

# SPRING ORCHARD FOVANT

## NEWSLETTER – 47

### January 2017

The threatened snow and ensuing chaos fortunately didn't materialise which is probably very lucky given the winter pressures on the NHS. Does Fovant remain a little oasis in the crisis?? Read on.

#### **GP Bashing**

There seems to be an orchestrated campaign by the Government and the media to blame someone for the current problems within the NHS and this time it's the GPs!! RUBBISH – he said very forcefully. For the last 10 years GP leaders across the country have been warning that not enough doctors are becoming GPs. There are now massive shortages in general practice with about a third of all practices in England reporting vacancies in their ideal numbers of GPs. It gets worse because about 1/3 of the work force is made up with GPs like me – approaching retirement age and who will probably retire in the next 5 years. The Government makes headline statements about recruiting an extra 5000 new posts to GP but a)that is a drop in ocean of what is required b)it takes at least 5 years to train a GP c)they can't get doctors to the parts of the country that are really struggling! Just to put a few figures to try and complete the picture – there are just over 30,000 GPs in country. This has been the number more or less since I started in GP in 1983. However there are now many more part-time GPs – so the actual fulltime equivalent number is much lower than 30 years ago. Our population has risen in the UK from 56 million people in 1983 to an estimated 66M by the end of this year – so fewer GPs are looking after nearly 20% more people. And of course the population is aging and with aging comes increased complexity and frailty. So the job gets harder and more challenging. Add into the mix the enormous explosion in Governmental bureaucracy and the ever increasing number of hurdles that we GPs are required to jump though – none of which improves patient care - and you can understand the pressure in which General Practice finds itself.

However the vast majority of GPs are dedicated, skilled professionals doing everything they can for each and every one of their patients – working long hours and daily going the extra mile to ensure that the health care you receive is the best available to you. I am always in the surgery by 0745 in the morning and rarely leave before 1900 in the evening and many of you will see my car in the car park at some point over the weekend catching up on paperwork or on my way to do a terminal care visit or whatever. I don't mind – I love my job but to suggest that we should be open from 8-8 seven days a week is sheer folly and totally unnecessary. That will make no impact on the struggling hospital service. What is needed is either a complete revamp of the NHS or massive further investment. Again a few facts – in 1988 there were over 300,000 hospital beds available to patients in the UK, in 2014 that figure had decreased to less than 150,000. It's not rocket science to realise that if a hospital gets busy that patients will be lying on trolleys waiting to be transferred to a ward if there are no beds in the hospital. But for a hospital to open up a ward costs a lot of money – its not only the cost of the building, but the nurses and doctors who will need to staff it plus the infrastructure. And this money will not be forth coming from the NHS – the individual hospital will have to come up with the money themselves – usually by making cuts in other services to their local patients. I visit Salisbury hospital most weeks and remain truly impressed by everything they do to give excellent care to my patients but they are struggling – winter pressures are no longer related to winter – they are year round, waiting times for out patient appointments are getting longer similarly for operations, clinics are getting fuller – so when you get to the hospital you'll wait longer and most importantly of all, if you are admitted to hospital as an emergency, the delays in getting you home because of lack of care in the community are becoming scandalous.

So is Fovant a little oasis in all this ?– well yes and no. In this part of south west Wiltshire we are surrounded by wonderfully responsive general practices who all work for the good of the population. We have regular joint meetings and try and ensure that new ideas are implemented and good ideas are shared between the practices. There will be no problem for a patient in any of the local practices in getting an appointment and this of course is not the case elsewhere BUT throughout the country GPs everywhere are working collaboratively and assiduously for their patients. Government must stop bashing GPs and instead be courageous enough to look at the real issue – the NHS in the 21st century itself. It is now nearly 70 years old itself and is no longer fit for purpose.

**Andy Hall**