

Surgery News

It seems this year that every time we think we are through the worst of winter along comes either another really cold spell or a few days of heavy rain. I've already used up my annual allowance of salt on de-icing the car park this year and I dread to think what this quarter's bill for heating the surgery will be. Maybe by the time you read this we really will be heading into a nice warm spring. And pigs might fly!

Talking of pigs, a new bit of European legislation comes into force this month which is good news for local pet owners and which is going to have a fairly dramatic effect on the surgery. From the first of the month, GPs who have been qualified for at least five years are permitted to treat animals as well as people.

This is excellent news for the practice because as the government seeks more savings in its fight to reduce the budget deficit, it is squeezing GPs' income severely. There isn't a veterinary service in the village so we can fill this gap and capitalise on the new rules. Veterinary work will not be covered under the NHS of course, so the income we generate by looking after small domestic animals will help subsidise some of the services such as phlebotomy and smoking cessation support which had been at risk because of impending cuts.

We are very lucky in that Dr Cavenagh has a keen interest in cats and dogs – he has been known to lay hands on them as a favour when visiting elderly patients over the years – and Dr Hunt has always been very strong on reptiles. With Dr Nambi also having advanced qualifications in minor surgery, we are in a strong position to get the new service started immediately.

If you don't think it is a good idea to mix people and pets, and I'm sure that some of you won't, please don't worry. We know that some people have problems with animals – perhaps because they are allergic to them or, in a few cases, they just don't like them – so the pet-care service will be kept totally separate from normal surgery sessions. To achieve this, on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons we will no longer be seeing human patients in the surgery which will instead be opened up for veterinary use. If demand turns out to be great enough, we are considering also offering a Saturday morning home-visiting service for local farmers who keep livestock, but this will have to be carefully thought through over the next few weeks.

If you would like to register your pets so that we can start looking after them, please ask at reception for a Form E384a "Registration of Small Animals" and we will get them onto our list. We are limiting pet numbers to one thousand initially, and it will be on a "first come, first served" basis, so I would advise you to get in quickly.

The reverse of this coin is that the legislation also allows vets to start dealing with minor human ailments. I think that they always have in remote areas anyway, but the new rules mean that they can make it official. You won't be able to register yourself on a vet's list as they will only be dealing with things like coughs, colds, earache and warts etc, but if there is a vet's surgery close to where you live and we are short of appointments, they might just be able to see you sooner than we can.

Next, I'm afraid we are asking for everyone's help again. I'm not sure if it has been the bad weather, but the number of requests for home visits by doctors has been exceptionally high since Christmas and many of them have not really been appropriate. The doctors have now decided that in future they will be assessing every visit request before agreeing to come out. The receptionists will make a note of people asking for a visit and a doctor will then decide if it is appropriate, which may well involve ringing the patient before coming out.

Rest assured that the doctors will always visit if it is clinically necessary; that is, if someone is genuinely too ill to come to the surgery. However, please note that they won't do home visits for social reasons. Bad weather, transport difficulties or having other things to do are not reasons for a doctor to come out to you.

It's worth noting that there are a number of disadvantages to home visits. Firstly, you will almost certainly be seen sooner if you come to the surgery as except in emergencies, visits have to wait until the end of surgery.

Visits are also a very inefficient way of using doctors' time. Usually in the time that it takes to make one visit, up to half a dozen people could be seen here. Additionally, don't forget that at the surgery we have the equipment etc that is needed for carrying out tests and for initiating treatment that might be urgently needed.

For those of you who have access to the internet, there is a good article about home visits on the BBC's website. The link is http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/support/talking_to_your_doctor/home_homevisits.shtml. It is written by a doctor and explains the situation far better than I can. It will also show you that this is an issue for all surgeries and it isn't just us being awkward. Thank you in anticipation of your help.

Hugh Cronin

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