

CAREFUL TAILORING

There's a Sixteenth-Century proverb, still familiar among the older generation, which tells us that we must cut our coats according to our cloth. Like most proverbs, it offers good advice – it makes no sense to start cutting out a fancy design if we don't have enough cloth to finish the coat. Put another way, it tells us to make the best use we can of the resources available to us.

Those of you who needed to visit the Surgery towards the end of last year may have been asked to complete a survey giving your opinions about the practice and its staff. This annual survey is administered by an independent company; we are given the overall results but we have no way of linking a particular comment with the patient who made it. We've been examining the detailed report to see what we can do to make improvements, but one aspect of the results is, we think, worth explaining to everyone in rather more detail.

The three issues that caused most concern are all inter-related – the waiting time to book an appointment, problems in obtaining an appointment with the Doctor of your choice and the length of time you have to wait when attending for an appointment. Obviously, we'll be looking closely to see what we can do to improve the situation, but there are some factors which are outside of our control.

Basically, the number of GPs in the practice is limited by external funding, so when the number of patients is increasing (as it is at Heaton Road) we tend to be overstretched until funding catches up with reality. This results in delays with booked appointments, especially with GPs who have been with the Practice for a long time and are well-known to most of our patients.

At each surgery session, the number of appointments we offer is based on the average time taken to see each patient, but if a patient has a problem which takes significantly longer than normal to investigate, there is bound to be a knock-on delay until the appointments average out again. We could schedule fewer appointments per hour, but that would of course lead to an even longer wait when booking an appointment.

So, next time you find yourself waiting longer than you'd like, please bear in mind that we are doing our best to balance your wait against the need to ensure that every patient gets the best service we can provide. We're cutting the smartest coat we can from our share of the NHS cloth!

FLU JAB DAY

We'll be holding our annual flu vaccination clinic on

SATURDAY 11 OCTOBER 2014

between **9.00.am.** and **12.00. Noon.** **Free** vaccinations are available to all patients **aged over 65 years**, to all other patients with **heart disease, diabetes, chest problems such as bronchitis or asthma, or long term kidney disease, and to all women who are pregnant and anyone who is a carer**, whether in a professional or voluntary capacity.

If you are in one of these categories it is important that you are protected against influenza. You don't need to book an appointment, but please check in at the Reception desk on arrival – you won't be able to use the automatic check-in machine, as it can only deal with pre-arranged appointments.

HOSPITAL COMMUNICATIONS

If you have any queries about hospital appointments or results, you can contact the hospital directly – you don't need to approach the surgery first. The telephone number and the name of the hospital department or of the appropriate secretary will be shown at the top of your appointment letter.

If we receive results following a hospital appointment and there is anything the doctor needs to discuss with you, we will get in touch with you straight away. You can also ask to be sent a copy of the consultant's letter when you check in for your hospital appointment.

If – as has recently happened with Doctor Rutt - a GP retires or leaves the Practice, all hospital communications addressed to that Doctor will be promptly reviewed by one of our other GPs, so there will be no delay in contacting you if this is necessary.

STREETWISE COUNSELLING

Are you between 13 and 25? Got a problem which you can't talk about with anyone you know? Streetwise can probably help – and you can talk to them online!

There are some things you just can't share with your friends. If you're looking for help, advice or just need someone to talk to, Streetwise is there for you. You'll get free, friendly and confidential advice and support, and Streetwise can help with pretty much any problem affecting young people in your age group.

You can find out more by checking out the website at www.streetwisenorth.org.uk and you can visit at www.facebook.com/streetwise.newcastle. An email to counselling@streetwisenorth.org.uk will put you in touch.

If you'd be happier seeing someone face to face, you'll find Streetwise at Unit 3 Blackfriars Court, Dispensary Lane, Newcastle (that's off Low Friar Street, just behind The Gate); or you can call on 0191 230 5400 or text to 0785 210 7838. You don't have to face your problems alone.

GENDER AGENDA

Dr Graham Rutt retired from Heaton Road Surgery on Friday 15 August. It was a sad day, and we will all miss him.

Dr Rutt's departure means that all of the GPs now working at the Surgery are female. We'd like to reassure you that all of our Doctors are used to dealing with male medical conditions, and are well aware that some men may find it more difficult to talk to a female GP. If you are concerned about discussing any issues, please let the GP know, or mention your concern to the receptionist when you book your appointment. We want to help you.

The number of female doctors training to become GPs is increasing in comparison with the number of male doctors choosing this career, so many other practices will find themselves in a similar position in the not-too-distant future. If you'd like to express your views on this situation, let the Surgery know; just give us a call and ask to speak to Sally Pern, our manager. Your opinions are important to us!

SURGERY UPDATE

At the time of writing no exceptional surgery closures are expected in the period from now to 30 November.

We will close as usual for staff training between 12.00 noon and 1.30 pm every Thursday.

If you need medical assistance at any time when the surgery is closed, please call the Out of Hours Service on **111** or, in an emergency, call **999**.

FROM LITTLE ACORNS

Since the NHS changed its administration procedures just over a year ago, emphasis has moved towards patient involvement in the running of the organisation. To help to achieve this, each practice has been asked to set up a Patient Participation Group; these are groups of patients who meet regularly with members of staff to discuss the way their practice works. The groups make recommendations, express preferences about suggested changes and generally influence the development of the practice by their advice and input.

The overall administration of areas is run by groups of practitioners called the Clinical Commissioning Groups who seek tenders for provision of services and purchase those services from local medical service providers such as hospitals and clinics. These Commissioning Groups are made up of GPs who accept responsibility for the various specialisations we need to provide complete medical cover for the area. When the current reorganization is completed, there will be a single Clinical Commissioning Group with responsibility for the whole of Tyneside.

To make sure that grass-roots patient opinion reaches and influences the Commissioning Group, a body called the ACORN Group operates in our area. This brings together representatives of local Patient Participation Groups and members of the medical and administrative staff of the Commissioning Group. ACORN meets every two months and discusses, from a lay point of view, how problems can be solved and what advice or suggestions should be put forward to the members of the Commissioning Group.

The Chairman of the Commissioning Group came to a recent ACORN meeting and explained the outline of the Group's commissioning intentions for the coming year. These details will now be discussed by ACORN members and our preferences and recommendations will be passed back to the Commissioning Group.

If you would like your voice to be heard, join the Heaton Road Patient Participation Group – we could use one or two younger members! – and see how, by working together, we can make sure this little ACORN will grow.

HEATON ROAD HEALTH TIP No. 5

Five a day keeps the Doctor away! Be sure to eat a variety of fruit and vegetables. Whether fresh, frozen, canned or dried, they all count towards your five a day and may help reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers. A single portion weighs about 80 grams – roughly a handful. Eating your five portions a day gives you plenty of vitamins and minerals and provides a good source of fibre and other important nutrients. So, next time you fancy a snack, reach for an apple instead of a chocolate!

