



Our Newsletter

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BPSLG wins Extended Hours battle – the fight to keep the service continues

As Wandsworth Borough News reported in early August: "Harassed parents and busy young professionals won a victory last week when health bosses agreed to save GPs' popular 'commuter clinics'." What they were referring to was the decision of the Board of Wandsworth Primary Care Trust (PCT), reluctantly bowing to overwhelming opposition, to continue funding the extended hours services at Balham Park Surgery and several others in this part of the Borough.

These will continue at least until the spring of 2006 when the results of the Government's three-month consultation on "Health Outside Hospitals" should be known. Part of BPSLG's continuing fight to protect these services was to invite Health Minister Patricia Hewitt to visit the Surgery to see their value for herself (see page 3).

In its consultation response to the PCT, BPSLG members disputed the claim that the arrangements were

inequitable, because the scheme had been in existence for four years already and was thus not a "pilot", as the PCT had tried to argue. The issue was not about the distribution of new monies between areas of relative deprivation and need, but the maintenance of a service which was fully utilised and for which the PCT conceded they had no suitable alternative.

In the consultation meeting

(Continued on page 2)

Prestigious Award from Royal College for Balham Park Surgery

For providing an excellent level of service to its patients, the Surgery has won a prestigious Quality Practice Award from the Royal College of General Practitioners. The Surgery submitted a portfolio of written evidence set against 16 groups of criteria including clinical care, health promotion and continuity of care. A panel of four assessors visited the Surgery and interviewed staff and patients before making their recommendations.

Presenting the award to Dr Patrick Bower, Councillor James Cousins, Chair of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, said he was delighted and honoured with this task since, in his view, the Surgery was one of the best in the Borough and the staff fully deserved the recognition.

Accepting on behalf of everyone at the Surgery, Dr Bower said that primary care was no longer solely led by GPs – it was

managed best by a multi-disciplinary team approach, and that included patients. He said the award was achieved as a result of the commitment of the entire Surgery team to provide the highest standards of care within the resources available. He went on to say: "The process enabled us to improve the quality of some of our services for the benefit of our patients. A lot of additional work was involved but we believe it was worth it. We would like to sincerely thank Councillor Cousins for presenting the award to us and the Balham Park Surgery Liaison Group for their ongoing contributions."

The award has been placed in Reception for all patients and visitors to see.

June Addison



Dr Bower (left) receives the RCGP award.

The Extended Hours Battle (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

organised by BPSLG following the General Election, PCT representatives admitted they had no firm plans for using the £50,000 that would be saved each year by ending the scheme at BPS to improve health inequalities elsewhere. This sum is less than 0.01% of the £60million budget the PCT spends on primary care annually (drugs excluded), and it would simply be swallowed up in the PCT's mounting deficit.

The PCT's position also ignored

strong signals from the Government about the need for more choice in primary care and went against its own published aims of enabling people to get the health services they need, when and where they need them; listening and valuing the views of patient, carers and the public; and involving and engaging local people in decisions about their health care.

It was very gratifying that Wandsworth Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee backed BPSLG's position 100% and added its considerable weight to the

demand of our patients that the PCT retain and continue funding these services. This was reflected in the PCT Board's decision taken on 27th July "that the current scheme should continue until such time as a widely accepted equitable alternative can be provided and pending the outcome of the 'Health Outside Hospitals Review'." *Andrew Craig*

Heart Health Messages

Dr Patrick Bower spoke to an audience of about 40 patients at a BPSLG evening education session in mid-June. His subject was preventing heart disease. The focus was on "primary prevention" – largely things that people can do for themselves, like not smoking, a good diet (eg less fat and salt), more exercise, reducing stress, moderate alcohol consumption, maintaining normal weight. He also touched on factors that we have little or no control over, such as ethnic background and our parents' health history, which put some people at higher risk, particularly South Asians and African-Caribbeans.

Not smoking, or stopping if you do, is the single most important factor in primary prevention of heart disease. The same goes for stroke prevention, because both heart disease and stroke have essentially the same risk factors.

Dr Bower described how these factors affected blood pressure and cholesterol levels. These can be treated effectively in most people, eg by diuretics to lower blood pressure and statins to lower cholesterol levels. But first these risk factors have to be detected, so having regular

health checks at the Surgery is essential.

The role of the doctor, Dr Bower stressed, was to help patients understand levels of individual risk and then decide what to do next. Computer programs help work this out from information taken in the consultation. It is important to help people understand the implications of treatment, for instance to reduce blood pressure, and then to work in partnership to get the desired effect.

A low risk might not be sufficient reason to take medication daily for years, Dr Bower said. It is up to patients to decide what they want to do in terms of their own lives once they have the facts and know their risk levels. The risks are greater for men as they get older. Ironically, the greater the risk the more effective the treatment, but also the greater the possibility of side effects. It could be a fine balance. Many factors are involved in heart health and heart disease, and there are no "pat answers".

Our thanks to Edward Dash for designing the excellent poster for this event. *Andrew Craig*

SURGERY ACCESS ONLINE

The Surgery has launched a number of online services via our secure website. To use these, you will need to register at the Surgery. Proof of identification is required (Passport, Driver's Licence, National ID or Employee ID). **Please ask a receptionist for details.** You can also log onto our website (see page 4) and click the appointments link for more details.

Here are some of the services provided:

Online Appointment Booking. You can view, book or cancel GP appointments; you should find this very useful when the Practice is closed or the phone lines are busy.

Repeat Prescription Requests. You can request these, monitor the progress of your request online, and then pick up the prescription from the Surgery as usual.

Messaging. You can send the Surgery a non-urgent message. A member of our Admin team will pass the message on to the relevant doctor. You can then view the response via the website. We guarantee to respond within 24 hours of receipt of the message or the next working day.

BPSLG invited Patricia Hewitt to visit

At BPSLG's Annual Open Meeting, members unanimously agreed to invite Secretary of State for Health Patricia Hewitt to visit the Surgery and see for herself how a successful "extended hours" scheme operates. Below is a shortened version of the letter sent to Ms Hewitt in early September. The opportunity arose through the "Health Outside Hospitals" consultation which the Government is now running.

Unfortunately, Ms Hewitt was unable to accept our invitation.

Dear Secretary of State

We would like you to see for yourself our innovative extended hours service and to talk to the doctors, nurses and managers who run it and, of course, to the patients using it.

Our surgery's extended hours service has been running since 2001 and is now funded by Wandsworth PCT as an "enhanced service". It provides booked GP and nurse appointments for our patients before and after normal surgery hours on two days a week and on Saturday mornings. These appointments are virtually 100% utilised and demand is at a consistently high level. This compares with a "did not attend" rate for "in hours" appointments of some 8% in this practice (a much lower DNA rate than the PCT average because Balham Park Surgery already manages capacity and demand very well). This is not an overspill of people who cannot access doctors or nurses at usual times. It is people who choose appointments at these extended times because they fit in with life and work needs.

In the last financial year an additional 2,054 patients (17% of the total practice population) were able to see a GP at our practice because this scheme exists. In addition some 2,926 patients saw a nurse during extended hours last year. Our experience validates the BMA's national MORI survey in April 2005 which found that people value being able to see GPs and nurses at local surgeries. Our patients are able to see staff they know and who have their records immediately available to ensure continuity of care. It all makes for a high quality patient experience.

The extended hours service at Balham Park Surgery takes account of the rapidly changing demographics of this part

of South West London. Our data shows that some 48% of our scheme users (990 patients) during the past 12 months who saw a GP came from the fastest growing part of our borough population – working people aged 25-34 – who cannot take time off at other times. One-third of these (301 patients) were younger men – a group notorious for under-accessing primary care. In addition, 139 children under age 16 used these appointments, generally because they were brought by a parent before or after work. All of these adults and children would have little or no alternative GP access because our "in hours" appointments have no spare capacity.

Providing extended hours at our surgery costs some £50,000 per annum, less than 0.01% of the £60million our PCT spends on primary care annually, drugs excluded. We believe this represents very good value. Having bookable extended hours appointments undoubtedly relieves some of the pressures that would otherwise fall on the local A&E service, a fact acknowledged by St George's Healthcare Trust, and the local Walk In Centre, which is already running at 300% over capacity.

We know that our surgery's extended hours service has a high satisfaction rate. It is a service that our patients want and value because it meets their needs. We would like to see this model extended more widely so that other patients may also benefit. We hope, once you have seen it in action, that you will agree.

Yours sincerely

Balham Park Surgery Liaison Group Members

The Quality and Outcomes Framework

The Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) is part of the new General Medical Services (GMS) contract for General Practices and was introduced on 1st April 2004. The QOF rewards Practices for the provision of quality care, and helps to fund further improvements in the delivery of clinical care. Participation is voluntary, but many Practices with Personal Medical Services (PMS) contracts are participating, as are most

Practices on General Medical Services contracts. The QOF measures achievement and allots points against a range of evidence-based indicators covering clinical practice, organisation and management.

The Department of Health recently published national QOF tables for 2004/05 so that Practices could see their own achievement in a broader context. The average achieved by

Practices in England was 958.7 points, 91.3% of a possible 1050. Balham Park Surgery scored 1029 points, which equates to 98%. We were 8th in Wandsworth PCT and 2nd in the Wandsworth South Locality. The area we are looking to improve further is providing for patients with asthma who did not have the flu vaccine. It is sometimes difficult for these patients to come to the Surgery.

BPSLG's 5th Annual Open Meeting, Wednesday 13th July

About 50 patients and Surgery staff ignored the rainy weather to attend BPSLG's 5th Annual Open Meeting. The evening started on a real high when the guest of honour, Councillor James Cousins, Chair of Wandsworth Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, presented the Surgery with the Royal College of General Practitioners Quality Practice Award. Glasses were raised in congratulations and thanks to everyone who had worked hard to gain this prestigious award. (Story and picture on page 1).

The AOM continued with a presentation by Sue O'Donnell, from the Brocklebank Surgery, who explained what Practice Based Commissioning (PbC) was all about. She described the opportunities it offered to Surgeries and their patients. Twenty-one Practices in our part of the Borough are going into this new way of working together to form the "Wandle Practices Commissioning Group". The group will be able to seek funding direct from the PCT and distribute it to members for, in the first place, prescribing, GP-requested diagnostics and new outpatient referrals. By managing these costs themselves the Practices will have more "clout" and be able to make savings, which can then be used to enhance services to patients. It is early days, and PbC requires the active participation of patient groups like BPSLG. Andrew Craig thanked Sue for her presentation and said that much more information would be available to patients as the new procedures were agreed with the PCT.

After some excellent refreshments, the meeting reconvened to hear a report from Andrew Craig on BPSLG activities over the past 12 months and its progress in meeting its objectives. These can be viewed on BPSLG's part of the Surgery website (see below). He particularly singled out the Group's role in the campaign to maintain funding for the Extended Hours Scheme (see page 1), and the two educational seminars on topics requested by patients, the menopause and prevention of heart disease.

Bridie Tobin, BPSLG Treasurer, outlined the Group's income and expenditure over the past 12 months. Funding from the PCT had ceased in March 2004, but in November 2004 the Group had obtained funding from the Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network (WCEN), which operated a "community chest" for groups such as BPSLG; this was for one year only, for purposes such as the AGM, the newsletters and the education seminars. Thereafter the Group would have to find alternative sources of funding, and Bridie needed suggestions from patients as this would become urgent by the end of 2005. Bridie then invited Mac Downes from WCEN to tell the meeting about its work. She expressed the Group's thanks to him and his committee for the funding.

Andrew Craig closed the meeting by thanking all those who had attended for their support. He urged patients to come to BPSLG's monthly meetings and lend their voice and support to the Group, which was always in need of volunteers and participants. With the advent of Practice Based Commissioning it would be even more important for each Surgery's patients to have a voice, and he hoped that Balham Park Surgery's patients would continue to give their support and participation to the Liaison Group.

June Addison

Dates of Future Meetings: 7-9 pm, Education Room, Balham Park Surgery

Unless otherwise stated, these are all BPSLG committee meetings, held on Wednesdays.

All patients of the Surgery are welcome to attend any meeting.

2005 **Thursday 10 November 05:** Dr Bower talks on Practice-based Commissioning.

16 November 14 December

2006 18 January 15 February 15 March 19 April 17 May

21 June **Annual Open Meeting** *No meetings in July or August*

6 September 18 October 29 November

Balham Park Surgery – 236 Balham High Road – LONDON SW17 7AW
Tel. 020 8772 8772

www.balhamparksurgery.co.uk