

Nethergreen News March/April 2008



Welcome to another edition of our Newsletter, where we try to keep you up to date with what's happening both in Nethergreen Surgery, and the wider NHS. This month, I want to concentrate on Appointments, and then explain the wider issues of the potential threats and changes to the provision of your GP service in the future.

Firstly, though, I hope you are benefiting from our earlier and extended opening times of 8.00am, and not closing at lunchtime. Many patients are taking up the early appointments from 8.00 am each day, but that does bring with it its own problems of **MISSED APPOINTMENTS**: We have never really had a problem with patients not keeping pre-booked appointments, but in January, there were 119 missed appointments (63 GP & 59 Nurse appointments) and in February there were 100 (45 Docs and 55 Nurses) and included in the total figure are 13 double and 4 triple appointments

I do appreciate there are occasions when missing an appointment may be unavoidable, but at a time when appointments are at a premium, it does cause us some concern.

We have always provided a facility for you to pre-book appointments up to 8 weeks in advance, and we do wonder if patients either forget that they have made an appointment so far ahead, or arrange an earlier appointment and forget to cancel the later one. Whatever the reason, missed appointments not only waste our time, but they also mean that other patients are denied the opportunity of taking up these appointments.

So, in an effort to try and ease this problem, and also hopefully give you all a greater chance of pre-booking appointments,

- with effect from May 1st 2008, we will be reducing the timescale for advance appointments to 6 weeks, and
- will reduce it to 4 weeks with effect from July 1st 2008.

I appreciate this may inconvenience those of you who like to book 8 weeks in advance, and it may appear that we are reducing your ability to pre-book appointments, but we hope these changes will make the system fairer for all. As always, though, we are more than willing to listen to any constructive comments you may have about the changes, or the appointment system in general.

(PTO)

CHANGES TO GP SERVICES: you may have seen the many articles on TV and in the papers about the proposed changes to the GP Contract, and the effect it will have on Practices. As part of the changes, we may be offering additional opening hours either at night until 8.00 pm or on Saturdays, and you may recall we conducted a survey in January to gauge patient preferences there were 480 replies, representing just over 5% of the Practice population, and these results were:

Late evening opening	166	34.6%
Saturday morning opening	145	30.2%
Stay as we are	119	24.8%
Early mornings	25	5.2%
Spoilt papers	25	5.2%

Unfortunately, that's as much as I can tell you about extended hours, because although the Government are telling the electorate that this will happen from April 1st, we haven't had any information about how they expect us to implement these hours; once we know, then I'll be able to let you have further details.

However, extended hours is only part of the issue, and whilst the press has been keen to focus on this part of the contract changes, they have been less keen to document the other more major concerns that we have about the future of Primary Care in England.

If you have been in the Surgery recently, or accessed our website (www.nethergreen-surgery.co.uk), you will have seen the many articles and press releases from the BMA and Sheffield LMC highlighting the concerns of GP's, the main one being the opening up of NHS Primary Care to private competition and eventually, the possible privatisation of NHS Primary Care services, starting with GP surgeries.

In addition, the Government also want every Primary Care Trust (PCT) in England to fund a health centre that will be open 7 days per week, 8.00 am—8.00 pm; unfortunately, though, it won't be staffed by any of the current GP's in the city, as they won't be allowed to work in it—instead, we expect it to be staffed by newly qualified and overseas GP's, and it may well be operated by private contractors; that gives us great concerns over the standard and continuity of care that the centre may give to any patients who choose to use it.

Of course, you may find all these changes beneficial to you, but we are so concerned that we recently arranged a meeting with Mr Nick Clegg, the Hallam Constituency MP, when Drs Barclay, Broadbent and Ludlow, along with a GP from The Hollies and Rustlings Road surgeries, so that we could raise our concerns at a higher level; he was receptive to our concerns and we intend to hold regular 6 monthly meetings with him so we can continue to raise our concerns on your behalf. He also voiced his own concerns over Sheffield PCT's "Achieving Balanced Health" five year plan, and indicated that he had been in discussions with the PCT's Chief Executive, Mr Jan Sobieraj, over the planned increased investment in healthcare resources in the more deprived areas of the city, to the detriment of current healthcare provision in Hallam constituency.

I hope this has given you an insight into the current issues and concerns we have; our worry is that these major issues are not being passed on to you, our patients, and the danger is that by the time everyone understands what is happening, the changes will have taken place and your traditional GP could be lost forever. If you want to find out more, then please call in and have a chat with me, or if you wish, contact your local MP, or Councillor, or the Chief Executive of the PCT.

When we have more information, we'll pass it on to you.