

Consider dispensing GP services in rural health redesign



Assembly Members can play a key role in ensuring that the rural health plan for Wales continues to consider the “whole system”.

As they consider the incoming ‘control of entry’ regulations in Wales, AMs are urged

to keep a careful focus on and consideration of the particular needs and services available to each community, recognising the variation that exists in rural Wales.¹

According to the Welsh Assembly Rural Health Implementation Group: “There are very real benefits of rural community services, which often provide a positive, more holistic experience for patients, enhancing patient autonomy and independence. These services are hugely valued by our communities, and they could be developed to provide high quality, effective care.”

Understanding needs

In Wales the NHS pharmaceutical services regulations, which are known colloquially as the ‘control of entry’ regulations, are currently under review; the proposal is to introduce regulations based on Pharmaceutical Needs Assessments (PNAs) and under the new regulations, applications for new pharmacies will be judged for their incremental contribution to the existing provision of pharmaceutical services.

It is the wish of desire of health minister Mark Drakeford that the Public Health (Wales) Bill takes into account the impact on GP practices which dispense medicines in rural areas not adequately served by a community pharmacy.

Since September, 2015, dispensing income received by Wales’ 82 dispensing GP practices has been recognised as a vital component of sustainable GP practice in Wales – and a means of protecting Wales’ most vulnerable patients from the closure of their local GP practice.²



Innovative dispensing GP practice at the Porthmadog Medygg Care surgery

Mr Drakeford has told the Health and Social Care committee, which is considering the Bill³, that he has heard concerns raised by the Dispensing Doctors’ Association, and others, about the viability and sustainability concerns affecting dispensing GPs in Wales. According to local GP data⁴ dispensing GP practices are among the most at risk of closure; patient lists for dispensing practices in Wales are much smaller than their non-dispensing GP counterparts, averaging just 3,643 – compared to the average for a non-dispensing practice in Wales of just under 6,000.

Improving access

The Welsh Government is delivering well on improving access to a GP – one of its key Programme for Government commitments.⁵

But for Wales’ most remote communities, access to a GP remains uniquely challenging. According to the Rural Health Plan for Wales, 16% of people over the age of 65 years have difficulty reaching their GP. In rural mid-Wales travel time to a GP is predominantly above 21 minutes, which puts people at risk of poorer health outcomes caused by delayed diagnoses.⁶

With your help, dispensing GPs can become the bedrock of the rural healthcare service

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 under one roof.

This includes the operation of branch surgeries and near-patient tests for patients in rural areas.

How you can 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.

References

1. **Welsh Assembly.** Rural Health Implementation Group report (2011) Delivering Rural Health Care Services
2. **NHS Wales/BMA Wales letter.** GP Sustainability Assessment Framework
3. **The Record of Proceedings.** The Health and Social Care Committee 28/01/2016.
4. **NHS Wales statistics.** GP practice analysis 2015
5. **Welsh Assembly Government news item.** GP surgeries in Wales open for longer, new figures show.
6. **Welsh Assembly Government Rural Health Plan.** Improving integrated service delivery across Wales.

The Meddyg Care dispensing GP surgery: the “diamond in the desert”

The popular holiday destination of Porthmadog is probably a lot better known for its beautiful scenery than for its cutting-edge dispensing GP services. But, it is a fact that some of the most innovative dispensing GP practice in the whole of Britain now resides in this busy little town.



In January, 2016, the Meddyg Care GP practice became what is believed to be the first dispensing practice in Britain to install a Robotik Technology MDS compliance aid robot. Electronically dispensing medicines in special pre-filled packs, this piece of dispensing technology is designed to improve the pharmaceutical care of the surgery’s most complex patients, including those who regularly take a variety of medicines or those taking medicines with a complex dosing schedule.

This sort of technology doesn’t come cheap, but it is the view of dispensing lead GP Dr Safia Akram that the investment is well-made. She says: “I see my practice as a diamond in the desert. You don’t need to be in London to be innovative.”

Dr Safia Akram and business partner Kevin Edwards have built up the Meddyg Care group of dispensing GPs into a four-branch surgery offering care to around 5,500 registered patients in the Porthmadog and Llandudno

areas. Of these, around 2,400 receive the GP dispensing service, although numbers of temporary residents eligible to receive the dispensing service can rise exponentially in the summer season, when the holiday-makers arrive.

Innovative approach to care

To ensure the practice meets the demands of its service users while maintaining safety and quality standards, the practice has adopted an innovative approach to care. Delivering services alongside the partners and three salaried GPs – and its robot - is a hardworking and efficient multidisciplinary team, comprising local pharmacists, high street opticians providing the Wales Eye Care Service (WECS), advanced nurse practitioners, district nurses as well as the delivery drivers who fulfil Meddyg Care’s home delivery service. This is also considered a first for a North Wales GP practice.

Installing the robot has required the staff to adopt new ways of working, but this has improved patient relationships. Says Dr Akram: “When we fill the boxes we can pick up problems that could affect medication compliance, remove unnecessary medication, and request any blood tests to maximise the benefit that patients will get from their medicines.” To ensure that every possible opportunity is taken to identify and resolve compliance issues with patients, Dr Akram likes to supply the first box in person and the finished box recycling service at the end once again identifies any left over medication, which can then be talked through with the patient.

Bringing on new recruits

As a training practice, Meddyg Care is doing its bit to encourage tomorrow’s medics and nurses practitioners to buy into the experience that is rural medicine. But, with so many practices in Wales coming under Health Board control after GPs have



A Robotik Technology MDS compliance aid robot in use at Meddyg Care Porthmadog

resigned or retired, Dr Akram remains well aware of the fragility of the GP network in rural Wales. She acknowledges that the dispensing activity makes a vital financial contribution to her own practice’s sustainability, and says: “It is essential that we maintain our quality standards, keep the staff happy and keep services going. We have the cream of Porthmadog working for us, and the reason for that is the financial contribution of our dispensing income.

“In rural Wales, what other ways are there for us to offset the reductions in income we have felt, for example, from the loss of Minimum Practice Income Guarantee [rural subsidy]? Dispensing is not a cheap gimmick, it pays for us to offer services that otherwise would be unavailable locally.”

Services available from Meddyg Care

- ✓ Family planning (coils/implants/sexual health services)
- ✓ Oil and gas medicals
- ✓ Yellow fever centre
- ✓ Travel immunization
- ✓ Ionizing radiation medicals
- ✓ Minor surgical procedures

About the Dispensing Doctors’ Association

The Dispensing Doctors’ Association (DDA) represents over 6,600 doctors currently working in 1,250 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