

Caithness Redesign – Princes Street Surgery

STATEMENT

We would expect that most of our patients will now have seen the Caithness Redesign publication which offers the people of Caithness the opportunity to make their feelings and concerns known on the proposed Hub options for Thurso and Wick.

We feel it is important to point out that the current situation for GP Practices will differ from practice to practice, so hope this statement will be helpful and enable patients to understand our position.

As part of the redesign, you will note the intention (or as in our case, the option) to include GP services within the Hub. We asked NHS Highland to give the surgery the opportunity to do this, if at some point this was felt to be in the best interests of our patients and the practice. We would like to point out that NO move would ever be contemplated unless it was an improvement on our current position and this is something we have made clear to NHS Highland.

Firstly, we do share the concerns of some patients who feel the additional distance to travel could be problematic for some – particularly the elderly and other vulnerable patients. We are not aware of any possible solutions to this at present, but expect patients will feedback their concerns to NHS Highland as part of the redesign process, bearing in mind this will probably affect other GP Practice patients too.

We also understand some patients will feel an emotional attachment to the current building – something which affects the GPs and Staff as well. We therefore do not believe we should move just because this is an option, and consideration has to be given to the pros and cons of such a big decision.

You will be aware that some of the GP Practices are now owned and managed by NHS Highland. However, we are an independent contractor and provide services to patients via a contract with the NHS. This means we are like any other small business, and must protect the interests of the Practice and patients, to ensure we survive in the current very difficult climate, where recruitment and retention problems have had an adverse effect on GP practices, particularly in the north. We wish to keep our independent contractor status. We see it as the most efficient way to provide GP services to patients.

The main issue we have - both now and going forward - is that our building is no longer fit for purpose. It is not owned by NHS Highland and we currently have a private lease arrangement in place. There is virtually no scope to improve the situation. Our list size has increased by approximately 600 so we are now looking after more patients than ever before. In more recent times, this is the single biggest increase for any Practice in Caithness.

We already have two Clinicians without a dedicated room to consult. This means we are constantly “room hopping” and have on occasions had to cancel appointments because Clinicians have had nowhere to go. This situation will become even more difficult when our new GP Registrar arrives in February. Becoming a Training Practice has been an exciting development and offers us the opportunity to train GPs, who may decide to stay in the Caithness area. We are sure everyone knows how important this is when considering the current recruitment issues. We are now the only training Practice in Caithness. We are

obviously keen to retain our Training Practice status going forward as this has potential benefits for ALL practices in our area.

We are already making difficult decisions around space/accommodation and although we can make some use of the Halkirk surgery to cope with room shortage, this is limited. The upshot of this is that we have known for some time, that the likelihood is that we will have to move at some point in the future, to deal with the increase in demand. The new GP Contract expects more multidisciplinary team working and we must ensure that we have enough space to accommodate everyone, and that we are able to offer the full range of services required. We feel it is also important that we remain an attractive proposition when it comes to GP recruitment.

Although ideally GP Practices should be located centrally, with adequate parking, this may not be possible in Thurso. We therefore asked for the option of a move to the Hub to be on the table. We would like to stress again that NO move would be contemplated unless we felt this would be in the best interests of our patients and the practice. For that reason we have asked NHS Highland if we can be involved in the planning and design so we can see exactly what is being offered.

Finally, patients may not be aware that under the terms of the new GP Contract, some services may no longer be provided by the Practice. Services such as phlebotomy (blood taking) and some treatment room procedures may be provided directly by NHS Highland to free up GP Practice time and make better use of clinical staff skills. We suspect these services would be provided by NHS Highland at the Hub and this would mean that patients would travel there for this. It could mean that some patients would then see the siting of GP services within the same area as better for follow up by the Practice, rather than the alternative which could mean two separate visits, to two different buildings.

As we understand that any possible change is difficult and there may be questions or thoughts on this particular subject, that you would like to bring up with us directly, we would like to offer patients the opportunity to write to us (see below) with any queries or concerns and we will do our best to answer your questions as fully as possible. In the spirit of the rest of the redesign process, we feel giving patients as much information as possible, is in the best interests of all concerned, and hope you find this brief useful.

A copy of this statement will be available shortly on our website and social media.

The Partners
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