

Patients' Group News

June 2011

Your centre, your health, your NHS

This year there will be big changes with the building of our new centre and in the NHS as a whole. Patient participation has never been more important or more welcome. Here at Albert Road the Patients' Group is 10 years old and in this special issue we look ahead to changing times for everyone

A chance to have your say

THIS invitation is for the next big public consultation on the new medical centre, where building work is set to begin.

Taking place in the welcoming surroundings of The Lantern, the GPs are hoping that many of you will drop by to add your ideas to plans for the finished project.

All patients and staff from both practices are invited and ideas from young people are particularly welcome.

The GPs at Albert Road invite you to help design the public areas of the new medical centre

on Tuesday 28th June

from 1.00pm to 6.00pm

**at The Lantern Community Centre,
Meadow Farm Drive, Sundorne**

- View the design and plans for the new centre which will house Albert Road and Mount Pleasant practices
- Make suggestions about making the building a welcoming place to visit
- Ideas welcome from everyone who will be using the building, young and old! Bring your children along for some colouring and sticking

Decor * * * Seating * * * Lighting * * * A name for the centre



Developers arrive on site

IF you walk past the site near the Sports Village you will now see fencing activity from the developers Matrix as work towards the 21st century building finally gets underway. This artist's impression shows the entrance. Keep up to date with all the latest news which is on display on your right through the main door at Albert Road Medical Centre.

News in Brief

IF you cannot attend your appointment please let reception staff know in good time. Latest figures show that every month, for the past five months, over 200 patients have failed to turn up for their appointments.



REMEMBER you can now receive a text reminder about your appointment, please make sure the centre has your current mobile phone number and other contact details.



DID you know that you can order repeat prescriptions and book appointments online? Ask for a registration form at reception.



IF you need to see a doctor or nurse outside normal hours you can book an extended access appointment for every other Thursday evening or Saturday morning. Appointments only please, booked in advance. If you can come during the day please do so.



THERE is still time to sponsor plucky Albert Road staff who are doing the Midnight Walk in aid of Severn Hospice on Saturday 2nd July, just ask at reception.



GOING away? If you need travel vaccinations you will need to book a double appointment with the nurse who will be able to advise you on what is needed for your holiday destination.



Stay safe on holiday.

If you require yellow fever vaccination you will have to go to the designated centre which is at Claremont Bank in Shrewsbury. There is a charge for travel vaccination.



THE next fundraising event for the patients' group is the annual sponsored walk on June 17th, meeting at the Sports Village car park at 7.00pm. Further details and sponsor forms from Bernie Jones on 01743 709601 or email berniejones@hotmail.com

Remember to be good to yourself

Dr WESTWELL'S thoughts on healthy living

'A little of what you fancy does you good..'

..so my mother used to say, and I still agree with it wholeheartedly all these years later.

There's so much information available to us these days, advice about what foods to eat, and not to eat; how much water or alcohol we should drink; the type and amount of exercise we should do – in fact, sometimes it feels like the choices are being taken out of our lives about how we live our lives, because 'big brother' knows better.

And I have to confess, it irritates me hugely. The idea that I should live on tofu stir fries, and go to the gym five nights a week borders on my idea of a nightmare – though for someone else it might be nirvana.

Nevertheless, a lot of that information is good stuff – yes, if you do eat certain foods your risks of cancer are increased; taking regular exercise does improve your heart's health, help you sleep better and keeps your joints functioning; being overweight increases your risks of an early death from any number of different conditions, and increases the risk of having to live with ill health – such as diabetes and heart disease.

So how do you balance living in a way that is healthy and prolongs your life, against the 'bad' habits we enjoy so much? Here are a couple of thoughts that may help, and do remember that I'm probably preaching to myself as much as anyone else!

1. Check the information you're looking at is reputable. There are people out there making money from fad diets and nutrition supplements which sound impressive, but have no true health benefits – most slimming tablets fall into this category. Also some research reported in the papers is not as conclusive as the papers make out. Often an article this month will seem to contradict something reported last month. If you want to look in detail – try NICE (the National Institute for Clinical Excellence), or if



You don't have to jump in at the deep end!

you're online www.patient.co.uk has lots of sensible advice sheets. Or ask your doctor or nurse.

2. Know where you are at risk – if you have a liver problem, you probably should be more careful about your alcohol intake; if you have arthritis in your knees and are overweight, losing some weight could help your symptoms significantly; if you know you have cholesterol problems eating a low fat diet could reduce your risks of heart problems later.

3. But most importantly – a little of what you fancy does you good. Changing your lifestyle completely for the sake of your health will often end in crashing failure, because after a little while you just feel deprived. Changing things a little at a time – adding some regular fruit and vegetables to your meals, going for a walk after your dinner, making your weekly trip to the chip shop a monthly trip, having two pints at the pub rather than four – whatever you know you can continue in the long term – that's healthier living for the rest of your life, and also a life that you can feel you're living to the full.

At the end of the day, each of us has to weigh up the pros and cons for ourselves, and then choose our lifestyles for ourselves.

The important thing is that we find out what are the advantages and disadvantages of living the way we do, so we can make choices that we are going to have to live with for better, or worse, for the rest of our lives. Which is why this summer, I'm going to make a few choices for healthier and fuller living, which I hope will reap benefits for many years to come.

Government pause and listen on NHS reforms

In the winter radical plans for restructuring the NHS were going through parliament. Since then there has been widespread criticism, and the process to make these recommendations law, has been on hold. Dr BRANFIELD takes a GP's overview of this complex situation so far . . .

THE government are currently restructuring the way services within the NHS are commissioned. They are asking GPs to form groups, or consortia, and asking them to take a more central role in deciding how services are provided and, more importantly, who should provide them. To do this they will need to control a much larger proportion of the NHS budget.

This is a massive shift and quite rightly there has been disquiet from GPs and a wide spectrum of other stakeholders (patients included!).

The government have recently indicated they will slow the process and 'listen' to concerns, but the process of restructuring has already started and the decision is very unlikely to be reversed.

One of the main issues with this new idea has been a very poor PR and consultation process by government. They have phrased a lot of their rhetoric to indicate that 'GPs will manage this', 'GPs will decide that' – leaving many people wondering how, and indeed when, GPs will find the time!

In reality a lot of present management structure will not simply cease to exist. The present primary care trust (PCT) with its various management

teams has already been quite drastically cut back to make savings.

A GP-led group (or commissioning group) will work more centrally within this PCT. A group of GPs will obviously have greater responsibility than before but there is still a team of 'managers' – financial and others — working with them.

Suggesting GPs are taking complete control of the NHS is deceptive and inaccurate. We are not taking over the hospitals, quite large areas outside of the hospitals will still not be under our influence, and the initial detail coming from the government indicates that they will still have quite a large degree of central control which might end up hindering attempts to improve and focus local services.

Being able to suggest improvements or offer ideas to the people treating our patients makes sense – it does not mean we're taking over the services!

Not all GPs will be expected to manage and commission at this level. We as practices are ALL expected to be part of this new consortium. We will be represented on various groups feeding into it and there are ways for

us to get involved without needing to step aside from our present clinical, face-to-face patient contact.

Shropshire is fortunate in having some GPs who are particularly skilled in management and they have already moved quite proactively to ensure we are not left behind and can adapt swiftly to the changes.

The budget has been drastically cut already. Our PCT did a very good of coming in on budget last year. To achieve this they have already cut staffing levels and there are very few 'easy' savings left.

Standing back I could see this new structure working and helping to improve the efficiency and quality of patient care. The crux, however, is the massive savings that this restructuring is expected to make and these might ultimately put central government squarely back in control.

If the bill is finally passed, which is extremely likely, we will be facing a very challenging time. I'm enthusiastic about what we might be able to offer through GP commissioning, but still have concerns about the 'fine print' and hope the government genuinely listen during the remainder of this consultation process.

Q. I'm an NHS patient — do I get a say in the way health care is provided for me and my family?

A. Yes you do, through patient participation.

SINCE April this year the government have required GPs to actively encourage patient participation through local groups. This has come at a critical time when NHS reform is under the spotlight as never before.

Fortunately in Shropshire, and particularly here at Albert Road, we are ahead of the game as we celebrate 10 years of active patient participation (see back page for a roundup of what's been achieved).

Countrywide the National Association of Patient Participation Groups has been in existence since 1978, their website at www.napp.org.uk has a wealth of information.

Another important national group is the Patients Association which has recently celebrated the life and work of the late Claire Rayner, the nation's favourite agony



aunt and champion of patients' rights. Visit the website at www.patients-association.com

At Albert Road everyone who is registered at the centre is automatically a member of the patient participation group which in turn is part of the Shropshire group which has been very vocal in representing patient views on the current proposals for the NHS.

For further information about the group's activities contact chairman and secretary Bernie Jones on 01743 709601 or email berniejones@hotmail.com

Meanwhile playing your part in the design and furnishing of the new medical centre is just one way in which you can have a direct say in the provision of health care in your own community.

Patients' Group reaches 10 year milestone

Group founder GP Dr PATTISON looks back fondly on the early days

FOR those of you who do not know me, I was a partner at the Albert Road practice from 1977 to 2003. When I started, most GPs wouldn't have expected their patients to have any significant input into their own care, and certainly not in the running of the Health Service.

But over those 25 years all that gradually changed. The consultation became much more of a partnership, as doctors learned to really listen to their patients' needs, and if possible come to an agreed outcome. Patients were often grateful for the care they received and wanted to donate money and equipment to the surgery, but this was difficult as doctors weren't supposed to accept gifts.

Doctors came to understand, too, that the help of patients in planning and organising services was very useful for both parties. Finally, the government realised that there was political (and perhaps actual) advantage in involving patients in the planning and delivery of healthcare both locally and nationally. It was to fulfil all these aims that patient groups began to be formed in some practices from about 1990 onwards.

At Albert Road we had always tried to involve patients informally, but by the late 1990s we were keen to take this further and set up a Patients' Group. Because we didn't really know what to do, I took advantage of a scheme which paid for locum cover for a short period while the doctor was

doing a research project. My task was to conduct a survey of patient groups in Shropshire, and then travel to a number of groups in different parts of the country.

I found the time both inspirational and instructional. I was inspired by the excellent work that many of the groups were doing, but it was also helpful to find out what worked and what didn't. When I returned from study leave I discussed my report with the other partners and then we arranged a meeting to present my results to the patients.

We issued a general invitation, and also specifically targeted patients we thought might be interested. We were gratified with the response, and from those that attended the meeting we formed a committee to bring the Albert Road Patients' Group into being.

We had a number of objectives, including:

- Fundraising, both for equipment and supporting the group, which we wanted to be enjoyable as well as profitable, hence events like the recent choir concert.
- Patient education, through the use of books, DVDs, occasional exhibitions, and this newsletter.
- A sounding board for the practice to find out what patients thought about possible changes.
- Developing a patients' voice in the organisation of the wider health service. I am particularly glad that this has been achieved so successfully over the years.

So the group is now ten years old. I'm delighted that it's still going strong, and wish you all the best for the future.

Albert Road Medical Centre

Harlescott, Shrewsbury SY1 1HY

☐ Tel: 01743 281950 Fax: 01743233198

☐ Out of hours (between 6.00pm and 8.30am weekdays and 6.00pm Friday to 8.30am Monday) an answerphone will give you a number to call in case of emergency

☐ Out of hours cover is provided by Shropdoc on 08444 06 8888

☐ If you would like medical advice over the phone you can call NHS Direct and speak to a nurse any time of day or night on 0845 4647

☐ You can also find reliable information on the website at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Cake stalls to concerts: 10 years' of fundraising

Raising funds for patient comforts has been an important part of the group's history as current honorary treasurer DAVID BARNES explains

TEN years of tombola, and 'flu session draws, and big draws and medium draws, of Christmas cakes, sponsored walks, and a couple of quizzes — how much have we raised? Well it's exactly £6,077.67!

In addition to our efforts, we have been so generously supported by patients who have donated £4310.76. It has always amazed me year after year that people do care, and it reflects so well on our local society. Thank you.

How have we spent your money?

The very first purchase we made was for the children, it's a piece of activity equipment, it cost £469.71, and it's still

being in use. Altogether we have spent £8,554.67, and we currently have a healthy balance.

What have we spent it on?

Various items of medical equipment, as required by the centre staff, funds for our active 'prevention group' who provide and maintain the regular health promotion displays in the surgery entrance.

Refurbishment of the reception area seating, plus extra seating and a leg rest.

Assistance towards the provision of a cooling system.

Many, many things making us, I think, the most pampered patients in Shropshire!

To the future, it is my secret ambition that one day we will have a 'foot stomping' jazz band to accompany our flu vaccination sessions — you never know!

and finally thank you to chairman Bernie Jones, at the helm since 2003, for everything he's done and always with a smile!