

Surgery News

This month's news is going to be dominated by requests for help, so it's not "news" at all I'm afraid

Firstly – and most importantly – a plea for everyone to help the local PCT keep within its drugs budget. I hasten to add that I am not asking anyone to do without something that they genuinely need. All I ask is that people order medication responsibly, only asking for what they will actually use in the coming month.

This probably sounds a really peculiar request to most of you. However, it is evident from the mountain of medication that is returned unused to pharmacies across Tendring and Colchester that huge amounts are being ordered every month that are completely surplus to requirements. About five million pounds worth of drugs have to be incinerated each year locally. This terrible waste means that many people are having to wait longer for treatment, including life-changing operations such as hip replacements. Other improvements to healthcare services cannot be brought in as soon as they might, due to lack of funds.

In some cases, the waste occurs because patients simply don't take a particular medication any more, never tell their GP, and inexplicably carry on ordering it. This has been proved time and again when huge carrier bags full of expensive items are returned for destruction having been found when someone is having a clear-out. Be in no doubt, medicines which are returned cannot be reused. They have to be destroyed regardless of how much they originally cost the NHS – which means you and me through our taxes.

Evidence suggests that even more often medication is ordered unnecessarily because patients have already built up sufficient stock at home to keep them going for months. Please have a look in your cupboard before you order next time and only ask for what you actually need to see you through the next month. Don't be tempted to return surplus stocks of things you still use though – see above! Keep it and use it.

Finally on this subject, please don't ask for a prescription for things that you can buy cheaply over the counter. If something like paracetamol is done on prescription, it costs the NHS many times more than the few pence which it will cost you at your pharmacy or supermarket. The NHS can't afford it.

Next a plea to mobile 'phone users. Unbelievably, some people leave their 'phones on when they are with a doctor or nurse, then expect to take a call during the consultation. Sorry, but this simply mustn't happen. Apart from it being exceptionally rude (an old-fashioned concept I know, but I'm an old-fashioned type of bloke), it eats into the limited consultation time that is allocated to each patient. If the appointment then runs over its normal time, patients due in later are delayed, leading to frustration in the waiting room, people being late for work or other appointments, and surgeries that are far too long for safety and sanity's sake.

Thirdly, it's back to that old chestnut, dental treatment. Putting it as simply as possible, doctors don't do dental. If you have a problem with your teeth or gums you need to see your dentist who is the highly-trained, true expert. This means during the night and at weekends, as well as during surgery hours.

During normal hours, if you haven't got a dentist or can't get an appointment, please ring the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Dental Helpline on 0845 0833 337. They do exactly what their name suggests.

The number to use out of hours is 0845 602 5238. This emergency service is available 6.30pm-8am, Monday to Friday, and from 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm, weekends and Bank Holidays. People grumble that dentistry costs money and whilst I'm really sorry about it, that's a national issue to take up with your MP.

Lastly, and on a sombre note, in the sad event that a relative who was registered with the practice dies and you want to obtain the death certificate, please don't just turn up at the surgery expecting that it will have

been done. This can lead to frustration and upsetting delays at an already difficult time. Please ring the surgery first to check when it will be available.

Unfortunately, it often isn't as simple as a GP just confirming death and writing the certificate. For a start, we may not even know that your relative has died until you tell us. Also, sometimes the only GP who can by law complete the death certificate won't be on duty, or the cause of death will not be known. In either case, the duty doctor might have to take instruction from the Coroner which can take a couple of days, especially if the final decision is that we must wait for an absent GP to return. After you have rung us, if the certificate isn't already prepared, I promise that we will do all we can to help by sorting it out as soon as possible.

Hugh Cronin
Practice Manager