

Our Doctor Writes

September 2009

There are interesting times afoot in general practice, and in medicine as a whole. Soon for the first time medicine will lead the way amongst the professions and deliver revalidation. Historically there has been an assumption that once qualified a doctor is a doctor for life. The ever increasing pace of change in science and medicine combined with several high profile causes for concern, such as the under-performance in children's heart surgery services in Bristol. Things are now changing and between 2010-11 the first GP's will go through a process aimed at ensuring that they are keeping up to date and also delivering high quality care to their patients. The road to delivering such a system has, as you may well imagine, not been easy at times but I'm sure that the benefits will outweigh the difficulties.

General Practice training is also in a continuous process of change. Since the early 1980's, following a doctor's full registration GP training has been comprised of 2 years hospital work followed by a year in General Practice. Recently the split has been 18 months of each. There has always been somewhat of a paradox in postgraduate medical training. This has been that the specialty with the widest curriculum had the shortest training time. This combined with the demise of the hospital generalist and their ever increasing specialisation requires greater and greater expertise in primary care. The product of these changes has been an acceptance that there needs to be a five year training programme for GP's. The first experience that patients will get of this is the presence of more GP's in training in teaching practices.

The likelihood is that the swine flu pandemic is set to increase between the end of September and Christmas. There is a vaccine that will soon be available, requiring two doses for each patient and the stocks of antiviral drugs are in place. There have been problems with the introduction of the national flu line but locally the problem has been well managed. If you come across serious shortcomings in the delivery of the flu programme please let me know and I will bring it to the attention of the PCT. It is important to remember though that the vast majority of those infected with this virus will have a short lived illness and not develop serious complications.

With best wishes,

Dr Tim Ballard