

## Woodstock Medical Centre, Lanark

### Patient Meeting Q&As

On 23 October 2019, NHS Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Partnership (SLHSCP) held a patient meeting to provide an update on developments with the Woodstock Medical Centre, Lanark. The meeting was well attended by over 250 patients who also had the opportunity to ask questions of the panel.

The panel comprised Craig Cunningham, Head of Performance and Planning, South Lanarkshire H&SCP (Chair), supported by Dr Philip McMenemy, Asst Medical Director; Dr Tyra Smyth, Lanarkshire Local Medical Committee and Dr Iain Hathorn, Clydesdale Lead Clinician.

For those who were unable to attend the meeting, this document reflects the questions and answers covered.

### Background and Current Position

GP partners at the practice announced in September that they intended to end their General Medical Services (GMS) contract with NHS Lanarkshire on 6 April 2020.

NHS Lanarkshire and SLHSCP are now in the process of putting arrangements in place to ensure the continued provision of general medical services to the people of Lanark is in place beyond 6 April 2020. This means awarding a contract to run the practice through a tendering process. This must be done in line with European legislation and so an advert for the contract was placed in the European Journal on 23 October 2019.

Patients will be involved in the selection process for awarding the contract and appointing new GPs. As part of the selection panel, they will be able to scrutinise proposals and seek assurances on how services will be delivered. Around 30 patients have already expressed an interest in participating in the panel and a few of them will be randomly selected and trained to take part in the selection process which will commence during the week of 9 December 2019.

While the contract with the current GP partnership will come to an end, all other employed staff at the practice will remain in post under any new arrangements.

We understand that this is an unsettling time for patients. We and would like to reassure you that NHS Lanarkshire and SLHSCP are supporting the current practice in a number of ways - assisting in identifying GP locums, practice nurse support and pharmacists, working closely with them to ensure that appropriate health care services continue to be delivered through to 6 April 2020 and beyond.

There is no need to move to another practice unless you have specific, personal circumstances that require you to do so.

## The Wider Picture

It's important to understand the wider background to the local situation in Lanark. General practice is changing. There is currently a national shortage of GPs with many GPs retiring. Some people coming into the profession, do not want to work in the same way as previously, with many choosing part time working and 'portfolio' careers – whereby they will work in a number of different locations.

Additionally, as the age profile of the population increases and many people are living with increasingly complex clinical conditions in their own homes, then so too does the demand on GPs increase and therefore, there needs to be different ways of working to meet the additional demand. To reflect this, the General Medical Services (GMS) Contract for Scotland was revised through an agreement between the Scottish Government and the British Medical Association last year. This advocates a multidisciplinary approach to providing GP services. This means making more use of other medical professionals such as Advanced Nurse Practitioners (ANPs) - who can diagnose and prescribe - pharmacists working within practices and advanced physiotherapists. The new contract also advocates practices working collaboratively on some services, such as support for care homes, and making use of the latest technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The aim of all of this is to ensure patients see the health professional best suited to treating them thereby, freeing up GPs to treat patients who can only be treated by a GP. Many practices across Lanarkshire have already adopted this new approach and it's working well.

## Questions and Answers

- *How will you manage to award a new contract when the practice hasn't been able to recruit new GPs?*

NHS Lanarkshire and SLHSCP has successfully tendered other GMS contracts in the past, including a couple in the last year, and we anticipate that this will be the case with the Lanark practice.

It is also important to distinguish between the Woodstock Medical Practice seeking to recruit individual partners or employees and NHS Lanarkshire advertising the practice contract as an entire entity. As explained above, under 'The Wider Picture', many practices are embracing new ways of working to improve access to treatment and patient care.

- *With 13,000 patients, this is a large practice. Is it maybe too much to expect it to be managed as one practice?*

We have other large practices – some larger than Lanark - across Lanarkshire which manage very effectively. Indeed, with a bigger practice list size, then so it can be easier to recruit to a wider range of clinical staff meaning that there is less reliance on doctors.

There are a variety of operating models used across the 101 GP practices in Lanarkshire. Many of the successful practices have moved or are moving toward the multidisciplinary clinical team approach, using ANPs and pharmacists as part of their practice. They are deploying the latest technology and systems to help run their practice efficiently.

- *What is the optimal number of GPs for a practice of this size?*

There is not a set ratio or number for this. Again it depends on the operating model and approach each practice takes, including the mix of GPs and healthcare professionals each uses.

- *Why are some GPs allowed to work part-time?*

GPs work long hours with many in excess of the standard 35 or 37.5 hour week. Some have flexible working patterns but will still be doing 'full-time' hours. For example, a GP may work 8 sessions, which is considered to be full-time, but over a period of four days which means they work four 10-hour days each week.

Some GPs do work part-time, reflecting the fact that, like everyone else, they seek a work-life balance, e.g. when raising a family. Flexible and part-time work patterns help us to recruit and retain GPs.

There are also doctors who want to broaden their career. They may work part-time as a GP and part-time in another medical role, increasing their knowledge and skills and bringing wider benefits to the NHS.

- *Why hasn't the health board taken over the contract to run the practice?*

The partners are continuing to provide a service to their patients until completion of their notice period – 6 April 2020 – in line with their contract with NHS Lanarkshire. During this time, the Board will continue to provide support, working closely with the practice to ensure continuing patient care.

As long as the contract is in place and we are able to support continuity of services, there is no basis for us to 'take-over' the practice. We accept that, despite the best efforts of GPs and staff at the practice, that some aspects of the service – including the appointment system – need to improve and we are working with the practice to help achieve this.

It is important to note that, NHS Lanarkshire manages contracts with over 100 practices across Lanarkshire, some of which are also currently receiving additional support.

- *Why were the problems at the practice allowed to continue for so long and why didn't NHSL step in sooner?*

It is important to note that the GPs themselves contacted the Board to advise us of some of the issues they were facing. In turn, the preference of the Board has always been that the current partners managed to 'turn around' some of the issues they have been facing. Accordingly, we have been providing proportionate support to the practice for some time now as issues have emerged. It is important to note that the Practice is responsible for provision of the services as set out in the contract they have with NHS Lanarkshire.

As soon as we become aware there is a problem with any practice, we will work with them to try and support the practice to resolve it.

- *Is having so few GPs for a practice this size not a risk to patient safety?*

No. There are various practices across the country with relatively few partners but with systems in place that support continued safe provision of care to patients.

In this scenario, there has been pressures encountered as partners have left and it has not been possible to replace them. In the absence of doctors, the partners employed other clinical staff to help make good this gap, for example, long term locums, additional nursing and pharmacy staff. In addition to this, NHS Lanarkshire has also provided a range of additional staff to ensure continued provision of service.

Again, we have similar sized and larger practices managed by similar numbers of GPs elsewhere in Lanarkshire which are operating effectively.

- *What is NHS Lanarkshire doing to support the practice currently?*

As well as providing managerial support, the Board has also assisted in identifying locum doctors, additional nursing staff and pharmacists. We are also continuing to meet with the partners on a weekly basis to ensure we can provide as much support as possible.

- *Why aren't you doing more by providing GPs directly?*

We have assisted in identifying some additional GPs, however there is a widely recognised national shortage of GPs, as explained under 'The Wider Picture' earlier, and there are not enough to provide like for like replacements of all the GPs leaving practices across the country. This is being repeated across Scotland and new systems of working are being introduced to reduce the reliance on doctors with other staff picking up the work previously undertaken by doctors.

This includes, for example, Advanced Nurse Practitioners who are able to diagnose and prescribe. Practices are also increasingly making use of new technologies that support and improve the effectiveness of patient care.

Work is going on at a national level to address the challenges we face with GP shortages and at a local level.

In Lanarkshire we are currently implementing our Primary Care Improvement Programme which promotes a multi-disciplinary approach to primary care which improves service resilience.

We are also engaging in a number of marketing and recruitment activities aimed at attracting more GPs. We are committed to doing the best we possibly can for Lanarkshire.

- *Why can't we get more mental health services at the practice?*

Mental health services are provided within the Clydesdale locality – we're happy to look at how we can improve access through the practice.

A new five-year mental health and wellbeing strategy for Lanarkshire 'Getting It Right for Every Person' has just been launched. It aims to transform mental health and wellbeing in Lanarkshire and is committed to supporting the delivery of 'No health without mental health'.

More info can be found on NHS Lanarkshire's web site – [www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk)

- *There is no continuity of care, why can't you always see the same doctor?*

Continuity of care doesn't rely on you always seeing the same doctor so long as the right systems are in place. However, under certain circumstances, if you do need to see the same doctor, it's important that you do.

Our aim is to provide a better, more accessible service to the people of Lanark and that means looking at new ways of working to ensure that where a patient can only be treated by a GP they see a GP and others are treated by other, more appropriate healthcare professionals.

- *The care-navigators aren't qualified so how can they decide if you need to see a doctor?*

It's important to note that the care-navigators are not providing a clinical assessment. They are trained in signposting patients to the right healthcare professional or service that is most appropriate to deal with their needs.

Once again, the aim is to free up appointments for patients who can only be helped by a GP. There are more specialised healthcare professional such as podiatrists, physiotherapists and optometrists (opticians) who are better equipped to help with specific issues, e.g. if you have a sore eye, then it is more appropriate you go to an optician than a GP.

Care-navigation is used across the country and is used in all the practices in Clydesdale. Care navigation is being developed as part of a national collaborative improvement project. In general, the principal works well. We do recognise that improvement is need in relation to Woodstock.

- *Is the focus for patient care based on targets?*

There are no waiting times targets set within GP contracts. However, the general standard is that if you do need to be seen urgently, you will be seen by a member of the practice team within 48 hours.

- *What's the intention around patient consultation and feedback?*

We propose to set up a patient participation group for the practice to ensure ongoing patient engagement and that their feedback is used to help shape service delivery.

Patients on the selection panel are also able to represent the views of patients in scrutinising contract bidders and ensuring their proposals will address patient concerns.

- *What is the basis of the Contract?*

The contract is the description of General Medical Services and Enhanced Services that the practice will be required to provide to all the patients on the practice list. The contract is between NHS Lanarkshire and the respective partnership. The panel will be able to scrutinise the proposal during interviews with bidders which is part of the selection process. The panel can focus on the areas that are a priority for them, such as the appointment system, proposed staffing levels and access.

- *Is there a set amount for the contract or is it up to each bidder to say how much they can run the practice for?*

There is a set amount of money made available for the contract based on the patient population and the services we're asking to be provided. Each bidder will set out what they propose to do and how within this amount.

- *Maybe the amount of money isn't enough and that is why the current GPs ran into difficulty?*

Money is not the reason the current GP partners are handing back their contract. The key reason is related to the difficulty in recruiting new GPs to the practice.

- *What will happen if no one bids for the contract?*

NHS Lanarkshire will take over the running of the practice on what's known as a '2C' \* arrangement.

This means we would directly employ GPs and other clinical staff to provide local health services.

\* The Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Act 2004 places a duty on NHS Boards to provide or secure 'primary medical services' for their populations. NHS Boards can do so by making arrangements to contract these services (known as 17C and/or 17J) – which is what the majority of practices operate - or they can arrange for services to be provided directly (this is known as 'direct provision') or via another organisation (this is known as a 'Health Board Primary Medical Services' contract). These additional options are included under Section 2C of the Act.

- *What accountability will there be for the new contract and how can we avoid getting into the same position again with new GPs?*

That would form part of the selection process where we would be seeking assurances from any interested applicants of the resilience they could bring to the practice. Patient representatives will be included in the selection panel who will be scrutinising bids.

In addition, following the award of the contract there is a period of monitoring to ensure that the practice is delivering the service as agreed. We use patient feedback as part of this assessment.

## More Information

If you have any further questions, please contact NHS Lanarkshire's Primary Care Team by emailing [pcs@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:pcs@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk) or calling 01698 855545.