

Why Did We Need To Change The Way Our GP Practices Work?

The document below was written in November 2013. This summarised how we all felt about life in our individual practices and why we wanted to change. Many of the plans mentioned in the latter section of the document are not still on our agenda and we have since altered our vision statement. But these have been left in this document so it can be seen as part of our journey.

Document on a Case for Change in General Practice November 2013

This document is to provide a brief overview of the reasons that seven practices in the Wyre Forest have decided to work towards a merger. The following practices are looking to merge as one:

- Stourport Health Centre
- York House Medical Centre
- The Medical Centre, Bewdley
- Forest Glades Medical Centre
- Kidderminster Health Centre
- Hagley Medical Centre
- Church Street Surgery

What do we do well now?

Wyre Forest is represented by 12 practices that all have a proven track record for providing excellent medical care.

- Our patients like their GP surgeries rating them well above the national average in annual surveys.
- Our patients have excellent community care with a virtual ward and admission prevention team.
- Practices in the Wyre Forest work very hard on caring for people at the end of their life allowing more patients to stay at home at this time than anywhere else in the whole country..
- The practices of the Wyre Forest have very high scores for QOF - a measure of how well we look after patients with long term conditions.
- Our patients are less likely to be admitted to hospital than in many other parts of the country - in the Wyre Forest we perform in the top 10% in the country for this.

So why change a service that is working?

Increasing Demand for Medical Services:

- Our patient population is changing, on average they are getting older and are living with more long term medical conditions. The number of times a patient needs to see a doctor every year rises as they get older. Patients who have several long term medical problems may be increasingly frail and need more care as a consequence.
- The expectation is that Practices will try and care for patients in their own homes where possible and not admit them to hospital. This involves working as part of large teams to enable coordinated care.
- Demand for Medical services increases every year. For example a review of some of our practices has shown we have 28 % more diabetic patients to look after than four years ago. See graph A on last page.
- We also have been able to show that the number of people attending our surgeries to see doctors and nurses has increased 27 % over the last 5 years See Graph B on last page.
- The number of GPs available to deliver the service is expected to be less than needed in future. This was highlighted in a national workforce planning audit by Deloitte in 2012.

Increasing Complexity in Medical Care:

- The medical world is becoming far more complex, most GPs and nurses now have at least one area they specialise in. Often the development and education for these roles is not possible in small organisations.
- Increasingly there is an expectation that practices will deliver services for more of the week and from better premises.
- The difficulties of running a clinical service organisation are considerable and growing as practices need to respond to the requirements of The National Institute for Clinical excellence, NHS England, Care Quality Commission and the Wyre Forest Clinical Commissioning Group – all in an increasingly challenging financial environment.
- There are strong demands in terms of the skills and knowledge required to safely provide medical care. Increasing complexity of employment law and the wider responsibilities for the health and safety of both staff and patients, combine with the general responsibilities of being a public service provider.
- Generalism is no longer sufficient. The ability, through economies of scale, to exploit specialism, both clinically and organisationally, is required to meet these challenges.

Ensuring Workforce Capacity and Competency

- GPs and practice staff are now expected to work until they are 68. This is a long period to work in small practices without any career structure. There is already a “long hours culture” and now we face outside pressures for even longer opening periods. Currently most staff can retire in their early 60s and are already feeling the strain when they get to that age.

As a result of all the above GPs in seven of the Wyre Forest practices have concluded their provision of primary care cannot continue in its present form.

What are the opportunities with a merger of the seven practices?

Maintain the High Quality of Care in The Wyre Forest

- We feel that the essence of excellent primary care in Wyre Forest is the individual contact between the patients in most need and a GP they know best. We hope to be able to protect this by concentrating our resources more effectively in a bigger partnership.
- To help us continue to provide a good service against the back drop of increasing demand and limited medical and nursing staff, we need to work in different ways to help patients get the care they need. Examples of this might include running combined clinics for patients with ill health or offering bigger group education sessions targeting patients with specific conditions.
- At the moment clinicians are expected to try and perform many different roles within a practice. This makes it hard to step back and assess the true quality of the service. By becoming more specialised within a larger practice clinicians will be able to focus on the quality of care and ensure it matches patients' needs.

Organisational Resilience

- We can develop a team of support staff and managers to underpin our organisation, ensuring that staff can flourish and deliver safe and effective care within an environment that meets all outside requirements and regulation. For instance we could have a specific manager for human resources for the whole business.
- Other service industries have achieved efficiencies and improved outcomes through organisational restructure. With a priority focus of patient care, through restructure, we feel primary care can be delivered more effectively in terms of both cost and outcome.
- We believe we are best placed to provide high quality care for our patients. Through a merger we will be a more robust and developed organisation, better able to deal with challenges that might emerge in the NHS as other providers potentially compete with us to provide health care locally.

Economies of Scale

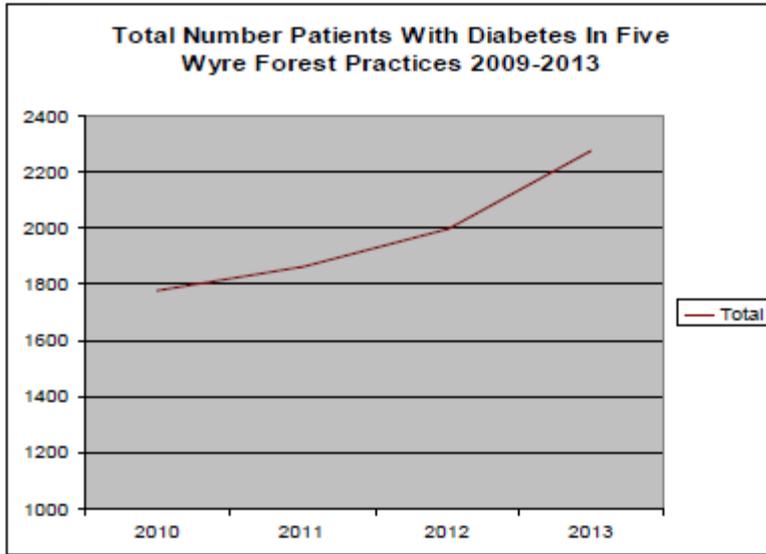
- We can provide a career structure for GPs and all practice staff, enabling them to develop within one organisation, working in different roles and developing different skill sets as they progress through their careers. This will encourage staff retention when forecast clinical work force demographics shows a reducing, ageing clinical work force
- We can focus properly on the quality of care. Each area of care can have one lead clinician and manager whose responsibility it is to ensure the delivery of a high quality, effective service.
- For example a lead for respiratory conditions could focus solely on this for the whole of Wyre Forest and ensure that patients with asthma all have appropriate clinical care.
- We can look to provide services that benefit whole populations rather than just those on a single practice list. For instance screening for ill health in populations that normally struggle to engage with medical services such as the homeless.

Opportunities to Expand Services

- We can develop new ways of helping people with long term medical conditions. A larger practice will allow us to develop teams of specialist nurses and doctors to look after patients, for example a diabetic team to oversee all the needs of patients who have diabetes.
- We can come together to make bigger investments in buildings / equipment and staff to develop as an organisation and provide a wider range of services to our patients. For example some larger practices in other parts of the UK now run X-ray clinics and have hospital outpatient clinics running from within the practice.
- The Future
- Over the coming months, as we undertake this exciting development, we will fully engage with stake holders including patient representatives, commissioners, staff within the 7 practices, and other local GPs. This will help ensure we create an organisation able to achieve our agreed vision for a merged Wyre Forest Practice.
- Our vision for a merged Wyre Forest partnership is “Meeting our patients’ needs through high quality care.”

We mean every word of this statement and all the practices coming together are completely committed to making this a reality.

Graph A



Graph B

