

HEREFORDSHIRE PRIMARY CARE TRUST

Response to the Review of GP Out of Hours Services by the GP Out of Hours Review Group, August 2006

In July 2005 the Health Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of the GP Out of Hours services currently provided on behalf of Herefordshire Primary Care Trust. Key questions asked by this review included:

- What is the Out of Hours service currently providing and how is it provided?
- How well do the current arrangements work?
- What improvements have been made or are planned?
- What alternative options are there for delivering the Out of Hours service?

The review group's findings were published in August 2006. This paper sets out the Primary Care Trust's response to each of the seven recommendations made in the report produced by the Review Group.

Recommendation One

That it is important that in developing the Out of Hours service in the future the service continues to be tailored to the particular needs of Herefordshire.

The Primary Care Trust fully accepts this recommendation.

All health services commissioned by the Primary Care Trust should be 'fit for purpose' and meet the needs of the Herefordshire population. The Primary Care Trust does not provide the Out of Hours service directly but is responsible for commissioning it from appropriate providers. The Primary Care Trust has therefore developed a detailed service specification which sets out the nature of the service to be provided and in particular the key access targets which must be met to comply with agreed performance standards. The Primary Care Trust then works closely with the identified service provider to ensure that this service is delivered according to the service specification i.e. the service is tailored to the particular needs of Herefordshire.

Recommendation Two

That every effort is made to continue to maintain the stability of workforce, both clinical and non-clinical.

The Primary Care Trust fully accepts this recommendation.

The Primary Care Trust commissions the Out of Hours service. The current service provider is Primecare. It is Primecare's responsibility to supply the workforce required to meet the agreed contractual obligations which in turn meets the service needs of the Herefordshire population. The Primary Care Trust monitors the performance of Primecare on a daily basis. The Primary Care Trust works closely with Primecare to ensure that the Out of Hours service is staffed by appropriately qualified and experienced staff who understand the needs of the local population.

Recommendation Three

That if possible more local GPs be encouraged to devote a small proportion of their time to the service whilst recognising completely the need to keep the burden on individual Doctors at a manageable level.

The Primary Care Trust fully accepts this recommendation.

In January 2005 the Government allowed GPs to exercise the right set out in their new national contract to withdraw from Out of Hours services if they so wished. All GPs in Herefordshire exercised this right. However, GPs could subsequently decide to work for Out of Hours providers to provide a service. Clearly an experienced competent workforce is required to provide high quality Out of Hours services. The Primary Care Trust commissions the service and it is for the service provider, currently Primecare, to ensure that an appropriate workforce is supplied. However, it is certainly Primecare's stated intention that there should be a balance of out of county and local GPs providing the service as this provides an optimal skill mix.

Recommendation Four

That ongoing consideration is given to how problems the service experiences as a result of inappropriate use by the public can be overcome.

The Primary Care Trust fully accepts this recommendation.

As with all unscheduled care services it is important that people understand the services available and use them appropriately. The Primary Care Trust works closely with Primecare to educate local people about how and when the service should be used. The Primary Care Trust also works, and requires Primecare to work, with the providers of the other unscheduled care services to make sure that all services are integrated and work together. It is unlikely that all inappropriate use can be prevented. In these cases it is important that

people are redirected to the appropriate service in a speedy and seamless way.

Recommendation Five

That the PCT consider whether more work could be undertaken to investigate whether it is fully capturing the patient experience of the Out of Hours service.

The Primary Care Trust fully accepts this recommendation.

Service feedback is very important to both Primecare as the service provider and to the Primary Care Trust as the service commissioner. It is only by receiving appropriate feedback that the service be 'fine tuned' to meet the needs of the people of Herefordshire. The Primary Care Trust manages a monthly Out of Hours steering group at which all key stakeholders, including the PPI Forum, are represented. In addition both the Primary Care Trust and Primecare's complaints processes aim to fully capture feedback from the public and ensures that this is used to form an improved service. The Primary Care Trust fully accepts that the need to capture patient experience is vital if the Out of Hours service is going to be 'fit for purpose'. The Primary Care Trust will continue to strive to ensure that patient feedback is captured.

Recommendation Six

That further consideration is given to ways of further planning and commissioning integrated services.

The Primary Care Trust fully accepts this recommendation.

The Primary Care Trust accepts the importance of service integration. At the moment there are a number of unscheduled care services available for the people of Herefordshire, e.g. NHS Direct, Primecare, A&E, MIU services and the 999 Ambulance service. Each of these services work closely together to support one another. The Primary Care Trust has recently appointed a Project Director for Unscheduled Care whose is managing a significant project involving all key stake holders in Herefordshire to further understand and improve the unscheduled care service, including the GPs Out of Hours service. Whilst high levels of joint working and integration currently exist across Herefordshire there are undoubtedly opportunities to further improve this.

Recommendation Seven

That the Out of Hours service continues to be subject to ongoing careful monitoring, evaluation and review.

The Primary Care Trust fully accepts this recommendation.

The Out of Hours service is monitored on a daily basis by the Primary Care Trust's primary care team and on a more formal monthly basis by the Out of

Hours steering group. This group reports into the Commissioning Board and PCT Board. The Primary Care Trust is committed to commissioning the very best Out of Hours service it can for local people and a comprehensive system is in place to ensure that standards of performance are enhanced. The Out of Hours service is also independently monitored by the Department of Health and the Healthcare Commission and will be subject to review by the PCT's external auditors

Conclusion

The Primary Care Trust welcomes the comprehensive report produced by the Review Group on behalf of the Health Scrutiny Committee. The evidence presented in the review shows a clear rationale for the local arrangements that have been adopted for the provision of Out of Hours services. The review also identifies the Primary Care Trust's commitment to ensuring that these arrangements are effective. The Primary Care Trust fully accepts the recommendations made and looks forward to working with the Health Scrutiny Committee to further improve GP Out of Hours services for local people.

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