

School Lane Surgery

PATIENT REFERENCE GROUP (PRG) MINUTES (Condensed)

Meeting: Thursday 15th October 2015

1. Healthy Living Centre (HLC) Update

School Lane and Grove Lane have entered into an alliance, and with everybody struggling to do more for less it is hoped that this will lead to more patients being treated for less expenditure.

NHS England had threatened to cut 25% of the surgery funding for the HLC, which would have seen us having to abandon the building. A total withdrawal to the School Lane site would have seen things very cramped, but following an appeal by the surgery and subsequent review by NHS England it has been decided to continue with the funding of this facility.

In the current round of NHS spending cuts there are few GP practices that are managing to retain the full amount of funding, and we are having to fight for it; NHS England had carried out a survey some months ago and had acknowledged that SLS is a special case; the funding period is for at least 5 years, though this is not a cast iron guarantee.

The minor surgery suite at the HLC has seen very little usage since the building first opened, having been seen as not fit for purpose from day one. There were faults in the original design and it has taken all this time to gain the funding to remodel the area. New services are being invited to make use of the facility and cataract operations are due to begin in late November; others are in the pipeline.

The recent upgrade has cost no less than £140,000 and it will help to see that the building is pretty much full to capacity; though the plan is to deliver more and more services as they become viable.

It is hoped the West Suffolk Hospital will be persuaded to visit the HLC with their mobile chemotherapy unit, where patients will given their treatment in an adapted vehicle.

As the population of Thetford expands we are facing a potential crisis in GP provision, and with 1,000 new homes due to be completed in not much more than 2 years it will be sooner rather than later. Grove Lane has already had to close its list, except for new family members, as they do not have enough consulting rooms to be able to see more patients; plans for an extension to the building are in the very early stages.

The two practices in the town were designed to serve 23,000 residents, but the current population already stands at 29,000. School Lane is oversubscribed by some 5,800 and there is a steady flow of around 150 new patients joining the list each and every month. Private developers do not tend to take local health facilities into consideration when planning housing estates, and with thousands more people likely to be coming to the town it means this is rapidly becoming a serious issue.

The surgery is facing an unprecedented challenge, and staff are beginning to experience some hostility from patients who feel they are having to wait too long for appointments. Reception staff as well as GPs and nurses are on the front line and none of this is their fault, as a team they are doing their best to keep things running smoothly. Patient knowledge of the pressure facing the surgery is very important, and it will perhaps lead to a more understanding response when things start to creak.

Architects are looking into expansion of the HLC, though NHS England would have to provide the funding for this project; Norlife owns the building, the NHS being its only tenant.

It had been suggested that prefab units could be used by both surgeries as a temporary measure, but the problems with the connecting of the secure N3 Network used by NHS computers discounted this option.

2. Research Accreditation

School Lane Surgery is now a research accredited practice, and a document has been produced to explain all; it is available on the surgery website.

3. Medicines Wastage Campaign

Norfolk does not perform well when it comes to the wastage of medicines, with 4.9 million pounds being the estimated amount spent unnecessarily; South Norfolk accounts for 1.3 million of this figure.

There is clearly too much waste, and poor prescribing is a contributory factor. Practitioners should ask themselves, "is this prescription right for the job?" For example, a big bandage may not be necessary and half of it might be wasted, a smaller one could be issued. Also, is the patient ordering a repeat prescription because they actually need it, and does their condition still require the same level of medication?

Generic medicine is invariably cheaper than its 'name' counterpart, and patients should be encouraged to accept the former.

4. Donations

The surgery is the grateful recipient of some donations of late, as follows:

1. 2 x large blood pressure machines, to be situated in the waiting areas at both School Lane and the HLC.
2. 1 x high-back chair, which means both waiting areas at School Lane and now the HLC has one. The chairs also have a raised seat and arm rests.

5. Complaints + Significant Events

By far the most common complaint made by patients is the waiting time for an appointment, and they are not at all happy about it. Some will insist on seeing a particular GP even when they are quite poorly, but thankfully most are willing to see any one of our GPs when they are feeling unwell.

There are no significant events to report.

6. Friends & Family Test

The Friends & Family Test, where patients are asked if they would recommend their surgery to friends and family, is an ongoing commitment for GP surgeries. The surgery would lose some funding if the test was not carried out, and with a patient list bordering on 16,000 it is a considerable extra load on staff.

An explanatory note plus Friends & Family Test form should be sent to the About Thetford magazine, in the hope they will publish an article and gain some publicity for the test.

7. Other Business

a) Community Wellbeing Fayre – To be held at the Carnegie Room on October 28th, between midday and 3 pm - with a free soup and roll for all those that attend!

This event has been organised by the Royal Volunteer Service and Thetford U3A (the University of the 3rd Age – it's never too late to learn!) to promote local support groups and services that are aimed particularly at the 55+ demographic. It is primarily concerned with keeping people active and involved in their local community as they age, and will see representatives from the Garden & Allotment Club, Model Railway Club, Library Service etc. as well as a number of medically themed services such as the Alzheimer's Society, Diabetes Trust and Healthwatch.

Thetford is one of 6 areas of the country that have been allocated £40,000 to spend on relevant projects, and people are now being asked for suggestions on how the money should be spent; this could literally be on anything at all, from items of equipment to hiring of premises etc.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday December 17th, 6.45 pm at School Lane Surgery.