

The Newsletter of Heathgate Medical Practice – January 2019

SPECIAL EDITION

Welcome to this special edition of our Practice newsletter. Written this time by Dr Tony Palframan, it contains an important message.

Thirty two years ago I was asked by Doctors Joan Bellamy and John Sampson to become the new third member of the clinical team. The building was rising from the heathland of Poringland and there was a great desire to move forward with patient care and services. I like to think I was asked to join the Practice because of my varied experience before I decided to become a GP.



I well remember the weekend in September moving the few meagre bits of furniture from the old surgery on Long Road into Heathgate. The building looked spartan but was bright and airy and graced with the waiting room mural that still exists today. I am not sure how many of you will remember the wildlife pond and butterfly gardens. Our back office had one desk. There were no computers and limited equipment.



We started looking at how we could improve the care of our 4,500 patients (today this has increased to 9,300). We started by reviewing everyone's Lloyd George records. These were a card envelope with a few sheets of hand written clinical notes and any correspondence from the hospital. We summarised each one and from these summaries developed an index system of the illnesses patients had.



In this way we were able to focus on chronic conditions such as asthma and diabetes. This is commonplace now but then was considered innovative. We started well person clinics and developed protocols for good care. In those days we still did our own on-call cover. Whilst not usually busy, our weekends started at 9am on a Friday and finished at 6am on a Monday.



I relied on my wife Karen to be at home in the evenings and weekends to take messages and then get in touch using a bleep. It was some years before we got a mobile phone which was about the size and weight of two house bricks.

The phone coverage where I live now in Rockland St Mary hasn't improved much in the last twenty five years either!

Dr Joan retired and we were joined by Dr Claire Thirkell and later Dr Jo Gilson who had been doing some sessional work at the Practice before. Dr Andrea Meyerhoff then came along as our fifth partner and the team went through a long period of stability. Many of you will remember Myra who was our long-standing Practice Manager who retired nearly twenty years ago. Garry our current Manager joined a year or so later.

The team has expanded beyond recognition. We started with a Manager and an Assistant Manager and three part time Receptionists. We had no Practice Nurse at that time. There are now more teams than we had staff then.

So what has changed in the last thirty years apart from the people?

Paper records have all but disappeared and we rely totally on electronic records. Blood tests and X-rays are requested electronically and the results come back the same way. Referrals and clinic letters no longer go by mail. Prescriptions are available electronically at the chemist within a few seconds of writing them. Computer records are searchable and have an added safety aspect that was never available with paper records.

We no longer do our own on-call (evening and weekend cover) and this service is undertaken by 111 and iC24. This is both good and bad. Not having to work seventy, eighty or more hours a week is a lifesaver for us. However, the downside is that we know our patients. On two occasions I was called in a panic by distraught people and I was able to go straight there because not only did I know who they were, but I knew where they lived.

When I first joined the Practice the medicines available to us were very limited. I remember making up liquids of dubious value in the dispensary. Hip replacements were just being performed, surgery for heart disease was rare and dangerous. Today, medicines are plentiful and surgery of all kinds is common. But with all these advances come increased risk – medicines have side effects and any surgery is not without risk.

The one thing that has changed beyond recognition though is the bureaucracy which can be overwhelming. It would not be an understatement to say that our lives are dominated by form filling. Some are designed to fund the Practice, others to say that the Government is fulfilling election promises and others.....who knows why we have to fill them in? Sometimes it would be just good to allow us to get on with the job.

So what hasn't changed in the last three decades? The patients. Some have moved on, sadly some have died. The number of registered patients at the Practice has more than doubled and I no longer know everybody, and that's a shame.

So why this reminiscing? Because I have decided to hang up my stethoscope and enjoy my garden, do more birdwatching and take more photographs. I am not leaving the NHS completely though as I do have a role in Norfolk and Waveney plans for the NHS and I hope my experience will inform good decision making.

I will be finishing clinics at Heathgate on 22nd March before taking a short holiday at the end of the month. I will be in Practice on Wednesday 20th March, with my door open with no booked appointments to say my goodbyes to patients. Please feel free to pop by and pop in! I will be leaving clinical matters to my colleagues that day but it would be great to see you if you are passing.

These last two pictures are of me overseeing the final fix of my new consulting room in 1986 and then taking up my position in the room I still consult in today!

It has been a privilege to care for you over my 30 plus years and may I wish you good health.

Tony

