

Our Doctor Writes

November 2009

November sees the opening of a new health facility in Wiltshire. A state of the art day surgery unit is opening in Devizes. Most day case procedures will be available once the doors open. This is an Independent Sector Treatment Centre or ISTC. In short it is owned by the private sector and will carry out work for the NHS. The quality of the work done there should be of a very high standard and waiting times for procedures should be very reasonable indeed. Your GP will be able to refer you to have appropriate procedures using normal channels such as choose and book. In these cash strapped times "where's the catch?" I here you say. The local PCT had no choice at all about the building and commissioning of this ISTC. In fact they have been put between a rock and a hard place. They have been required to purchase a block contract of activity for several million pounds from the company. This will need to be paid regardless of the volume of work that actually takes place there. The money is top sliced out of the local health economy. If the facility is not used then in effect the PCT ends up paying twice. The effect of this will be to divert funds away from hospitals such as Great Western in Swindon. To qualify to go to Devizes a patient must be fit and well as there is no Intensive Care Unit based there. There will also be minimal training offered there for junior doctors. By removing funds from the main hospitals there is likely to be a knock on effect in the service provision in these areas. These plans were all rolled out in the belief that consumer choice in healthcare is essential. In a way choice has taken on its own independent moral value similar to the right to high quality care free at the point of need. The paradox is that as commissioners of local health services the GP's and the PCT had no choice at all about it all. Now that it's here though, we need to use it when appropriate to do so.

The Swine Flu vaccines should be with all the local surgeries by the time you are reading this. There is a small amount of uncertainty as to whether or not vaccination will require one or two doses. This is dependent on which manufacturer's vaccine is supplied to your practice. The groups likely to benefit are similar to the seasonal flu groups but with the addition of pregnant women and the immunosuppressed and their close family members. Pregnant women appear to be particularly at risk. It is also sensible to be covered if you are a health worker in regular contact with patients. If you are unsure whether or not you will benefit from vaccination please ask your practice. The normal flu vaccination programme is also well underway. If you are in one of the at risk groups and haven't yet been protected please contact your surgery as soon as possible. The NHS rules about private vaccinations for private vaccination could do with a little clarification as well. The rules are quite bizarre. Whilst your own GP is able to make a charge for providing non medical services to their patients (including travel vaccinations) they are in breach of their terms of service if they charge for flu vaccination. I think that this is ludicrous as the safest place to be vaccinated is in your own practice where your doctor and the staff know you and have access to your full medical records.

Best Wishes,

Tim Ballard