

Meeting of  
Lanarkshire NHS Board  
24<sup>th</sup> March 2010

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**SUBJECT: WITHDRAWAL OF GP SERVICES FROM OLD MILL ROAD,  
UDDINGSTON**

**1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this paper is to update the Board in regard to the consultation process regarding the closure of the branch surgery at Old Mill Road, Uddingston by Dr MacAlister and Partners of Viewpark Health Centre.

**2. BACKGROUND**

Dr MacAlister and Partners is a medical practice consisting of 6 GP's who provide primary medical services in the Uddingston, Bothwell, Tannochside, Birkenshaw and Viewpark areas of Lanarkshire and also has patients in Broomhouse which is within the Glasgow city boundary. The current configuration of the practice premises are a main surgery in Viewpark and a branch surgery in Uddingston. In addition the practice team is enhanced by Practice Nurses and a range of other clerical staff.

The main practice premises in Viewpark are owned by NHS Lanarkshire and leased to the GP partners and the premises in Uddingston are owned by the GP partners.

Viewpark Health Centre is approximately two miles from the site in Uddingston.

The practice contacted NHS Lanarkshire on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2009 to advise that the GP partners wished to consolidate all clinical services on one site and proposed to withdraw from their branch surgery at Old Mill Road, Uddingston. The practice has indicated that they will stop providing GP services at Old Mill Road, Uddingston on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2010. The practice will not be removing any patients from its list. NHS Lanarkshire provided clinical services, such as treatment room nurses, podiatry; physiotherapy etc will continue to be provided and accessible from Viewpark Health Centre.

The overall practice list size is circa 9,500. The number of patients attending the Viewpark site is approximately 5,500, with the remaining circa 4,000 patients attending the Uddingston branch site.

The main drivers to withdraw from Uddingston, as articulated by the GP partners, can be summarised as follows:

- i. Responses from local and national patient satisfaction surveys indicate that access for patients to doctors of choice is difficult
- ii. Operating from two sites makes this extremely difficult to resolve
- iii. Continuity of care is difficult to maintain

In addition to the current branch surgery at Old Mill Road, there is also another GP practice in Uddingston - the Lincluden practice at 53 Bellshill Road - which has five GP partners and around 6,700 patients and will continue to provide primary medical services to patients in Uddingston.

### 3. LEGAL POSITION

It should be stated at the outset that there are no specific legal or regulatory powers available to the Board to stop the practice closing the branch surgery in Uddingston.

There is a statutory provision for Health Boards to terminate a General Medical Services (GMS) contract in a limited range of circumstances. This includes if there has been a breach of contract and, as a result of that breach, the safety of patients is at serious risk if the contract is not terminated; or where a practice's financial situation is such that the Health Board considers that the Health Board is at risk of material financial loss. Other grounds for termination of contract include the provision of untrue information; disqualification to practise medicine or imprisonment for a period of over six months.

It is considered that none of the statutory grounds for terminating a GMS contract are a factor in this case.

The joint NHS Confederation and British Medical Association publication, New GMS Contract (2003) Investing in General Practice (the Blue Book) provides a framework for dealing with branch closures, but this has **no legal standing**, and is a guide in this regard.

It is widely accepted by Health Boards, Local Medical Committees' and GP practices; that the Blue Book is a valid reference point in relation to contract matters and the guidance in this document in relation to branch surgery closures is being followed as much as possible.

Legal advice was however obtained to confirm that there is a statutory requirement for the Board to consult where there are proposals which significantly affect the operation of the services being provided by or behalf of the Board.

As a result NHS Lanarkshire did consult with those patients affected by the proposal.

#### **4. APPROACH TO CONSULTATION PROCESS**

A Communications and Engagement Plan was developed, in conjunction with the practice, to ensure all interested parties were made aware of the proposals from the practice and how they could make representations during the consultation process. Elected members were briefed, kept updated on this matter and were invited to patient meetings.

All registered patients were sent the following from NHS Lanarkshire,

1. a letter from NHS Lanarkshire advising them of the background to the proposals
2. a feedback form to comment on the proposals, this can be returned via a postal address, email or the NHS Lanarkshire website
3. an invitation to attend two scheduled patient meetings
4. a list of frequently asked questions

This was in addition to a specific letter from the practice.

Two patient meetings took place at Uddingston Public Hall, Old Mill Road, Uddingston on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2010 and Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2010 between 7 – 9pm. Representatives from NHS Lanarkshire and all the partners from the MacAlister practice were in attendance on both occasions.

The consultation process allowed NHS Lanarkshire to assess the number of patients who wish to remain in Uddingston and to determine the most effective way of delivering primary medical services to those patients.

#### **5. ASSESSMENT OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS**

The consultation period has resulted in the following:

- patient meeting 4<sup>th</sup> February – circa 59 patients attended
- patient meeting 11<sup>th</sup> February - circa 32 patients attended
- 73 written and email submissions – 65 of which are mainly negative and 8 mainly positive

A range of views were expressed at the patient meetings with many highlighting the increased inconvenience and costs of travelling to Viewpark. There were a number of patients who expressed high satisfaction levels with the GPs and the practice staff.

The positive written responses are broadly supportive of the perceived benefits of consolidation of GP services on one site.

The negative written responses cover a number of areas and broadly fall in to the following categories:

- By far, the greatest number of negative comments related to transport difficulties and increased expense in travelling to Viewpark
- Move to consolidate is financially driven
- Car parking facilities in Viewpark
- Additional pressures on telephones at Viewpark
- Unhappy with the perceived consultation process

From the patient meetings that have taken place and the responses received, the majority of responses from patients do not support the proposal to consolidate services on one site at Viewpark Health centre. However, it is important to note that the level of feedback received and the number of patients who attended the patient information evenings represents a small number of the total practice population.

It is acknowledged that for many patients, there is significant emotional attachment to both their doctor and the practice they attend and for other patients, their priority may be convenience of access to services provided by the practice. It is recognised some patients may have additional travel requirements should they remain with the practice

In addition to patient meetings the Lanarkshire LMC was also consulted upon the decision to withdraw services from the Old Mill Surgery. They responded to the Health Board indicating that after careful thought and reflection on how to improve services to the practice's patients they were supportive of the withdrawal. They noted that the decision of the practice followed the practice patient satisfaction survey result which clearly indicated that patients wished to be able to see a named doctor at the surgery on any day – a service which cannot be provided on two sites under the current arrangement.

They wished to congratulate the practice on acting on these survey results and managing to find a way to provide the patients with the service they wish, noting that the practice will incur costs to do this but are willing to accept this to improve services to patients.

Discussions with other practices, primarily with Lincluden in Uddingston, but also with the Bothwell practice and the other practice in Viewpark found they were prepared to accommodate patients if they chose to leave Dr MacAlister's practice.

## **6. MAINTAINING ACCESS TO GENERAL MEDICAL SERVICES**

A key theme emerging from the patient meetings was a level of anxiety about access to GMS services in the Uddingston area both in the short and long term. Along with this there was a request that the Health Board should undertake to introduce a new GP Practice into the area. The paragraphs that

follow look to outline the approach that has been taken and will continue to be taken on this matter.

Patient movement between practices in the Uddingston/Bothwell/Viewpark area has been closely monitored and around 344 patients have moved from the Old Mill Road branch surgery to the Lincluden practice since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010. This activity has reduced significantly in March. There have been ongoing discussions between the Lincluden practice and NHS Lanarkshire regarding the level of support required which would allow the Lincluden practice to continue to accept patients who wished to transfer from the MacAlister practice. This support can be categorised as broadly short and medium term in nature.

Short term support is intended to allow the Lincluden practice to reconfigure internal areas to increase consulting room capacity. The final outcome of this re-configuration has still to be agreed and discussions are ongoing with colleagues in South Lanarkshire Council regarding the utilisation of unallocated accommodation in the library premises in Uddingston, which is adjacent to the Lincluden practice. All clinical services will continue to be provided from the Lincluden practice, any use of the library premises will be for clerical and/or storage use only.

Discussions, which pre-date the move by the MacAlister practice, have taken place between NHS Lanarkshire and the Lincluden practice regarding the provision of new, larger, premises within Uddingston. The GP partners at Lincluden envisage a growth in the practice size with a move to new, purpose built modern premises. The medium term support would be for NHS Lanarkshire, working with the GP partners at the Lincluden practice, to progress the proposal to build new premises within Uddingston.

Any proposed development would not be funded from the NHS Lanarkshire capital allocation as separate arrangements exist to provide recurring funding for GP led developments from the GMS allocation and elements already included in the financial plan.

At the patient meetings there was a question raised in regard to the ability of NHS Lanarkshire to create, from scratch, a new GP Practice in Uddingston, given some concerns about the capacity of Lincluden to continue to register patients. It is considered that on the basis of the numbers of patients that have transferred practice already and those for whom a new GP practice in Uddingston would be closer, that the potential maximum number of patients is circa 1500.

As there have been no patients removed from the MacAlister practice list, there is no new contract to offer. Any such proposition to do so would be highly speculative given that the starting point would be zero patients and hence no financial contract to award.

Current policy within healthcare is not to introduce new single handed practitioners wherever possible, with a far greater emphasis on looking at how

Health Boards work with surrounding practices to build capacity in the short and long term, actions that the Health Board is clearly taking.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

A similar consolidation of GP clinical services occurred in 2009 when the Bothwell Medical Practice, which had a branch surgery in Viewpark, consolidated all services at the Bothwell site. A number of conclusions may be drawn from this process. A clear parallel with the current proposals is the desire on behalf of the GP partners to improve the clinical services they deliver to their patients. The view from patients who responded to the consultation process is that any such proposals would not deliver such benefits to clinical services.

There has been an ongoing readjustment of GP clinical services in the Bothwell/Uddingston/Viewpark areas, and this current proposal continues that process. In addition, there are also proposals from the Lincluden practice to build new, larger, premises in central Uddingston in the medium term with aspirations to grow the list size and number of doctors in the practice. Short term support is being provided by NHS Lanarkshire to enable the Lincluden practice to register those patients who wish to move practice.

NHS Lanarkshire's main objective is to secure the long term provision of safe, sustainable clinical services to patients in the Bothwell/Uddingston/Viewpark areas. It is recognised that in the short term, these changes may cause inconvenience to some patients and for some patients, considerably more problems. All possible steps are being taken to minimise such problems to patients and patients who find they need to move practice, can do so. The outcome of these changes will be to ensure there is safe, sustainable clinical services to patients in the Bothwell/Uddingston/Viewpark areas in the long term.

Notwithstanding this position, there are **no legal measures** the Board has to prevent the practice closing the branch surgery and any recommendation made is based on following the guidance document GMS Contract (2003) Investing in General Practice (the Blue Book).

NHS Lanarkshire will be working with all practices in the Bothwell / Uddingston / Viewpark areas to ensure services continue to be available to all patients.

## 8. RECOMMENDATION

- i. To note the consultation process that has been followed and responses received
- ii. To note the proposals for the future delivery of primary medical services in the Bothwell / Uddingston / Viewpark areas
- iii. On the basis of the consultation and in line with the process outlined in New GMS Contract (2003) Investing in General Practice (the Blue Book), to acknowledge that, as a result of the withdrawal of Dr McAlister and Partners from the Old Mill Branch Surgery, Uddingston, access to safe, sustainable, General Medical Services, for patients on the Practice List, will be delivered through the Practice Premises in Viewpark.

