

Surgery News

We've had our new telephone system for just over a year now, but we are still finding new things that it can do. A recent accidental discovery made shortly after control of the system had been linked into our main computer is going to help the doctors and nurses here do more consultations without having to bring patients in to the surgery.

The discovery was a complete fluke and has even surprised the company which supplied our telephones. It all came about when Dr O'Reilly was on our land line, speaking to a patient who had rung in on her mobile. Dr O'Reilly's wife happened to text him at the same time and as well as getting the peculiar beeping that you sometimes hear when you are on the 'phone and a text message comes through to a nearby mobile, he noticed a strange shadowy picture on his computer screen.

This only lasted for a few seconds but it was long enough for him to realise that it was actually the patient's sitting-room that he could see. Our telephone system was somehow triggered by the incoming text message into picking up a signal from the camera in the lady's mobile. The picture was very poor quality, but identifiable nonetheless.

We ended up doing a lot of tests and investigative work with our telephone company – that is why you might have seen lights on at "The Hollies" late at night and at weekends recently – and the outcome is that they have worked out how the presence of two separate mobile signals causes our main computer to pick up these images.

Apparently the angle at which the two transmitters send the mobile signals is critical in dictating what quality of picture we pick up. This aspect needs a lot of work to make the system properly usable but we hope that before long our doctors and nurses will be able to sit in their rooms actually seeing sore throats, rashes etc in real-time and life-sized on their computer screen without the need for patients to be anywhere near a computer or web-cam. They could be at work, out in their car or even away on holiday. As long as there is a mobile 'phone transmitter situated roughly at the critical angle we should be able to have a look at the problem and make a diagnosis. That's progress for you.

Not such good news on the prescription charge front I'm afraid. The payment per item, having been held at £7.20 for two years, is going up to £7.40 from the beginning of April. If you are on a lot of medication, don't despair though. The annual pre-payment certificate charge has been held at £104, making it even better value. If you have more than one item a month, please do ask for details about this either here or at your pharmacy. Incidentally, the certificate can be ordered over the telephone or via the internet and payment can be made by instalments. There is also a quarterly certificate available for £29.10 which is still good value.

It seems pretty unfair that we are going to pay even more for our prescriptions here in England when Scotland has just announced that charges there will be abolished, just as they have been in Wales and Northern Ireland. Even reminding myself that many prescription items cost an awful lot more than the monthly charge doesn't always stop me feeling that we are a bit hard done-by.

Whilst on the subject of prescriptions, if you have joined the Repeat Dispensing scheme, please don't forget that when you collect the last month's worth of medication from your pharmacy, you'll need to ask us to produce another batch of prescriptions so that your supply continues uninterrupted. Also, don't be too surprised if at that stage we ask you to come in for a medication review before the new batch is sent out. We still need to check regularly that your overall health indicators such as blood pressure are as they should be.

On a much more positive note, I've been having a sneak preview of our new website this morning. Richard, our Assistant Manager, has been beaver away at it over the last few weeks and it is now taking proper

shape. I must admit that I'm really impressed with the way it is coming out. It contains a lot of useful health information as well as links to a number of other NHS sites, and we are all hoping that it will make it much easier for you to look things up, make appointments, order prescriptions etc from the comfort of your own home. That should take the pressure off our telephone lines, helping us to improve access and service levels, which can only be a good thing.

Will the monthly "Surgery News" be on the website? Of course it will! Along with many back issues.

Hugh Cronin
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