

## School Lane Surgery

# Patient Reference Group (PRG)

(Condensed)

Meeting: Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2019

### 1. Previous minutes

There is nothing to report as the minutes for our previous meeting have not yet been distributed. Apologies for my tardiness; it's a long story!

### 2. Dr Martin Belsham

Martin joined the practice in 1991, having previously worked in a hospital environment where he had developed a special interest in drugs: he has completed a 2 years postgraduate course on substance abuse.

Drug services in Thetford were not at all good in the early 90s and so Martin, along with others, decided to set up a new regimen that would go on to see a marked improvement in the treatment of addicts. At this time the town was an amphetamine and heroin hub, and Martin is rightly proud to be able to say that in the 15 years that he ran the new service there had not been a single death from substance abuse.

But, as has happened before in the NHS, a proven system was 'rationalised' and the service was then commissioned away to another provider; and then subsequently to another, and once again after that! Sadly, none of the replacement services has managed to keep a clean sheet and it was no surprise to hear that the patients involved do not like what has happened.

The generally held belief is that abstinence is the best policy, but this may not be the best aim and it is surely better to try and keep people safe. Running the clinic meant Martin was able to talk to addicts and find out about their life, which had often involved abuse in early life, both physical and mental, violence and criminality. Some of the life stories would make your hair stand on end, and it is not until you have heard and understood people that you begin to understand why they are abusing themselves with drugs. Of course, there is not always an obvious reason, some people have an addictive personality and are unable to stop themselves. Some addictions are triggered by a life event, while others may be vulnerable because of a lack of parental control in their youth. Addicts often cite a lack of love in their life and drugs give them that feeling, or 'rush.'

Addicts are at their most vulnerable upon leaving the hospital environment, where they have been cleared of drugs, cared for and monitored closely, only to return to exactly the position they had been in before their hospitalisation. This scenario will tend to repeat itself and can eventually lead to the death of the patient; there is only so much the body can take. In Martin's view it is much better to use maintenance medication, where the patient can be monitored and encouraged to change their life.

The biggest change in drug habits of late has been the increased use of cannabis. Another interesting fact is that heroin is the only drug that has an antidote, methadone, which is used to wean addicts off the more dangerous drug. In order to recover from an addiction, other than a heroin addiction, it requires that the addict stop taking drugs altogether.

At this point Martin was thanked for his fascinating presentation, an eye opener for all of us.

### 3. Staff changes

Debbie, the diabetes nurse, has left the practice for a job at the Norfolk & Norwich Hospital.

Alice, the asthma nurse, has also departed for pastures new; closer to home.

A new GP will be joining the practice in April, as a partner in SLS.

#### 4. Complaints, Significant Events & Compliments – Annual Review

**Complaints:** a total of 18 complaints were logged in 2019, and while there is no room complacency at the surgery, this is not a high number when one considers the number of patients treated. These complaints covered a wide range of issues and no one aspect of the service provided by the practice stood out. The surgery is however always looking to improve and learn, so a number of changes have been made:

- Urinalysis Audit has been completed and the surgery policy/protocol changed.
- Revisions have been made to the advertising of changes that affect multiple patients. Not all patients are regular users of the practice and the future will see more use made of social media and leaflets being produced.
- There will be further publications and patient information produced so that charges for private services are better understood.
- Breast feeding awareness amongst staff has increased.
- Changes at Reception, and in the training of receptionists with regard to information taking, has improved awareness of the possibility that a patient may be suffering a serious illness but is failing to disclose or is unable to articulate the fact.

**Significant Events:** a total of 12 significant events were logged in 2019, 2 of which are still being investigated. The one issue that cropped up more than others was the handling of sharps (needles), and the following learning has taken from these incidents:

- Needles with special safety caps are now being procured by the surgery.
- Complaints have been written to an outside service provider regarding the storage of used sharps in surgery premises.
- New protocols are in place regarding 3-way checks for child immunisations.
- Staff now take immediate action to stop any breach of confidentiality when systems fail or have been taken away.

**Compliments:** a total of 29 compliments have been received in 2019, and they cover staff in all areas of the practice. Pretty much everybody got a mention, well done all.

#### 5. Other Business

- a) Further to the **Patient Satisfaction Survey** results (see previous minutes): the practice achieved above average ratings in the last survey though marks were down this time; they were down for everybody. The surgery is happy enough and received positive comments about the waiting area improvements at School Lane.
- b) Nurse **Anna**, by encouragement and not a little persuasiveness, has managed to increase the number of health screenings taking place at the surgery.
- c) Patients will soon be able to arrange for **holiday vaccinations** online.
- d) **Prostate screening:** the Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test is available from the surgery, but patients have to request for it to be carried out.

There is a new prostate screening test due to be introduced that can be done in the patient's home, though the surgery has not yet gained funding for it. Finances mean that not all new treatments are affordable, and the PSA is not a routine test.

- e) It was suggested the PRG organise a get together with representatives of the patient groups attached to the other surgeries that make up the Breckland Alliance of GP Surgeries, perhaps in the autumn? This would be a chance to network and act as an idea's session for Breckland.

**NEXT MEETING: Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> February, 7.00 pm at School Lane Surgery.**