

host of other professional activities.

Among other things she was a member of the QOF national organisation review, chairs the IHM Fellowship/EBA national working group and VTS National Steering Group, and is a trustee of the National Association for Patient Participation (NAPP).

A board member of the Beds & Herts Faculty, Sandra is also involved in the RCGP/Princess Royal Trust for Carers partnership, as well as the Collegé's Primary Medical Care Provider Accreditation pilot.

She puts her energy and drive down to one thing – her obsession with the pursuit of quality patient care.

"I got into practice management because I wanted to do something that really made a difference. Quality is my passion – in my book, it doesn't help patients and carers then it's not worth doing."

There were a lot of people involved in the launch and it struck me that the balloon was a good symbol of teamwork – it gave me the feeling of the sky's the limit – and would make a fitting logo for the Bennetts End team."

The practice prides itself on being responsive to the needs of its 18,000-strong patient population. Good management coupled with high-quality clinical care has allowed the practice to make strides in creating and developing new services, says Sandra.

"I'm privileged to work with doctors who are very forward thinking. Before polyclinics, practice-based commissioning, the Roadmap and the Darzi Review were around we were actually putting these ideas into practice."

leen Screen initiative based on research carried out by a doctor and nurse at the surgery. Adolescent focus groups were consulted to find out what their needs were and the resulting service was advertised in local schools.

"As Hemel Hempstead is a new town, there isn't the level of parent and grandparent support that you normally find in a more established town. Transport was also an issue, so we wanted to offer an informal, discreet drop-in service."

"The infrastructure is so important when planning new services. If that's not in place you've failed before you've even started."

The practice also offers counselling in-house, a satellite Citizens Advice Bureau to provide free confidential advice on employment, debt and benefits; physiotherapy services; a travel clinic for both NHS and private patients; and a carers' clinic, led by a local carer-support worker. The practice is a member of Carers UK and works closely with Carers in Hertfordshire and Age Concern. It was also recognised with a Silver Award from the Princess Royal Trust for Carers in 2005.

Sandra meets regularly with the practice patient group, the Friends of Bennetts End Surgery. The group helps the practice team keep in touch with the needs of patients and has also fundraised for a wide range of equipment and facilities, including ECG machines, a defibrillator, a children's play area, a tea service for waiting patients and a fortnightly minibus to help elderly and disabled patients attend the surgery.

So successful has Sandra been in transforming Bennetts End that in 1999 it was awarded Beacon status

"Partnership planning can be very effective, but to make it work you have to trust your colleagues. If the management side of the practice is running smoothly it means that the GPs and nurses can concentrate on patient care. Challenges and change don't need to be stressful if there is good clinical and management leadership."

Throughout her 27 years as a practice manager, Sandra says she has relied on the RCGP, especially in the early days of her career.

"The College was a safe haven for education, at a time when there was very little formal training for practice management."

Sandra still relies on the College to help her and the practice keep up to date with the latest developments in general practice. She and a group from Bennetts End attended the 2007 RCGP Annual Conference, and this year Sandra will attend the event in a different capacity, co-leading the conference's practice-development stream with a practice manager colleague. She says:

"I can honestly say that the 2007 conference was the best education and networking event we've been to for a long time, so I'm really excited about being involved this year. We'll be looking at the latest developments, which hopefully will inspire people to try out new ideas in their own practices."

It is this enduring commitment to improving resources and training for practice managers and ultimately improving patient care that is being recognised by the RCGP Honorary Fellowship.

For Sandra, the Fellowship is proof that good practice management is recognised as being as important as good clinical care in strengthening primary care and general practice.

"I'm so proud that the profession has reached so far. If there's one thing I'm particularly pleased about, it's that people entering practice management now have the chance of a formal, vocational training scheme endorsed by the RCGP. It shows how integral managers are to the practice team, and what a difference we can make."

"The Honorary Fellowship is a both a personal and a team award – I couldn't have achieved what I've achieved without inspirational friends, my family and the practice team. More than anything else, I think that teamwork is the key to quality general practice."

