

Surgery News

The Chancellor giveth and the Chancellor taketh away. Beer might be down by a penny in the budget – and the proposed increase in duty cancelled – but I'm afraid that prescription charges went up by 20 pence to £7.85 per item from 1st April. Dare I say that the government's priorities seem slightly odd?

There is, however, some good news to go with this. The charges for Prescription Pre-payment Certificates, which benefit anyone who needs more than 4 items in three months or 14 items in one year, have been frozen. They remain at £29.10 for three months and £104.00 for a full year and can be paid by debit or credit card or, for an annual certificate by direct debit over ten months.

If you would like to apply for a Pre-payment Certificate you can do it by telephone on 0300 330 1341, or on the internet at <http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/healthcosts/2131.aspx>. (I hope that this link works okay as the last one I put in Surgery News didn't for some patients.)

I'm sure that a lot of people will have been alarmed by recent reports of measles epidemics around Swansea and Middlesbrough. They have left hundreds of children very ill, with quite a few needing hospital treatment. Parents being put off the MMR vaccine a few years ago by totally false stories of risks associated with it, has led to many children being left unprotected against this horrible disease which can cause brain damage and even death. Families in those areas are now having to cope with the consequences.

If your children haven't had the MMR jab – for whatever reason –*please* reconsider the situation now before it is too late. Contact your surgery and make an appointment to get them protected. You could save your children and yourself a lot of distress and will probably help to prevent a very nasty epidemic in north east Essex.

Here at the surgery we are trying to get to grips with all the changes to Primary Care (which is our particular bit of the NHS), that came into effect from 1st April. Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) have been abolished and their functions taken over by a veritable list of organisations – the NHS Commissioning Board (the name of which has already been changed to “NHS England”), North East Essex Clinical Commissioning Group, the NHS Commissioning Support Unit, the NHS Property Company – even Essex County Council's Public Health Department gets in on the act. As you can probably guess, working out whom we answer to, and who to ask for help with for various parts of our work now is causing some head-scratching. I suppose that the dust will settle soon but for the time being, just have a go at working out how many NHS employees it takes to get you treated in hospital, let alone to change a light bulb. I reckon you'll need a calculator.

Going back to the subject of jabs for a moment, summer is coming – allegedly, at least – and some people's thoughts will no doubt be turning to holidays abroad. Please don't forget that if you opt for a holiday that requires you to have travel immunisations you need to get them done in good time to ensure that your immunity to various exotic nasties has kicked in before you travel. For some jabs, this can take a few weeks, so don't leave it until the last minute. Immediately you know where you are going, if you contact us one of our nurses will work out what you need and when to have it. If you happen to get a fantastic last minute deal, which means that you should have jabs but are told that they won't take effect in time to protect you, please don't shoot the messenger. It's worth checking with your travel agent what health risks you might be taking before handing over your cash for that dream back-packing holiday leaving tomorrow for somewhere remote in the Far East.

The other thing to bear in mind is that malaria tablets and many travel vaccines don't come free on the NHS. They are private services which have to be paid for. Again, please don't blame us for that as we don't write the rule books. (Who does, since all the changes, I wonder?) We will let you know how much your jabs etc will cost and if

they are expensive, might ask for payment in advance. For some holidays these hidden extras might come to hundreds of pounds, so you do need to budget for them.

Anyway, have fun planning your holiday, wherever it's going to be. I've always wanted to go to Burma.

Hugh Cronin

Practice Manager, Great Bentley Surgery