

# Our Doctor Writes

June 2008

There seems to be no end to the change that the Department of Health wants to introduce into General Practice. Across the country every PCT in the land has been asked to introduce a mega-surgery or "Polyclinic" to try to destabilize the traditional model of providing family health care. For a while I thought that rural environments similar to the Marlborough area might be insulated from these changes by the inability to herd people into vast city style practices. There is however another strategy designed to introduce deliberate creative discomfort into the system.

In the last month the Department of Health has released a White Paper which focuses on the provision of pharmacy services for the UK. The main changes are in more rural areas. Traditionally there has been an understanding that rural practices need the income that is generated from dispensing to underpin the costs of running smaller practices in areas where the costs of running a small surgery may otherwise be prohibitively expensive. At present the rules are that any rural dispensing practice can dispense for any of its patients who live more than a mile "as the crow flies" from their nearest pharmacy. The proposed changes will change this to allow a practice to dispense if there is not a pharmacy within a mile from the practice. Already companies are applying on block to open practices in areas which will fundamentally destabilize small rural practices. The equation for us and Burbage is simple. If a pharmacy opens within a mile of either practice it will remove so much income from our two practices that they will immediately become non-viable. The consequence would be that the practices would fold and then the pharmacies would subsequently have no core business and fold as well. In short order our villages would be left with no village GP surgeries or easy access to prescription medicines. Currently I am not aware of any plan for a pharmaceutical chain to want to open in our midst. If it does arise though it is really important that everyone knows what the consequences would be of agreeing to planning permission being granted.

The BMA are very concerned about the threat that is posed to all Surgeries by the move to introduce polyclinics and to give contracts to private companies to run services. Across the country practices will be displaying posters and leaflets relating to this. Please read the information and if you feel that the current provision of services is preferable to the proposed changes please think about signing the card/petition in the surgery.

On a clinical note that although it seems to have been winter until just recently it is still important to remember that the sun's rays are still highly damaging to northern European skins. Children are particularly vulnerable to the long term consequences of UV skin damage and just one bad episode of sunburn may be enough for a child to develop a melanoma in later life. Cover up with hats trousers and shirts. Use high factor sun creams as a matter of course before going out. Leave some on a windowsill by the door before you go out this summer, making it easy to use makes it more likely it will go on your skin!

Best wishes

Dr Tim Ballard