

## **Are Otford patients comfortable with this vision for the future of GP provision?**

A worrying direction of travel in terms of impact on GP provision is becoming apparent to your Patient Participation Group (PPG) and we felt it right to share some of these worries with you.

NHS England has divided the whole of the country into 44 areas to produce plans for how they will deliver health and social care over the next 5 years. This in the context of significant future cuts to the budget, huge increases in demand and with Local Authorities struggling to meet social care needs. These plans (Sustainability and Transformation Plans - STPs) were submitted to NHS England on 21<sup>st</sup> October although we have not yet been allowed to see the Kent and Medway submission. Neither has there been any genuinely transparent consultation with patients during preparation of the plans.

While we would love to be proved wrong, the plans developing within the NHS are causing your PPG grave concerns regarding the future provision of GP services:

- STPs must balance the books within the budget provided by Westminster, even if the care changes in them are undeliverable or not in the public interest. This will be the case in some areas. NHS England plans to transform the NHS, but there is little evidence that STP changes will save money. We fear instead that they will encourage the further privatisation of the NHS.
- Over the past year or so, GPs in England have been forming Federations of Practices to remain financially viable. Otford Medical Practice is now part of a federation of 22 practices called SW Kent Federation. Practices need to be big enough to compete against private companies for tenders to provide services for us, yet want to retain their own autonomy. It is difficult for Federations to function efficiently without a complete upheaval of their administrative systems that will require expertise that GP practices may not possess.
- We are, therefore, concerned that NHS England now seems to prefer moving towards 'super' practices of 30-100,000 patients. The model may well see doctors and specialists from a range of services at the hub of such a super practice with an increased role for Physician Assistants. These are currently being trained within the UK but are not medically qualified doctors. Of necessity and when funds permit, super practices would need to be located in large central premises and this would have a significant consequent impact on access for patients, particularly those living in villages.
- We are aware that the management of care in each of the 44 areas is likely to become the responsibility of Accountable Care Organisations (ACOs) – conglomerates of GPs, Hospital Trusts, Councils and other health and care providers (both public and private). ACOs are derived from an American model that has many problems and we fear herald increasing privatisation of healthcare in the UK. ACOs would be given a budget to deliver all the health and social care for people in an area (there are 1.8 million people in the West Kent and Medway area) and would be entitled to retain any 'profit' made. It is less clear how a 'deficit' would be managed by a private company – over recent years the UK has seen several private companies hand non-profitable contracts back and walk away from patients. We are concerned that this decentralisation of funding, taking responsibility away from central government, could have a major impact on the local nature of the provision of GP services that we enjoy today.
- Our concerns have been validated in the letter written to the Chancellor, Rt Hon Phillip Hammond on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016 by Dr Sarah Wollaston MP, Chair of the all-party House of Commons Health Committee. The letter highlighted the Health Committee's concerns over the shortfalls in NHS and Care funding.

These views are those of your PPG not the Otford Medical Practice.

We would welcome your feedback to ensure that we reflect the views of OMP's patients properly in any discussions that we are invited to attend regarding the above. Please let us have your views either by email to [otfordppg@gmail.com](mailto:otfordppg@gmail.com) or by handing your written comments to the OMP reception desk.

Thank you.



Ken Cardinal  
PPG Chair