

Frequently asked questions in relation to the proposed merger of the Huntingdon GP practices

7 April 2017

1. Why are you merging? If there is the same number of doctors how will it be better? Is this just to save money?

The proposed merger is not driven by an attempt to save money. At present the three practices are having difficulty in recruiting salaried GPs and nurses (including practice nurses, minor illness nurses and nurse practitioners) and we are finding that GPs are unwilling to become partners due to the considerable responsibilities of, and investment required in, being a business owner. This is unsustainable going forward. We feel that as a larger practice we will be able to offer a wider range of opportunities to prospective partners and salaried GPs, including the opportunity for career progression which, as smaller individual partnerships, we currently cannot offer. This in turn will secure the continued provision of primary medical services to our population, and a larger skill mix within the team will offer our population a sustainable, high standard of care delivered by the most appropriate healthcare professional.

As a merged practice we will have a wider pool of skills and experience that we can draw upon and allow us to increase the range of services that we currently provide.

2. How will this affect the present service? Will it be more efficient?

If we merge then it will mean that patients will be able to attend whichever of the four practice premises is most convenient to them. It is anticipated that the doctors will work across the four sites in order to support this choice. The current range of services offered by the practices will be maintained, as long as NHS England and NHS Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) continue to commission them from us.

At the moment each practice has differing appointment systems and we will need to consider how we take the best bits of each in order to have the most efficient and convenient system as is possible for the merged practice.

3. Can I keep the doctor that I have at present?

Yes.

4. Will the hours of opening remain the same as at now?

Like the three current practices the merged practice will be responsible for the care of its patients between 8am and 6.30pm Monday to Friday, excluding public and bank holidays. It is envisaged that the merged practice will be open outside

of these opening hours in line with the needs of its patients however no decision has been made so far as to when those extended hours will be.

5. What about emergency cover? Will this be the same or improve?

Cover outside the opening hours will continue as at present. Patients who need medical services outside of GP opening hours should call NHS 111. NHS 111 is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is free to call from a landline or mobile phone. Calling 111 will connect you to a team of fully trained advisers who are supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. They will ask you questions to assess your symptoms, and give you the healthcare advice you need or direct you to the most appropriate and available local service. They can make you an appointment with an out of hours GP if needed. If an ambulance is required the NHS 111 call adviser will arrange for one to be sent immediately. This service is commissioned by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough CCG.

6. Is the appointment system changing? Will I get to see a doctor or nurse any sooner?

We have reviewed the appointment systems offered by the current practices and note that all are slightly different in how they operate. We have considered how many appointments would be required by the merged practice but no decision has been made yet as to how the appointment system will operate. We have, however, determined that the phone system must allow patients to ring any of the four premises and be able to book an appointment at any site. The merged practice will also offer patients the ability to book appointments online if they wish to do so.

7. What is the timescale envisaged for the merger?

We will submit a formal application to NHS England later this month (April 2017) and if we are successful then we anticipate merging from 1 April 2018.

8. Is this connected with the changes taking place with the merger of Hinchingsbrooke, Peterborough and Stamford hospitals?

No.

9. Is there a standard/prepared document (possibly with an FAQ), that has been prepared for patients and interested parties?

Yes. We will add new questions to this document and will publish it on the practices' websites.

10. The article in the Hunts post says that patients and residents are being asked their views; given that I evidently haven't been asked, why wasn't I, given it looks like a fait accompli?

We will be discussing the proposal with patients of the practices and this will be done in liaison with the practices' PPGs, and further information will be made available in due course. We would like to reassure patients and residents that at this point a merger is not a fait accompli. The three practices are unable to merge without the approval of NHS England and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group and we must first submit an application to merge to those organisations. Part of the application requires us to set out how we will engage with patients and the first step was the press release along with an initial discussion with the chairs of the PPGs. We will definitely be speaking with patients registered with the practices as we are keen to hear from our patients so that their views can be taken into account as we develop our plans for how the merged practice could operate should our application be approved.

11. How do you intend to keep everyone informed?

We will continue to liaise with the practices' PPGs and plan to provide an update on the merger at each meeting. We will also regularly update this document as new questions are asked and it will be published on the practices' websites. The Acorn surgery has an active Facebook account and we are considering having a similar presence for the merged practice.

Posters will be displayed in each practice and we have set up a shared mailbox so that patients can submit their queries via email. For those patients who do not have an email address we will respond to written letters.

Frequently asked questions in relation to the practice premises

1. Will any of the current practice premises close?

No. The contract with NHS England would require the merged practice to continue to provide services from the four current premises. Should the merged practice wish to move to new premises at any stage in the future this will be subject to a lengthy process that will require approval by NHS England and the CCG.

2. If so, when do you think this is likely to happen?

The current premises are reaching capacity and in the future that will affect our ability to absorb the increasing population of the town and surrounding area. We are therefore working with NHS England and the CCG to see what funding may be available to the merged practice for new premises. The merged practice would not be able to just move to new premises; there is a lengthy process that would need to be followed to secure permission to do so and also funding for any new premises.

3. Why does this need to be done? Can you not have services at the present locations?

As noted above, we are reaching capacity within the current premises. We are also aware of the problems patients can have in parking (see question 5 below). We therefore feel the ideal situation would be for the merged practice to move into new premises within Huntingdon which would allow us space to increase the number of GPs, nurses and other healthcare professionals that we have and to address the access problems that some patients have.

Our vision would be to have new premises at a suitable location in Huntingdon and to maintain premises in Godmanchester.

4. Where will you be looking for any new premises or which premises do you envisage remaining open?

In the short to medium term we anticipate that the merged practice will provide services from the four current premises. In the long term our aspiration is to find new premises within Huntingdon (as well as keeping a Godmanchester site).

5. There are already parking problems. Will you take this into account in seeking new premises?

Yes, and this is a key consideration for any new premises.

6. Not everyone has access to their own transport. Will you take this into account?

Yes, and this is a key consideration for any new premises.

7. The practices cover a large area and there is a lot of new building taking place, for example in Godmanchester. How do you envisage people managing to get to a central location, say Huntingdon?

The considerable amount of building work in and around Huntingdon, including Godmanchester and the Alconbury Weald development, is one of the reasons why the merged practice would require new premises at a convenient location in Huntingdon and why we are committed to maintaining a facility in Godmanchester. We are aware of the difficulties in accessing the town at certain points of the day. We will therefore work with NHS England, the CCG and the local planners to identify suitable and convenient locations should we be successful in being awarded funding for new premises.

8. Is there not a case for at least surgeries in two locations?

Yes. As noted above, in the short to medium term we will maintain the four current premises. In the long term we are committed to premises in Huntingdon and Godmanchester.