

APPOINTMENT OR DISAPPOINTMENT?

As you may have read in last September's Newsletter, it was very clear from comments made by those of you who completed a recent survey that the appointment process is a major source of disappointment with our service. This arose from several different aspects of the system – the waiting time between booking and attending, the difficulty in getting an appointment with the doctor of your choice and the length of time you have to wait when you arrive for your appointment. In that Newsletter, we explained how these difficulties were closely related to each other; what seemed to be an easy solution to one of these problems would simply make the others worse. We promised to look at the whole picture and to find an approach that would make the system work better all round, and we have some ideas which we hope will be improve the situation.

First of all, we tried to identify why appointments had become an increasing source of dissatisfaction in recent years. Obviously, staff absences through illness and other temporary interruptions of our normal routine don't help, but these are recurring difficulties and we can try to build enough flexibility into the system to cope with them when they arise. More specifically, we've identified two factors which were, we think, the main causes of the concerns you expressed. The first of these is the growth in the size of the practice. The number of people registered with Heaton Road Surgery has been rising substantially in recent years – for example, in the 18 months ending on 31 January 2015 our list grew from 6555 to 7277. That means that we now have eleven patients for every ten who were registered with us in July 2013. Not only that, but the number of older patients, many of whom need more frequent medical care, has risen even more dramatically, though this isn't surprising – after all, the 'Baby Boomers' of the late 1940s and early 1950s are now beginning to draw their pensions! The problem, as in any large organisation, is that it can take a frustratingly long time for changes at the sharp end, where we meet people face-to-face, to be reflected in increased funding and support from central management. In the recent past our funding has lagged behind the rate at which the practice was growing, but we are at last able to provide GP time at a rate which is comparable with the national average for a practice of this size.

The second factor is however much closer to home – we have a serious and continuing problem with people who do not attend for the appointments they have booked. We fully appreciate that you can feel much better in the interval between making an appointment and visiting the Surgery, and may decide that you no longer need to see a GP or a nurse. That's fine, but *please* let us know as soon as you decide not to attend so that someone else can be given your time-slot. In the second half of 2014, a total of 1723 appointments were unproductive because people simply failed to turn up. That's an average of 66 *every* week – eleven hours of wasted clinical time. Put another way, we are able to offer over 3000 appointments every month but, on average, at least one person in twelve fails to turn up without letting us know that they no longer need to see a doctor or nurse. If all patients kept us informed so that we could reallocate these appointments, it would mean much shorter waiting times for everyone else and much less wasted time for our clinical staff. Don't forget to get in touch as soon as you decide that you no longer need an appointment – you know it makes sense!

Finally, to make sure you get the best out of our appointments system, we are putting together an information sheet explaining how everything works and clearly setting out your options. The leaflet should be available at Reception by the middle of March.

BOOKING AN AMBULANCE

If you sometimes need to book an ambulance you need to make a note that the system has changed. You should in future telephone the Ambulance Service directly on 0191 264 8870 to arrange your booking. This doesn't of course affect emergency calls, which should still be made to 999.

ZERO TOLERANCE

Unhappily, we have been subjected to some verbal abuse recently. The practice is part of the NHS Zero Tolerance Campaign, under which verbal abuse, threats or violence to all NHS staff is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated. Any such behaviour may result in removal of the offender from our practice list.

MORE ABOUT THE GIFT OF LIFE

The headline article in the December Newsletter explained the basic structure of the organ donation and transplant system as it operates in England. We need far more registered donors because only a tiny number of those who register will die in circumstances that enable organs to be transplanted. England has fewer registered donors per head of total population than most other European countries.

So *why* is this the case? Recent research indicates that less than one person in five would not consider organ donation, whilst just over half of the adult population would definitely be willing to donate organs if they were to die in circumstances which made this possible – but the number of registered donors is far below this proportion. There are three factors which probably have a significant effect.

The first of these is our traditional British reserve – it's just not the sort of thing we feel comfortable talking about. We need people to break through that reserve – people like you! Next time you are with a group of friends or colleagues, why not say that you've heard that there is a shortage of organ donors? Try to get a conversation going about the subject, and mention that only a tiny proportion of those who register will die in circumstances which make donation possible – the chance of this happening is less than the probability that you will need a transplant yourself. If more people talk about registering, more people will actually register.

The second factor is the urban myth. These myths are everywhere – 'facts' that have no foundation but which are widely circulated and believed. In the context of transplants we hear tales of surgeons allowing patients to die so that their organs can be 'harvested', and there are plenty of other equally blood-curdling stories in circulation. None of them are true. Organ donation is tightly controlled by law and follows strict protocols accepted by almost every country in the developed world.

Finally, there's the question of age. A lot of people seem to think that they are too old for their organs to be of any use as transplants. Again, that's not true; there are age limits for donating certain organs but, in general, if an organ is healthy, the age of the donor is not a bar to transplantation. Organs from donors aged well over 80 have been successfully transplanted. There is no upper age limit for registering as a donor.

Ask yourself whether, if told by your doctor that only a transplant could save your life, you would accept that transplant if it became available. If the answer is 'yes', think carefully about what this implies.

You can join the register by calling 0300 123 2323, or online at <http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk>

PRIVACY AT RECEPTION

You may not be aware that we have a designated area in which you can speak to a member of the Reception Team in privacy. If you have a matter you would like to discuss in confidence, all you need to do is ask!

SURGERY UPDATE

The surgery will be closed all day on:

Friday 3 April 2015 (Good Friday)

Monday 6 April 2015 (Easter Monday)

Monday 4 May 2015 (Mayday Bank Holiday)

Monday 25 May 2015 (Spring Bank Holiday)

and for staff training from 12.00.noon. on:

Wednesday 25 March 2015

We will also 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.

WE'VE GOT A STAR!

Healthwatch Newcastle is the local arm of Healthwatch England, established by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 as the national consumer's champion in those fields. Local operations began a couple of years ago, and you can find out more by visiting the website at <http://www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk>.

You can get help and support with problems you encounter at any level of the health or social care systems, but you can also commend anyone who you think has provided exceptionally good service.

Someone who used Heaton Road Surgery recently has nominated us and we have been presented with a Healthwatch Newcastle Star Award 'for going that extra mile to make their experience great'.

We are proud to receive the award and would like to thank out anonymous supporter. We'll do our best to live up to the standards you expect from us.

WELCOME TO OUR WORLD

Laura Lois has recently joined us as a Practice Nurse. Laura used to live in the UK, and has now returned after working in Australia for 9 years. She is updating her training and skills and will soon be able to provide the full range of services offered by our two existing Practice Nurse. We hope that she will enjoy working at Heaton Road and will not miss the koalas, possums and kangaroos too much!

HEATON ROAD HEALTH TIP No. 7

If you are feeling stressed and are finding it hard to cope, try these three simple suggestions –

- ❖ Give your partner a hug every day before work. Studies show this simple act really can help you remain calm when chaos ensues during your day.
- ❖ Have a good cry. Crying can boost your immune system, lower stress hormone levels, relieve depression and help you think more clearly.
- ❖ Twice a day, concentrate on breathing deeply for three to five minutes.