



Access to General Practice Appointments

I have been asked to write a short piece to explain what is happening in terms of access to primary care from both a local, national and UK perspective.

As some of you will know I represent GPs and those of you who have asked me about how the service is changing have always had honest answers.

It won't have escaped your attention in the media that General Practice in the UK is facing a crisis in terms of both workload and recruitment and retention of GPs. We have been very lucky at Haygarth doctors in managing to recruit doctors and allied health staff in the last year or two but that is very much not the situation elsewhere in Wales or the UK.

We now as a practice offer more clinical appointments and availability than ever before, yet the wait for routine appointments, particularly if a patient wants to see a specific GP is still longer than patients would want.

Why is this happening?

The answer is complex and in many areas is simply because there aren't enough GPs. Many GPs (myself included) are now going part time in order to stay in the service. Patients are living longer and the complexity of chronic disease work has increased immensely over the last 10 years.

Funding into General Practice has been reduced over the years rather than increased to keep up with increasing workload and demand and the shift of work from hospitals to GPs.

What funding has been made available in Wales has been given to groups of practices working together at a larger scale to provide services and this is likely to be the way many of your services are provided in the future as it is now clear that the model of all services being offered at the local surgery is unsustainable.

The Welsh Health minister has a concept called "prudent health care" and within this GPs will be expected to only do what only a doctor can do. This will mean opening up more access to specialised nurses and other members of the primary care team who will have more time to focus on specific problems such as respiratory disease and see the problems that a GP doesn't have to.

Patients will have to accept seeing other members of the primary care team and not always a doctor and it's very likely that some of their care will improve as a result as clearly the 10 minute appointment that British GPs work to is often not adequate for complex problems and needs.

As you will have read, General Practice is now subject to more regulation and inspection than ever before and more than most if not all other specialties. We are pleased to report that a recent inspection of our practice by Health Inspectorate Wales found nothing but praise for our systems and services. That is not to say we don't have challenges for the future and issues as does the rest of the U.K. General Practice, in keeping up with ever increasing demand but personally speaking, I wouldn't work anywhere else.

Dr Pete Howard for Haygarth Doctors