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Healthwatch

I am responding to your correspondence from 3rd May regarding the Traveller Community's Experience of Health Care in Oxfordshire. We welcome such a review. I speak as the longest serving GP partner at the new Chipping Norton Health Centre having been in post for 20 years.

Background

Can I say that over the past 20 years the relationship of the health care professionals and the traveller community at the Beeches has greatly improved, and a very warm respect has been established. When I first arrived we were very often inappropriately asked to carry out home visits to The Beeches which now almost never happens – I feel that there is a far greater understanding of the services we provide.

Travellers experience of GP services

In response to the specific experiences of travellers with the Chipping Norton Health Centre we accept that we did have teething problems with our previous appointment system. Since 1st January 2016 we now have a "walk-in clinic" from 8.30 – 10.30 every morning. This is to address the very important issue of access, and guarantees that any patient who attends before 10.30am will be seen. Early feedback to this change was expectedly negative (who likes change!) but as the weeks and months have progressed we have fine-tuned the service and now receive more positive feedback than negative. It is accepted that patients who present early are likely to be seen sooner and unfortunately there can be delays if it is very busy. However we have never yet had a wait of as long as 4 hours which is what the national standard for A&E is and in most days there is never a wait of more than 1- 1 ½ hours. Although this is sometimes complained about it does ensure that the patient who arrives at a reasonable time should usually be seen within 30-45 minutes.

Our hope is also that if the patients who wish to be seen urgently are seen the same day this will free up more routine appointments for those who need more time and can be seen for a planned consultation.

I agree with the conclusion that the appointment system is no different to travellers than any other member of the community.

Other issues again are quite universal particularly if certain prescriptions are not fundable and patients have to pay. This would not apply exclusively to the travelling community.

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However we do offer a very much wider range of services in the new building such as mental health services, including counselling, the Citizens Advice Bureau and on a Tuesday we offer Turning Point which is a specific locality clinic for Drug & Alcohol problems. This is a very much appreciated service which may be specifically helpful to the travelling community from the findings in the rest of the report.

With specific respect to the recommendations

1. Outreach Worker

We would certainly welcome an outreach worker and a lot of the suggested responsibilities would be very useful. Any means of assisting the travelling community to maximise their opportunities in using our services would be very helpful. However, I feel that a patient advocate role and supporting vulnerable and less abled patients to navigate the health and social care services would be extremely beneficial. There has, in the past, been liaison officers from the Travelling Community who I have had contact with, who have been particularly adept at helping patients, at very difficult times, to be supported through the system and to enable the best possible outcome.

2. Making GP Practices more accessible

We would advocate trying to increase accessibility although I would not favour long telephone explanations, rather to encourage patients with literacy or other communication difficulties to be reassured that reception staff are happy to help any specific problems that they encounter and not be concerned about asking. Also, the 111 service can also help explain how best to access services out of hours.

I would welcome working with representatives from the travellers community to understand how best they feel that we could make the surgery more accessible and particularly how we can offer better information as to how our health services can be explained and the benefits of screening and other health checks which might improve overall health.

With respect to call-backs - this problem has been resolved since November 2015 as the "walk-in clinic" significantly reduces the need for patients to call the surgery and we do now have more telephone appointments which patients can use.

3. Dental Services

We support the recommendation around improving access to dental care in Chipping Norton although this will be outside our remit. However, a discussion with Chipping Norton dental practice may be very useful.

4. Mental Health Services

We support the development of Mental Health Services and already offer a Drug & Alcohol clinic within the surgery. We also have been expanding mental health services and our community mental health team have one of the most rapid responses to emergency referrals for anywhere in the county.

However, we would also support an advocate to ensure that patients are able to access and use mental health services as well as possible.

Yours sincerely

Dr Jonathan Moore