

The RCGP and Lord Darzi's review of the NHS



The first in an occasional series of patient information leaflets produced by the Royal College of General Practitioners on important issues affecting general practice

Health Minister and surgeon Lord Ara Darzi has been tasked by the Government to carry out a widespread review of the NHS, both in London and nationally (England), to ensure that patients can depend on fair distribution and quality of health services, regardless of personal circumstances or where you live.

The RCGP - a network of over 30,000 doctors across the UK - welcomes this review and the opportunities it provides for investing in and developing NHS services to deliver improvements for patients.

One proposal generating considerable interest is the setting up of polyclinics or supersurgeries. The RCGP agrees that the concept is worthy of consideration and that it has potential in providing:

- i. choice for patients
- ii. a "one stop shop" for health and well-being
- iii. access to a wide range of services on good premises

For some areas of the country, this model will be welcomed by patients and doctors and could bring great benefits. But as it stands, the polyclinic or supersurgery idea plays down the importance of general practice in favour of "Martini" healthcare: any time, any place, any where - any doctor. While this approach might suit otherwise healthy and able-bodied commuters who rarely need to see their GP, it could be a very different story for older patients or people with long term conditions. As proposals for polyclinics are advanced, these concerns should be addressed.

In many areas of the country, we believe that services can be improved by building on the strengths of general practice. The RCGP believes that the services provided by GPs and their practices are essential for a quality NHS in the future because:

- i. Patients want personalised care - to see a doctor they know and who knows them
- ii. Patients want healthcare close to home in the heart of the community - preferably within walking or pram pushing distance or on a good bus route
- iii. Patients want co-ordination of care with GPs liaising with specialists and hospitals where necessary
- iv. GPs work in practice teams able to deal with multiple conditions at one time and integrate different types of care for patients
- v. GPs provide aftercare for patients discharged from hospital
- vi. GPs provide lifelong care and never discharge patients
- vii. Prevention can be better than cure - GPs work hard to prevent conditions such as strokes and heart attacks

We are concerned that polyclinics could bring about the end of the unique relationship between patient and GP; that patients could be treated as numbers rather than individuals and that continuity of care will break down.

We also have concerns that polyclinics could be set up in, and run by, existing hospitals and used as another means of generating income for the hospital trust. More worryingly, it could mean that many patients would need to travel further to access care and many patients, particularly older people and some vulnerable groups, worry about going to hospitals for a variety of reasons including the fear of contracting infections such as MRSA.

What is the RCGP doing?

We believe that our new model of caring for patients - the federated model - is the best solution for delivering better care for patients whilst providing all the benefits of polyclinics or supersurgeries.

What is the federated model?

This involves different GP practices working together in "federations" or collaborations to deliver a wider range of quality healthcare services where patients want them - closer to home - by healthcare professionals they know and trust.

GP teams would be able to provide a wider range of services in the community and the majority of health problems, including mental health, would be dealt with by family doctors. GPs would also have greater access to scans and x-rays, meaning patients would be sent to hospital only as a last resort. GPs could also work closely with specialists in the same way as is being suggested for polyclinics.

Further details are available on our website at

www.rcgp.org.uk/roadmap

GP federations are already working successfully in numerous areas around the country and making a real difference to patients' lives - but we want this to become widespread. The NHS Review should lead to improved services and better care for patients. GPs and practices want to be central to NHS improvements and to ensure that new models of care meet the needs of patients and communities.

We are making our views known to Lord Darzi and the Government but you can also have your say on the "Our NHS" website:-

<http://www.ournhs.nhs.uk/2008/01/04/play-your-part-with-our-online-questionnaire>.

Together we can change the NHS for the better.

If you have any comments or would like further information please contact the RCGP Patient Partnership Group (PPG) at:

ppg@rcgp.org.uk