

## **County Councillor's Notes – August 2006**

The Health Service's £800 + million overspend nationally will now affect us locally. The Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust (let's call it the PCT), has been instructed to save £27.9 million by March next year. This is around 10% of its budget.

The PCT are the people who pay GPs for Doctor's services and who pay the hospitals to care for patients. They have considerable power of GPs because they are the main way Doctors get paid.

Why is there a cut back and why is it so big? The PCT serves a population of 244,552 but is funded by the Government for 77,452 less than this (equal to about 65% of those who live in Cambridge City). The missing money, which properly should have been spent in South Cambridgeshire, is diverted mainly to the north of England and Scotland. Given this shortfall, it is not surprising that the PCT should find itself overspent beginning in 2003/4. The pay rises to Doctors in General Practice and in hospitals has also made the deficit bigger. Our PCT needs to show savings of £21.9 million by Christmas this year.

This is going to have a serious impact on patient care. For example, each GP Surgery must reduce its hospital admissions by 12 a month and its first-outpatient appointments by 38 a month. Mental Health suffered a £3 million cut-back earlier this year and will have to face yet another cut of £760,000. (At the time of writing, I am still waiting for a reply to my letter demanding an explanation from the Secretary of State for the first cut. I sent that demand in February and it's now August.) There will be ward closures and some hospital staff face redundancy. Patients going to Accident and Emergency at Addenbrookes will find less of them are admitted into the main hospital. There will be a 50% reduction in "bed-days" and a 50% cut in re-admissions. If you're going for an outpatient follow-up, be prepared to wait a lot longer because there will be 24,680 less of them. The list goes on: Addenbrookes will lose £14 million this year and £17 million next and there will be a cut of £6.1 million in non-emergency surgery. Again there is to be a planned cut by 1/3 of non-delivery spells in Maternity Hospitals. 90% of the PCT's commissioning money goes to Addenbrookes who will be seriously affected. As a County Council we are also very concerned about the £770,000 which the PCT pays towards our work with disabled people as we are in line to lose it.

The impact on patient care depends centrally on whether local Doctors can pick up the workload formerly taken by hospitals. So the co-operation of GPs is vital to ensuring that patients do not suffer too much. Remember that the PCT holds the purse strings on Doctor's contracts and so can provide incentives to make things happen.

There is a "not to be prescribed" list of drugs and this will be extended. Branded drugs will frequently be replaced by "generic" drugs which do the same job but come in cheap packaging.

Together with providing less health care, the Government has an agenda to get people living longer, healthier lives. Recently I attended one of their seminars where they set out their aims for getting people to take more exercise (10,000\* footsteps a day), to

eat healthier foods (more fresh vegetables and fruit – and less sugar and fat) and to stop smoking. One of the PCTs new demands for patients waiting for surgery is “stop before your op”. Be warned, if you smoke and you’re on the waiting list for any kind of operation, you will be told that smoking must stop, and must stop well before your admission date. This is good for you and good for the waiting list.

One of the reasons the Government gives for taking our health funding away is that in South Cambridgeshire we have the longest life-expectancy in the UK, and we’re generally healthy and fit. Put another way, we’re subsidising the ill-health of those who undermine their own quality of life by eating badly, smoking, and going everywhere on four wheels.

*\* that’s about 5 miles.*

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