

Alconbury Surgery

Information regarding the future of our Dispensary

As a rural GP Surgery we have historically had the right to dispense to patients resident in our Practice Area who live 1 mile or more from a Pharmacy. As a Dispensing Doctor this right was protected from a Pharmacy application to open because less than 2750 patients reside within 1 mile of our dispensary. Our intention, should the local population approach this designated number, has always been to apply to open a pharmacy ourselves at the Surgery and protect the existing service we provide our patients.

In 2016 a pharmacy application was made that challenged our protected right to dispense to patients on the basis that our Dispensary is amongst the busiest in the country which proves there is sufficient need for a pharmacy. Despite our best efforts to resist this application and it initially being refused, our dispensary's protection was removed by NHSE in an unprecedented ruling at appeal. The Pharmacist was awarded a license to open within Alconbury and was given 6 months to find premises and 6 months to open.

We approached the successful pharmacy applicant to discuss working with him at the Surgery as we felt this would be in the best interests of our patients, he declined. Instead he has made an agreement to open the Pharmacy in the Costcutter store at 1 Bell Lane.

When the pharmacy opens in the village NHS regulations dictate that we will no longer be able to dispense to patients resident within a mile of the pharmacy. We will be given notice by NHSE to transfer patients resident in Alconbury & Alconbury Weston to an alternative service and those affected by this ruling will have the option to have their medications dispensed by any Pharmacy they choose. We appreciate that this will be disruptive for patients and will do all we can to ensure the transition process for patients is as smooth as possible.

We will continue to dispense to patients who live more than a mile from the Pharmacy and intend to do so. The Surgery dispensary will not be closing but will dispense to less than 50% of patients currently looked after by our Dispensary team. Please bear with our team at this difficult time whilst they are working to maintain your current service during a period of such uncertainty.

Frequently Asked Questions.

Why hasn't the Surgery applied to open a Pharmacy?

The Surgery had planned to apply when there were adequate patient numbers within a mile of the Surgery. This is still not the case. The Pharmacist has been awarded the license on appeal and now has 6 months to open. It is extremely unlikely that a second application for a Pharmacy in the village would be approved. Nevertheless, in the interests of our patients we have submitted an application to open a pharmacy at our premises and await the outcome from NHS England.

Why is the proposed Pharmacy to be located at the shop and not at the Surgery?

The Partners at the Practice met with the Pharmacist to explore opportunities for us to work together to deliver services in the best interests of our patients but he was not willing to pursue this.

Why are we refusing to dispense to patients in Alconbury & Alconbury Weston?

The NHS Pharmacy regulations do not permit us to dispense to patients resident within 1 mile of a Pharmacy. This is not our decision, we are not refusing to dispense to patients but must work within our contractual restrictions.

What about patient choice?

Patients resident in Alconbury & Alconbury Weston are no longer able to access services from the Surgery Dispensary but do have the freedom to choose between several local Pharmacies.

Why was the village not consulted?

The Pharmacy application process is not like a planning application and is based on NHS England's decision on whether the area has need of a Pharmacy. Historically the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment in this area stated that there was no such need. In fact the Surgery has in the past had an application declined for this reason. Likewise the initial application for a Pharmacy at Alconbury, with no definitive address identified, was turned down for this reason. Due to the low number of patients resident within a mile of the Surgery our Dispensary Service had protected status and there was no need for a Pharmacy. The Pharmacist appealed this decision arguing that the volume of items being provided to patients by our dispensary was evidence that there is need for a Pharmacy in the village and NHS England supported this argument and removed our Surgery's protected right to dispense to these patients. There is no consultation period when considering Pharmaceutical need and once it is established that the need exists it is the responsibility of the Pharmacist to then find premises within the designated area. If they are unable to do so then their license will lapse and then any willing provider can then make an application for the license to provide pharmaceutical services within Alconbury, as is the case if the Pharmacy does not remain open for any reason.

What can we do?

We would like to reiterate that the imminent changes are not a result of any decisions or actions of the Surgery, they are a consequence of decisions made by NHS England in line with current Pharmacy regulations and we are unable to influence them. Should you wish to contact NHS England to complain or give feedback then you can do so in the following ways:

By post to:
NHS England
PO Box 16738
Redditch
B97 9PT

By email to: england.contactus@nhs.net
By telephone: 0300 311 22 33

Melanie Fowler
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26.06.17