

BPSLG Scoops National Patient Participation Award for Practice Exercise Class

So just why were GPs Andy Morgan and Shona Lockie and BPSLG Committee member Andrew Craig gathered outside the impressive entrance of 14 Princes Gate, Hyde Park, on the morning of Friday 15th November 2002? The truth is they had a rendezvous to keep -- with a photographer (see the evidence on this page). Not just any photographer, but the official one for the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), whose headquarters they were entering. They were there because BPSLG was going to collect the 2002 Patient Participation Award at the RCGPs annual meeting and awards ceremony later in the day. And Dr Morgan was also to be made a Fellow of the RCGP at the same event. So all in all it was quite an occasion for the Practice. Sponsored by *GP*, a weekly tabloid newspaper read in surgeries throughout the country, the RCGPs patient participation award was established in 1996. Its purpose is 'to encourage the develop-

ment of patient participation in general practice within the United Kingdom. A cheque is presented to the winner, and it is to be used to benefit the patients of a Practice or to further the development of patient participation'. Previous winners were from Cambridgeshire, Middlesex, Lanarkshire and Oxfordshire. BPSLG was the first London group to win. And it was worth entering -- because the prize was a cheque for £2,000. BPSLG's application for the award focused on one of its strategic objectives, namely the creation of a Practice-based exercise class in the new surgery premises. That's what the RCGP prize money will be spent on,

beginning sometime early in 2003 once a suitable instructor has been recruited. From the range of possibilities, the BPSLG Committee decided to focus initially on a yoga class, because it is low-tech, user-friendly and requires minimal outlay. ... *continued on page 2*



Balham Park Surgery reps at the Royal College of General Practitioners on 15/11/02 to receive the patient participation award: (l to r) Dr Andy Morgan (wearing his RCGP gown), Dr Shona Lockie, Professor Dame Lesley Southgate (RCGP President) and Andrew Craig from the BPSLG Committee.

Patient Participation Seminar

On 4 December 2002 the Balham Park Surgery Liaison Group (BPSLG) hosted a seminar entitled 'Patient Participation Outreach Meeting for Wandsworth GP Practices'. BPSLG's aim is 'To help doctors and surgery staff to provide, and patients to obtain, the best possible healthcare'. From an initial idea from Andrew Craig, the BPSLG Chair, invitations had been sent to all Wandsworth GP

Practices, of which seven sent at least one representative. The seminar was chaired by Rowena Davis and facilitated by Valerie Moore, both members of the Group. Many members of BPSLG also attended and Melba Wilson, the PCT Chair and a BPS patient, was also able to come to part of the seminar. Wendy Crowder, the PCT's manager of Patient Participa-

tion Involvement, and David Ross, chief officer of Wandsworth Pilot Patients' Forum, were also present.

The seminar kicked off with a presentation—'How it all began' by Dr Andrew Morgan, Natalie Goldsmid-Whyte (Practice Manager) and Bridie Tobin ... *continued on page 3*

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Patient Survey 2003

All doctors and nurses took part in a patient survey during January 2003. Last year we did the same survey with GPs only. The questions range from your feelings about the environment and the level of service provided to access to appointments and the quality of the consultation you received on the day you are completing it. Forty questionnaires need to be completed for each clinician. The results will be collated by an external organisation who then provide a confidential summary for each participant and a summary to the primary care manager in the practice. The survey compares results internally to those of other local Practices. As we did last year, we will publish anonymous results in a future Newsletter. We are hoping to include BPSLG in acting appropriately upon our findings, to improve our services to you.

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This means that the resources available through the award could be devoted to providing expert teaching and achieving results through working directly with small groups of appropriate patients.

The class will be for patients referred by Practice GPs and nurses. It isn't a substitute for something available at a leisure centre or for yoga classes offered elsewhere. After discussion with Practice staff, it is proposed in the first instance to target older patients in need of greater flexibility, postural stability (eg to reduce risk of falling), breathing improvements, and who might benefit additionally from the socialisation opportunity provided by such a class. Wandsworth PCT is supporting the project through the involvement of their exercise programme coordinator, Paul Knivett, in the recruitment process and on the project steering group.

Wandsworth Primary Care Trust's Chair, Melba Wilson, praised BPSLG's success in her December report to the Trust Board in these words: 'Well-deserved congratulations to Balham park Surgery Liaison Group upon winning the RCGP's Patient Participation Award. This award very much attests to the Group's commitment and enthusiasm in extending patient and public involvement'.

Access To Appointments

Since March 2002 and our move in April, we have dramatically increased our list size. We have gone from approximately 7500 patients to over 10,200. Although we have increased the number of doctor and nurse sessions, you may have experienced delays in waiting to be seen. We are looking carefully at the emerging patterns, so that we can ensure you can get appointments that suit your needs, and that you are not waiting for a long time when you come in. The primary care manager is keen to receive feedback if you experience difficulties.

Breast Screening

If you are a female patient at Balham Park Surgery, and aged between 50 and 64, you should be contacted this year via the National Health Service Breast Screening Programme. You will be offered a mammogram at St George's Hospital. This is an X-ray procedure which can detect breast changes at a very early stage. Mammograms are offered every 3 years for patients in this age group. ***We strongly recommend that you take advantage of the programme.***

Routine X-ray breast screening is not available for women under 50 as it has not been shown to be of benefit. However, if you have any concern about your breasts, please tell one of our doctors.

Patient Queries

We now have an administrator, Zillah Blakeney-Edwards, who aims to provide a one-stop service for patient queries. This might mean following up on a referral to hospital that has been made on your behalf over 3 weeks ago, but you have not heard anything. You might wish to follow up on the results of tests you have had, or you might have a general query about our services. Zillah is based on the first floor of our building and can be telephoned directly on **020 8772 3330**. If she cannot help immediately, she will find out who can!

Electronic Booking Programme starting March 2003

The Practice will be able to book out-patient appointments for patients via an electronic link to the hospital or consultant. The programme will be phased in gradually, initially with hospitals where Wandsworth Primary Care Trust has contracts for care.

Patients are increasingly active participants in their own healthcare, taking responsibility not only for aspects of their treatment but also for the way it is organised. The NHS plan says that, by the end of 2005, booking systems will give patients a choice of a convenient time for hospital appointments and admissions within a guaranteed maximum waiting time. Patients will receive treatment at a time that suits them, in accordance with their clinical need. Electronic booking will support this, improving the way that out-patient care is managed.

Patient Participation Seminar ... *continued from page 1*

(BPSLG Treasurer). This took the form of a discussion with the three leaders sitting in the centre of the group – the ‘fishbowl’ technique – and three more chairs for anyone who wanted to join in to ask questions. This proved to be very interactive and a number of interesting and enlightening questions were asked. Andrew Craig then outlined ‘How it works now – significant things we have done’ and this was followed by a breakout session in which four smaller groups were asked to address the questions: ‘What would be the advantages / disadvantages of setting up a Patient Liaison Group in our Practice?’ ‘How would we do it in our Practice?’ and ‘What would we have to do to get it started?’. These groups provided lively discussion and their comments led to further discussion when the groups reconvened to bring the seminar to a close.

Andrew Craig thanked everybody for attending what all agreed had been a most stimulating and energising few hours. He particularly thanked Dr Andrew Morgan and Natalie Goldsmid-Whyte for giving up so much of their time to the event. Notes from the breakout groups would be circulated to all the Practices which had responded. He hoped that others would follow the BPS lead and start up a Patient Liaison Group.

“What Works in Complementary and Alternative Therapies” ... a talk by Dr Patrick Bower

This talk, held on November 13th in the conference room at the Surgery, was very well received and well attended – so much so that not all those who wanted to come could be accommodated on this occasion.

Dr Bower stressed that he was not an expert in these therapies and that he looked at them with the eyes of a conventional doctor. He was open to those where there is evidence that they work and do no harm. He also discussed the placebo effect – if we believe in the power of a treatment, this in itself can help us feel better.

The evidence on alternative therapies is not very convincing. The trials that have been conducted are often small and biased and not as rigorous as those for conventional medicine. He quoted a review of the research by Dr Ernst, which suggests, for example:

- Acupuncture is of questionable value for chronic pain but seems to be effective for nausea
- Chiropractic treatments offer promising results for back-pain
- The herbal medicine based on St John’s Wort works better than a placebo
- There is no clear evidence, among other treatments, of the benefits of homeopathy or irridiology.

It is also true that many of today’s medicines are derived from plants – for example, aspirin comes from willow bark. Dr Bower suggested we should subject alternative therapies to the same questions that some have about conventional medicine.

The talk was followed by a lively question-and-answer session, and the audience expressed interest in further evening meetings.

Late Night, Early Morning and Routine Saturday Surgeries

These continue to be popular and most get fully booked. We are finding that people who would not usually book an appointment because of other commitments, are now doing so. The surgeries operate on; Monday and Thursday from 7.00 am, and Tuesday and Wednesday until 9.00 pm. As well as the usual Saturday “emergency surgery”, patients can book in advance to see a GP or nurse for routine appointments until 1.00 pm.

Repeat Prescriptions by Email

Balham Park Surgery has introduced the ordering of repeat prescriptions via email. This service is for those already receiving repeat prescriptions . As an alternative way of ordering repeat prescriptions, patients can now email their requests to the surgery using the following email address: repeat.prescriptions@gp-h85066.nhs.uk

This email address is for repeat prescriptions only and each request will take one working day to process. An automated message will be emailed to you confirming that we have received your email. **It is essential to email your name, date of birth, daytime telephone number and the correct details of medication or your prescription may not be issued in due time.**

The NHS Alphabet (Part 6 of a continuing guide for local users)

National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) (www.npsa.org.uk)

The NPSA is a Special Health Authority created in July 2001 to co-ordinate efforts across the UK to report, and more importantly to learn from, adverse events, including 'near misses', involving patients that occur in the NHS. As well as making sure mistakes are reported in the first place, NPSA is trying to promote an open and fair culture in hospitals, encouraging doctors to report incidents without fear of personal reprimand. It will then collect reports from throughout the country and initiate preventative measures, so that the whole country can learn from each case, and patient safety throughout the NHS will be improved.

The Health Service Commissioner for England (www.ombudsman.org.uk)

What we usually call 'the Health Ombudsman' was created in 1973 to investigate complaints about the National Health Service. Complainants who are dissatisfied with the way their complaint was handled locally or because an Independent Review was refused can ask the Ombudsman to help. Ann Abraham took up this role in November 2002. If her office agrees to take up a case, it can investigate matters further and has powers like a court to obtain documents. Ombudsman investigations are reported regularly to Parliament.

Access to the Surgery from Marius Road

A patient has written to BPSLG pointing out (quite rightly) that the alley way from Marius Road to the surgery door is not very safe, especially for older people: the surface is very uneven, and some parts of it are badly lit. The problem is that this alley is private property, and the surgery has no right of access or control over its upkeep. It is certainly a much shorter way in if you are coming from Marius Road, but if at all possible, try to come in down the pathway from Balham High Road.

However, the practice manager has consulted the Police Crime Prevention Unit, who have made various recommendations for improving the lighting. These will be carried out as soon as possible.

Personal Medical Services (PMS) At Nightingale House

Balham Park Surgery has taken over GP services at Nightingale House, a nursing home for elderly Jewish people. We have employed a full time nurse-practitioner, Stephanie Barrett, and a medical secretary, as well as providing some GP sessions there during the week. This will not affect services within our Practice, but it provides opportunities to further improve the care given to these local residents. Dr Patrick Bower is the lead doctor for this project. Dr Joanna Smail, one of our GPs, has started working at Nightingale House one morning a week.

Asking for a Check-Up

Remember that you don't have to be ill to ask for a check-up. The effects of aging don't always show up as symptoms. So if you feel you would like to know, for example, how your blood pressure is, ring up for an appointment.

Calling all DTP Experts

At present, the text for the Newsletter is collated by members of BPSLG and then sent to the IT manager at the surgery, who formats it to fit the four pages and passes it to the printer. Naturally, this formatting takes up time which the IT manager can ill afford. **Does any reader have the skill (and the time) to help us by formatting the Newsletter text so that it could go directly to the printer?** If so, we would be very glad to hear from you – you would not have to deal with the printer yourself. You can write to BPSLG at the surgery, phone Natalie on 020 8772 3320, or e-mail her at Natalie.Whyte@gp-h85066.nhs.uk

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