

NHS Highland Briefing Service Issues Isle of Mull – July 2014

GP Vacancies and GP Out of Hours Cover

1 GP Out of Hours arrangements Isle of Mull – Current situation

The 3 GP Practices on Mull provide services under the national GMS contract and as such are independent businesses responsible for delivering their contracted services.

However under the national GMS contract, GP Practices have the option of opting out of providing “out of hours” service, from 2004, for their practice population and as such responsibility for this provision transfers to the NHS Board.

The out of hours service for Tobermory and Salen GP Practices (including hospital cover) had previously been shared under a joint rota between both Practices.

The Bunessan Practice provides out of hours services for its own practice population.

1.1 Tobermory

The Tobermory Practice has stated it can no longer support such an onerous on-call demand re availability 1 in 2 or 1 in 3 and wish to only participate in a rota on a one day a week day (not weekend) basis. It has therefore exercised its right to opt out of this service which due to the contractual notice period would see the Practice from January 2015 no longer providing a GP out of hour’s service.

With regard to the Mull hospital contract the Practice has also served notice on that contract which will see their input into the hospital cease from September.

1.2 Salen

The Salen Practice has indicated at this time that it does not intend to opt out of providing GP out of hours service for its practice population. It also intends to continue to provide hospital service input based on its current commitment.

The Practice has, however, indicated that it cannot fill the gap left by the Tobermory Practice to provide a 24/7 out of hour’s commitment for the Tobermory patients, nor can the Salen practice cover the gap left by the Tobermory doctors in the rota for the Mull and Iona Hospital every second night and weekend.

One of the GPs in the Salen Practice is retiring in September 2014 and the Salen Practice has already recruited a replacement who will take up post in October 2014.

1.3 Bunessan

The 2 GPs in the Bunessan Practice, Ross of Mull, will be leaving in September 2014. As the GPs have resigned and not made any alternative arrangements to appoint new partners the responsibility for service provision will transfer to the Board. The Board will lead recruitment to the Practice. The Board will ensure there is no interruption to the level of health services that patients receive from the Practice by providing locum cover until a permanent appointment is made

2 **Context**

NHS Highland has been facilitating and supporting a discussion with the 3 GP Practices over the last 2 months to consider alternatives, support recruitment in order to provide a sustainable service in and out of hours provided on the island by Island GPs. Other alternatives were discussed and examined included the Islay model this was extensively referenced and considered.

Unfortunately no agreement could be reached across the 3 Practices and this was confirmed at a meeting on 18 July 2014 with the GPs.

In light of this NHS Highland has a statutory responsibility to inform patients who are registered with the Tobermory Practice that the Practice has exercised its contractual right to opt out of out of hours. All patients have therefore had a letter informing them of this and arrangements to provide them with more information and to collect their views and feedback at an initial public drop in events in Tobermory on 21 August 2014 from 12.30pm until 7 pm.

As a result of the impending Buinessan vacancy, NHS Highland will also be arranging a similar public drop in event with the Buinessan community. This will provide information on the interim GP cover arrangements and capture their thoughts and views on providing a sustainable service in and out of hours. Dates to be finalised but this is planned for August.

3 **Future Service Provision**

This is the first time a GP practice on an island has exercised their right to opt out of the “out of hours” service and then reduce their commitment to that service. The GPs who remain “non opted out” on the island are willing to work within their own “commitments” to provide a service for Mull.

NHS Highland will confirm its commitment to provide the residents of Mull with an appropriate service in and out of hours. However, there is across Scotland a significant challenge in recruiting and retaining GP’s in remote communities exacerbated by onerous on-call commitments. The Scottish Government recognise this and are supporting pilots in other areas of alternative arrangements to see if they can be applied elsewhere.

Argyll and Bute CHP will be putting in place a formal project process mirroring the arrangements developed on Islay and complying with SHC CEL 2010 to ensure full community engagement and involvement in developing a sustainable service. Community representatives will be identified and invited to become members of the Project Steering Group.

A number of material issues have been raised by the GPs and community which will inform this work these include:

Question What and when would we be advertising Buinessan and what happens until GP appointment

Response Service will be provided by locums until appointment

We would be advertising the practice to appoint GPs with candidates to demonstrate how they will provide a sustainable OOHs service

Question Why are Tobermory GPs opting out and what GP service will we provide

Response Background re national contract – Tobermory GPs are not prepared to continue 24/7 service - entitled to opt out

We believe solution to service must be on the island and involve 3 practices to provide GP out of hours service

First time an island GP has opted out (other island GPs accept geography/remoteness context and limited alternatives)

The service model may well be different but it is not known yet – this has a link with Bunessan recruitment

NHS Highland has responsibility to provide GP out of hours service based on need/demand (GP OOHs activity on Mull is very low - 61 home visits and 88 appointments per year) <3 per week).

Question What is the purpose of the drop in events, role of NHS24, First Responder and SAS need another ambulance/paramedic in Tobermory

Response To collect info from public on service they experience

Explain difference of GP out of hours to SAS service

Provide more info on the opt out and ask the public's view on alternatives - e.g. single on-call GP for the Island

Clarify the role and function of NHS24 and SAS and how we work together to provide service (they are attending the drop in)

What communities do to enhance resilience e.g. First Responder Scheme etc

Question Tobermory have a reduced OOHs service

Response Advised that this may be the case and has been the situation in the rest of Scotland for some years. There have been considerable changes on other islands since 2004, particularly Arran, Skye and Western Isles. Argyll & Bute and NHS Highland has been fortunate not to see this until now but it is happening e.g. Islay, Small Isles, Inveraray etc as doctors no longer prepared to provide a sole 24/7 service

This is a link with recruitment to Bunessan

Contacts

Veronica Kennedy, Locality Manager, Oban Lorn & Isles veronica.kennedy@nhs.net

Stephen Whiston, Head of Planning Contracting and Performance stephen.whiston@nhs.net