

## Housing in Derby City

A number of practices in the city contacted us recently to say that they felt they were receiving an increasing number of requests for reports/certificates to support housing applications. John Grenville has had a meeting with Lisa Callow, the Manager of Derby City Council Housing Options. Lisa pointed out that, due to recent changes in legislation and case law, the City Council was receiving more requests for social housing and a greater number of applicants were citing medical problems, among others, in their applications. Lisa also accepted that with the increasing burden of work in her department some members of staff may from time to time be trying to short circuit the pathway that we have previously agreed with the City Council.

We agreed that the pathway would remain unchanged, i.e. Housing Options will gather as much information as they can from applicants and will attempt to make a decision based on that information. Where there is medical information and they do not feel able to make a judgement based on it they will pass the matter on to their medical adviser, Tony Gould. If, and only if, Tony feels that he is unable to make a decision without requesting further information from the applicant's GP he will make that request in writing.

There is a separate issue regarding people who are homeless. This is a much smaller group but the statutory obligations on the City Council are much greater. Lisa agreed that the pathway for these applicants would be the same as for general housing applicants (i.e. requests for reports will come only from Tony Gould). She accepted that the City Council may need to offer a higher fee to ensure faster turnaround. Many homeless applicants are supported by the voluntary sector agencies, such as Housing Aid or the CAB; these organisations may request reports prior to the application being made to the City Council. There is no obligation on practices to provide such reports and they may set their own fees for doing so. In most cases we understand that the voluntary agency should be able to access funding from the Legal Service Commission. John Grenville is seeking a meeting with the Chief Executive of Housing Aid to try and ensure that speculative requests for reports are not made. We will keep

you informed.

If there are practices in the County who are having difficulties with housing authorities, would they please let the office know.

### **RCGP Certificate in the Management of Drug Misuse, Part One**

**Tuesday 9 October 2007, 930-4.30 at Derbyshire Chamber of Commerce Centre, Canal Wharf, Chesterfield S41 1NA**

**Speakers: Dr George Ryan, Dr Michelle Bingham**

Part One of the RCGP Certificate in the Management of Drug Misuse is ideal for GPs working at a generalist level or as part of a shared care scheme. It is also a local requirement for those intending to provide treatment to drug misusers as part of a locally or nationally enhanced service. Pharmacists and nurses must demonstrate completion of an accredited Supplementary Prescribing course to be eligible for this training.

If you are a GP, pharmacist or nurse and wish to qualify for the Part One Certificate you must complete and pass the two e-learning modules available at [www.doctors.net.uk](http://www.doctors.net.uk) or [www.rcgp.org.uk/substancemisuse](http://www.rcgp.org.uk/substancemisuse) and attend either a local or national accredited training event such as this one. Completion of the e-learning modules is advisable before attending this event, although not essential.

Outline of the day (lunch provided)

Introduction to primary care treatment of drug misusers  
Assessment of a drug user and harm reduction intervention

Safe prescribing in general practice  
Patients with more complex needs.

Derbyshire clinical staff will be given priority to attend and course fees will be paid by the Derbyshire Drug & Alcohol Action Team (DAAT).

Closing date for applications: Friday 21 September.  
**Further details from Kathryn Walker, (DAAT),  
c/o Chief Executive's Dept, County Hall, Matlock.  
Tel: 01629 580000 x 7229.  
[kathryn.walker@derbyshire.gov.uk](mailto:kathryn.walker@derbyshire.gov.uk)**

## Staff who are also patients

It would be unfair to discount potential applicants for jobs in general practice surgeries simply because they are registered with the practice. The BMA's Equal Opportunities Committee has produced general guidance on how doctors can avoid discrimination against any employee, which emphasises common sense precautions such as ensuring that selection for a job is based on the requirements previously set out in the job description. It is clearly not ideal, however, for an individual's doctor to also be that person's employer. Conflicts and difficulties often arise, particularly in terms of patient confidentiality. The risk of this occurring can be diminished if the issues are discussed in advance. Therefore, if a position is offered to someone who is also a patient of the practice, that person should be offered the opportunity to register with another practice.

If, however, the individual wishes to remain with the practice, that decision should be accommodated. In rural areas there may be no reasonable alternative. Advance thought should be given by both parties, however, to the potential difficulties that could arise, for example, if the patient were to need a lot of sick leave and the practice needed verification of illness. In addition, if disciplinary procedures should be invoked, the patient/employee's health record may hold relevant information that is known only to the employer by virtue of being the employee's doctor. In such circumstances, the record should not be used for purposes unrelated to the provision of health care without the individual's consent.

In some exceptional cases raised with the BMA, it seems that some individuals have probably sought jobs in a surgery with a view to altering aspects of their own or their family's medical records, by removing reference to child protection proceedings, for example. Clearly the practice needs to be alert to that possibility.

All staff must be advised about confidentiality and, specifically, that it is totally inappropriate for them to look at the medical records of relatives, neighbours, or friends. All information is confidential and available only to those working in the practice on a strict "need to know" basis. If the employee's relatives themselves are unhappy about the individual potentially having access to the records of an employee's relatives this should be on the same basis as for any other records and should be on grounds of needing to know. It would clearly be inappropriate for a GP to look at the records of an employee's relatives simply to obtain information about the employee.

## Sickness certificates

The LMC has recently had a number of reports about patients asking for Med3 or Med5 sick notes because they have been advised to do so by Job Centre Plus. It is essential that GPs issue sickness certificates only when they are certain that the patient is unable to work. Doctors who breach this principle could find themselves facing a GMC hearing. If you believe that your patient is fit to work and he/she has spun a yarn to an adviser at Job Centre Plus suggesting that he/she is not fit then Job Centre Plus has access to consultant occupational health doctors who can discuss the matter with you.

## Patient Experience Survey

Congratulations to Derbyshire practices – the results indicate that patients are generally satisfied with GPs' hours of availability, and practices should be pleased that the survey demonstrates patients' confidence in general practice.

## Latest advice

In the past month GPC has issued advice on the following topics :

Information leaflet for patients about the GP patient survey.

The relationship between practice based commissioning consortia & LMCs.

Fees for prescribing pharmaceutical products .

Further details of any of these issues are available on application to the LMC office or on the BMA website [www.bma.org.uk](http://www.bma.org.uk)

## How to contact us

Derby & Derbyshire LMC Ltd office is at Norman House, Friar Gate, Derby DE1 1NU. Our telephone number is 01332 210008, fax 01332 341771.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT NOW WE ARE OPERATING AS A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE WE HAVE NEW EMAIL ADDRESSES.**

Our email address is now [office@derbyshirelmc.co.uk](mailto:office@derbyshirelmc.co.uk). The two Practice/PCT Liaison Officers are Melanie Beatham and Kate Lawrence who will continue to liaise with the same North and Southern practices as before the PCT reorganisation. Their email addresses are: [melanie.beatham@derbyshirelmc.co.uk](mailto:melanie.beatham@derbyshirelmc.co.uk) and [kate.lawrence@derbyshirelmc.co.uk](mailto:kate.lawrence@derbyshirelmc.co.uk).