

# All Change for Banbury GP Services

GP services in Banbury are changing as surgeries merge and patients are encouraged to use new technology in place of face to face consultations.

Health bosses say company Principal Medical Ltd (PML) is steering the merger of West Bar and Woodlands practices while Banbury Health Centre patients will be absorbed by all town surgeries. Diane Hedges of Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group told Banburyshire stakeholders' meeting CPN her group had engaged a technology specialist to help practices launch GP Online services to help patients avoid face-to-face appointments.

And she said Horsefair Surgery - which passed into private hands last year - was making 'enormous efforts' to improve.

"Horsefair Surgery has been through some really troubled times. It is the only practice not rated 'good' and we know enormous efforts are being made by the practice to improve."

She said GP recruitment was proving tricky and the cost of locums did not help. She was enthusiastic about the merger of surgeries.

"What we've got here in Banbury is a really innovative solution putting together [these three] practices under the auspices of Principal Medical Ltd and we are now in a place where the CCG has authorised that large contract and PML is working with the practices to go through the various innovations and setting up of companies so we'll end up with one single contract," she said.

"Alongside that we have retained the site at Banbury Health Centre. We have asked that unregistered patients actually follow the normal practice of registering with any practice and practices in Banbury have all agreed. There is a need for enormous change because because of the pressures in primary care and the recruitment issues," said Ms Hedges. "I think these are permanent changes - the move to have practices growing larger and coming together to 'work at scale'."

She said new technology and apps offered different ways of dealing with high volumes of patients. "As a CCG we're supporting 'social prescribing' as a route to give patients another area of exploration if it isn't an actual clinical need.

"We have recently selected a provider who will be working with practices (on GP Online) to see how we can offer alternative means of

patients working with their GP rather than having to go through the face-to-face route, so very much testing different ways for the way patients interact with their GPs and a range of other people. We make sure there is more skill mix alongside GPs, social prescribing, clinical pharmacists, paramedics, nurses. There is a need for permanent change... for the way we do business.”

Cllr Andrew McHugh, former practice manager for Horsefair Surgery, said he thought service for patients in a bigger business unit of conjoined surgeries with a single specialised manager would be improved. He described the changes as ‘a really exciting development’.

NHS England describes social prescribing as a means referring people to ‘services’ instead of medicalised solutions, from art classes to singing groups and walking clubs to gardening. They say it is useful for the lonely and isolated, people with mild mental health issues or with poverty, debt, housing and relationship problems, which impact on health and wellbeing and can prompt repeated visits to GPs or A&Es.

Banbury Guardian at: <https://www.banburyguardian.co.uk/news/all-change-for-banbury-gp-services-1-8638654>

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“What appalling smoke and mirrors. Where does that actually leave the patients who have clinical need? Most of the work I do could not be done on-line – I need to examine patients, huge numbers are elderly and not smartphone users.. People keep banging on about social prescribing – great if there is a service to signpost to (lots have closed because of cuts) but it is an add-on, not instead of medical services.” (Dr. Helen Salisbury, Oxfordshire KONP)