

Use your medicines responsibly
West Norfolk CCG set to launch campaign promoting responsible use of medicines

By Dr Paul Williams

West Norfolk CCG's Governing Body member responsible for Prescribing and Education

The NHS is huge, it costs a fortune to run; it is the biggest employer in Europe. Imagine that, just think of the wage bill alone. The money it spends is the money you pay the government in taxes, and it never has enough, no matter how much money the NHS is given it spends it, and looks for more.

Here in West Norfolk the organisation which plans and buys NHS services is West Norfolk Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). We at the CCG thought it would be a great idea to tell you more about the local issues and problems we are dealing with and what makes running the NHS in West Norfolk different to the rest of England.

The CCG is overseen by a Governing Body which consists of, among others, local GPs. We have a legal duty to organise healthcare and to do it within the budget the government gives us. There is the first problem. In order to balance the books we have to make savings every year while still improving the care you get by paying for new treatments, coping with the increasing demands of the ageing population and also now tasked with delivering the "seven day NHS".

In this series of articles we want to explain to you some of the detailed problems we have to cope with locally and seek your help to deliver the savings needed to make the improvements we all want to see. One area where West Norfolk is different to a lot of other CCGs is in the money that is spent on the drugs you get prescribed by your doctor. We spend a lot more than other similar CCGs on these drugs, in fact the most recent figures suggest our average spend per patient is about 10% greater than the national average, and that spend is increasing at 5.54% a year compared to the national average spend increase of 4.33% a year. The budget in just West Norfolk for these drugs is £31.5 million pounds! So you can imagine spending 10% more than the average is a lot of money.

This year we were set a savings target of about £1 million pounds. At the moment we are only on course to deliver about a quarter of that. We are asking GPs to redouble their efforts to improve this saving; and this is where we need your help. We need you to act responsibly when requesting drugs from your doctor. Only order what you need, don't stock pile drugs in your home; co-operate with your doctor if he or she asks you to use an equally safe and effective drug which costs less. Where an effective treatment is available from your pharmacy use that and allow NHS resources to be used where they are needed most. You may be contacted by your surgery to see someone to review your drugs; we have found we can save about £100 every time we review a person on multiple drugs. Reviewing your medications can also make sure you are on the safest, most effective treatments for your condition and help to reduce adverse effects.

Next month we will start looking at specific treatments to explain how we can deliver safe effective care while saving money.