

Alconbury & Brampton Surgeries

Dispensary Update & Information

As a Practice we have been made aware that a significant amount of mis-information relating to commercially sensitive matters at Alconbury Surgery has been published within the public domain in recent weeks. We would like to take this opportunity to update our patients to clarify events to date and ensure that they are aware of services available going forward.

Why has Alconbury Surgery not opened a Pharmacy?

The Surgery cannot open a Pharmacy without a Licence. As the surgery has less than 2750 patients within a 1 mile radius current pharmaceutical regulations state that there is insufficient need for a pharmacy and the GP dispensary has protected status. In accordance with this, when the Surgery previously applied for a license to open a Pharmacy in 2008 it was declined.

Mr Patel applied for a license knowing this and his application was also declined. Mr Patel then appealed this decision and this appeal was taken to an oral hearing. As previous correspondence between the Surgery and the NHS relating to Mr Patels application was not received, the Surgery were not considered to be an interested party and were not informed of these developments or invited to the hearing. Instead we were made aware of the hearing by Boots the chemist who kindly offered us the opportunity to attend as their invited guest. Unfortunately this limited our input and representation at the hearing and Mr Patel's application for a licence was awarded on the basis that the productivity rate of the Dispensary demonstrated that there was sufficient pharmaceutical need within the village to warrant a Pharmacy. This was an unprecedented decision which having been granted at appeal can only be overturned by judicial review in the High Court. The Partners reluctantly decided that to pursue this further would be detrimental to the sustainability of the business should their case be unsuccessful.

Since the recent ruling that there is sufficient need for a Pharmacy within Alconbury villages the Practice reapplied for a Pharmacy licence in June 2017. The initial stage of this application is still yet to be concluded due to administrative delays in processing and the Partners anticipate the outcome of their application imminently.

Why do we not employ a pharmacist?

The surgery employs appropriately qualified staff in the Dispensary to support the GPs in their care of our patients. No clinical check by a Pharmacist is required as the GPs at the Surgery are accountable for the work completed within the Dispensary. We work within national guidelines to ensure that the processes in place within the Dispensary meet requirements for safeguarding the provision of medicines to patients in a safe and controlled environment.

We currently employ 2 qualified dispensers, 1 qualified dispensary technician and 2 registered pharmacy technicians. The team have an average of 9 years' service. In previous years the Practice has employed a fully qualified Pharmacist within the Dispensary as we valued their contribution to the team. As an employer we invest in the training and development of our team above and beyond the minimum requirements as we pride ourselves in being a supportive employer. Whilst financial factors inevitably influence our payroll budget our HR policy is motivated by our desire to sustain a positive, mutually supportive team with a shared priority of delivering high quality care for our patients.

How will the imminent changes impact upon the Surgery and our team?

The Practice is a business with an NHS contract and we work hard to balance our desire to deliver services that meet the needs of our patients with the need to remain viable as a business. In recent years we have reinvested Practice profits in the recruitment of additional GPs and at present our GP to patient ratio is higher than the national average which ensures adequate appointment availability. Financial pressures within the current healthcare environment are increasing and General Practice has historically delivered some services for patients without adequate or any funding because it is in the best interest of patients. The reduction in dispensing income going forward will inevitably impact upon the profitability of the Practice, a factor for consideration by any business when developing future plans for development of services.

The Surgery priority is to ensure the smooth transition of patients to their new chosen provider and evaluate work volume once the gradualisation period has ended. We have additional temporary staff in the Dispensary currently to support the team in coping with the workload created during this transition. With a 52% reduction in dispensing patients from July the Practice anticipates that we will have no choice but to consider changes within our Dispensary team going forward.

How will the imminent changes impact upon patients?

We anticipate that all existing services provided at the Practice will continue for the foreseeable future. The full range of Childrens Vaccinations and Travel Vaccinations will continue to be available 5 days a week at the Patients convenience. We do not operate a clinic based system as this restricts Nurse appointment availability.

The Practice has offered a free monthly delivery service for dispensing patients with repeat medications who are unable to attend the surgery for a number of years. Our intention is for this to continue.

Our dispensary team have historically worked ahead of the minimum 48 hours politely requested from patients to provide their medication to ensure that where possible our Surgery opening hours do not present a problem for patients collecting. Where possible we will continue to do so irrespective of which Pharmacy is nominated by a patient for the dispensing of their medications.

From July onwards we plan to trial Saturday opening with the Dispensary between 9am and 12pm. This will extend the remit of services available to patients during extended hours and ensure greater accessibility to the Dispensary for patient collections.

As a Practice our priority is and always has been to provide the best care that we can for our patients. This includes making them aware of the Pharmacy services available to them and ensuring a smooth transition to their chosen provider whoever this may be.

If our patients have any concerns about the process and/or wish to discuss matters with us in more detail then we are more than happy to do so should they wish to make contact with us.

Melanie Gearing

Practice Manager