue that practices receive from providing dispensing services may not have been designed to subsidise the provision of general medical services in rural areas but in reality this is very much the case. This is clearly demonstrated in the Cost of Service Inquiry commissioned by the Department of Health in 2010.

In Wales there are 86 dispensing practices, serving almost 196,000 dispensing 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. The funding for these services is supported by dispensing income, which allows rural practices to meet the extra costs of providing services in rural areas.

## 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 in the Dispensing Doctor Data section of the Dispensing Doctors' Association website at:  
<http://www.dispensingdoctor.org/dispensing-practice/dispensing-doctors-data/>

### 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.

## Taking Control of the regulations

As NHS Wales deliberates the next steps for the NHS pharmaceutical services (control of entry) regulations, the DDA would urge policy-makers to consider primary care as a whole, 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 Wales to appropriately fund dispensing through well-considered rural allocations, and reimbursement and remuneration for the dispensing activity that is so vital to patients in rural areas.

### References

The Dispensing Practice Cost of Service Inquiry. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-service-inquiry-for-dispensing-practices>  
Wales Assembly Public Health White Paper responses summary.  
<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/healthsocialcare/white-paper/?lang=en>

# Retaining jobs, retaining vital medical services



The dispensary at Uwchaed Medical Practice, Cerrigydrudion

**“An absolute tragedy”**. This is how Dr. Dewi Griffiths (GP at the Uwchaed Medical Practice, Cerrigydrudion, Conwy) describes the threatened closure of rural practices throughout Wales.

His fear is that his Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board area, encompassing all of North Wales, will particularly bare the brunt of the GP recruitment crisis - now affecting even locums. Already, concerns have been raised over the loss of both remaining GPs in Blaenau Ffestiniog, with the prospect of sporadic locum cover only from February 2015.

“Patients deserve continuity of care. I believe that GPs should be committed and invested in their patients. In this way they are better placed to take into account the whole patient picture - physical, emotional and social factors when diagnosing illness and recommending the required treatment,” explains Dr Griffiths.

Currently, Dr Griffiths is one of only two GPs at the Uwchaed Medical Practice, covering an isolated area in rural North

Wales. However, the practice is fortunate to be supported by an expert team of healthcare professionals and staff who provide a comprehensive portfolio of healthcare services (see box, below).

## Services at the Uwchaed Medical Practice

- Blood tests, 9.00am – 11.30am daily
- Ante and postnatal care
- Asthma
- Chiropody
- CHD
- Contraception and sexual health
- COPD
- Counselling
- Diabetic
- Ear syringing
- Hypertension
- Leg ulcers and dressings
- Minor surgery
- Smoking cessation
- Physiotherapy
- Travel advice and vaccinations

“I do evangelise about rural practice,” he says: “I guess it’s a little bit like James Herriot Medicine, but I cannot emphasise enough how valued it is and it is something that we, as a community, will fight to protect.”

Dr Griffiths describes rural general practice as providing a unique service. To be effective in rural areas GPs have to have a broad clinical skill set. “Due to our remoteness, calling an ambulance requires careful thought. Ambulances take time to reach us and on occasions they may well send the air ambulance”.

In addition, the nearest pharmacy is approximately 15 miles away. He says: “So the dispensary at our practice provides crucial access to medicines. Also, the income it generates provides vital financial support for our practice – support that is used to finance the wide range of services offered here, to pay wages and, importantly, attract and keep GPs. Dispensary income was never meant to pay for services historically provided under the GMS, but the reality is different.”

In an urgent message to Assembly Members, he says: “As with all practices, there are increasing pressures on our finances. Without dispensing we would not be able to provide the service we do and our patients’ health would suffer for it.

“This is why I would urge Assembly members, ministers and policy makers who question the continued need for dispensing practices to come and spend a day with us - to see what we do and how highly our patients regard us.”

## 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)