

17 December 2013		ITEM: 5
Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Merger Proposal of Medic House and Tilbury Surgery		
Report of: NHS England – Area Essex Team		
Wards and communities affected: Tilbury and East Tilbury	Key Decision: Non-key	
This report is - Public		
Purpose of Report: The purpose of this report is to inform HOSC of a proposed merger of two GP surgeries in Tilbury, Medic House Surgery and the Tilbury Surgery. HOSC are asked to consider the proposal in light of the information provided in this report and decide whether they would support the proposed merger.		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Due to the condition of the current premises occupied by Dr Saha of the Tilbury Surgery, Montreal Road a proposal has been submitted to NHS England in view of a merger with another local practice. Dr Ramachandran and Partner operate out of Medic House Surgery in Ottawa Road which is a purpose built surgery built in the 1980's. If the merger goes ahead Tilbury Surgery would close and Dr Saha along with his Partner Dr Padmanabhan and all the registered patients would move to Medic House Surgery.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.1 The committee are asked to consider their support in view of NHS England agreeing to a merger between Medic House Surgery and the Tilbury Surgery.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

2.1 In June 2013 Dr P K Saha of the Tilbury Surgery, Montreal Road, Tilbury informed NHS England that he was considering retirement and terminating his General Medical Services (GMS) contract. The reason for this consideration was prompted by the premises in which he currently operates not meeting new Care Quality Commission (CQC) requirements and his wish to reduce his commitment to work in readiness for full retirement.

2.2 Tilbury Surgery has always been a very small practice run by a single handed GP. The surgery premises are rented from Thurrock Council and were once a café before being refurbished. The premises, not being purpose built, would not currently be deemed suitable for modern day primary care services and would certainly not meet CQC standards. The list size of the surgery has

always been around 1,000 registered patients with the practice remaining financially viable due to the relatively small overheads of the building and the family management of the business with Mrs K Saha, who is a registered nurse, acting as both the Practice Manager and Practice Nurse.

- 2.3 In view of the proposed termination notification NHS England began a scoping exercise in view of the management options. Due to the concerns around premises, the small patient list size and with 5 other surgeries within 0.1 to 0.25 of a mile list dispersal would have probably been the preferred management option in the event of termination. (See appendix A for site of neighbouring practices)
- 2.4 Prior to any formal stakeholder engagement taking place in view of Dr Saha retiring he retracted his intention to retire and took on a GP Partner, Dr Padmanabhan. Along with the new partnership came a proposal to NHS England in view of a merger with another local practice. Medic House Surgery, Ottawa Road, is currently run by Dr Ramachandran and Dr Raja who hold a Personal Medical Services (PMS) contract with NHS England. A PMS contract is a local contract which allows NHS England more contract negotiation over the national GMS contract.
- 2.5 The proposal made to NHS England involved the four GP's becoming partners under the PMS contract, merging the patient lists, closing the Tilbury Surgery and operating solely out of Medic House Surgery. Medic House Surgery is a purposed built surgery built in the 1980's. The surgery currently has a list size of 1,473 and provides sufficient room for two doctors to provide services at the same time. The proposal includes all four partners (3 males and 1 female) covering a rota to provide services to the combined patient list of 2,445.

3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

- 3.1 In principal NHS England supports the proposal of the partnership merger as it is in line with the future strategy of primary care in view of smaller practices coming together and closing premises that no longer meet the standard for health care delivery. However before any decision is made stakeholder engagement and consultation in view of the options available is vital. The options available are limited in this matter but are listed below alongside the implications of each option.

- ***Merger is Agreed***

If the merger is agreed it is likely to go ahead prior to the end of the financial year. Patients on Dr Saha's list will be notified that the merger will be going ahead and that on a specified date the Surgery on Montreal Road will close and that all future services would be delivered from Medic House, Ottawa Road.

The benefits of the merger would be:

- Dr Saha and Partner being able to continue practicing in a purpose built surgery that meets CQC standards.
- A partnership of 4 GPs increases choice to patients. With Dr Padmanabhan being a female GP there would also be on going choice to see a GP of either gender.
- Dr Saha and Dr Ramachandran will have the ability to plan their retirement and reduce their commitment to patients over time. This will allow patients more time to get to know and build relationships with the newer partners Dr Padmanabhan and Dr Raja before the older partners retire.
- NHS England's policy for varying a PMS contract is clear that any variation constitutes an opportunity for renegotiation. This merger would provide NHS England the opportunity to negotiate some key performance indicators into the contract in order to improve and maintain service provision. If a merger is agreed NHS England would be looking to improve and maintain good access for all patients through the contract.

Possible concerns over merger:

- Some patients will have further to travel to Medic House. As the Tilbury Surgery is in a parade of shops public transport supports current access for some patients. Public transport provision to Medic House is not as convenient.

- ***Merger is Rejected***

If the merger is rejected Dr Saha has made it quite clear that he would be looking to terminate the current contract and retire straightaway as he is not happy to continue to provide services from a building that is not Care Quality Commission compliant and fit for purpose going forward.

If this option was followed NHS England would need to undertake an options appraisal, again with full stakeholder engagement, to determine how best to manage the contract termination. The options available would be, list dispersal, establishing a branch surgery through a limited/restricted procurement or an open procurement. In view of the small patient list size of 972 patients and the standard of the current premises list dispersal would probably be the most viable solution.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- 4.1 NHS England, in principal, recommend the merger of the two practices for the reasons already identified in this report but seek the view of HOSC as a key stakeholder and partner in the delivery of health services in Tilbury and throughout Thurrock.

5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 All stakeholders are being consulted in this matter with patients being key stakeholders. Patient consultation commenced on the 22nd October 2013

when a letter was sent to the household of each patient registered with Dr Saha (Appendix B) and Partner and Dr Ramachandran and Partner (Appendix C). The letters explained the proposal and the impact on patients if the proposal went ahead. It informed patients of a patient engagement event on the 14th November 2013 where NHS England and the practice staff would be available to listen to opinions and concerns. The letters also gave details of how any concerns or comments could be fed back to NHS England if patients were unable to attend the event. The event on the 14th was held at Medic House Surgery giving the Tilbury Surgery an opportunity to see the surgery. The consultation period for patients closed on the 22nd November 2013.

The responses and feedback received from each patient group is outlined below:

Dr Saha and Partner

- 5.2 During the consultation period 2 written responses were received representing 0.2% of the practice population. Both responses raised concerns around getting an appointment. 1 raised concerns re the size of Medic House and it being located in an undesirable area.
- 5.3 5 patients (0.5% of registered list) currently registered with Dr Saha and Partner attended the engagement event. The issues and concerns raised by these patients were their ability to get an appointment quickly as this is something that they are accustomed to being able to do. It was recognised that with such a small number of registered patients access has not been an issue. 1 GP to circa 1,000 patients is uncommon and the possible reason for the responsive access that patients have received. Patients were however reassured by Dr Saha and colleagues that patient care would not be compromised and if a patient needed to be seen urgently they would be seen. It was acknowledged that patients may need to wait slightly longer for a routine appointment than they have previously. NHS England acknowledged the concerns around maintaining good access.
- 5.4 Two patients expressed concerns in view of the extra distance to travel. Even though mobility is not an issue for these patients at the moment they had chosen a practice in a location that is served well by public transport in case it is needed in the future. This concern was acknowledged and it was also confirmed that patients still had a choice and if they wished to register with a practice closer to home or with better public transport links this was within their right to do so.
- 5.5 Picking up prescriptions was also raised in view of the increased distance to travel. Again this was acknowledged and the practice explained that most pharmacies now offer a repeat prescription service that involves the collection and delivering of repeat prescriptions.

In conclusion 4 patients stated that they would be happy for the merger to go ahead, 1 patient stated that they didn't mind either way.

Dr Ramachandran and Partner

- 5.6 During the consultation period 5 written responses were received representing 0.33% of the practice population. Concerns raised were around access to appointments, the size of the building and whether Appledore Surgery, a branch surgery, would be affected.
- 5.7 14 patients (1% of registered list) currently registered with Medic House Surgery, attended the engagement event. The key issues raised were access, number of nursing sessions and Dr Ramachandran retiring.
- 5.8 Access was the main topic for discussion with a number of patients expressing concerns over getting through on the phone in time in the morning to book an urgent appointment before they have all been booked. In view of the difficulty that some patients have been experiencing booking an appointment there were concerns that with an increase in patient numbers matters would get worse. It was clarified that only around 1,000 patients would be joining the list and that with these patients would come two more Doctors and a practice nurse. Dr Ramachandran apologised to any patient that may have had difficulty accessing an urgent appointment as the practice do try to see or at least telephone triage all urgent cases. Patients were encouraged by the practice to raise formally any concerns around getting an appointment so matters could be addressed as the practice manager and GPs were not aware of some of the issues raised.
- 5.9 Patients expressed concerns, with an increase of patients, that the practice may lose it's ethos of being a "family run" practice. Many of the patients represented families who had been registered with Dr Ramachandran for many years. Dr Ramachandran acknowledged this and reassured patients that the other GPs involved shared in his approach to patient care. He also highlighted the benefit of the merger in bringing a permanent female GP to the practice which is something that has not been offered previously and which increases patient choice when seeing a GP.
- 5.10 NHS England acknowledged all the concerns raised by the patients attending and at the end of the event asked for a show of hands in view of supporting the merger. All 14 patients indicated that they were happy to support the merger.
- 5.11 Other stakeholders that have been consulted with are Thurrock CCG. No concerns or issues have been raised and in principal support the merger. As Thurrock CCG now hold the Information Technology (IT) for GP services there are IT implication to the merger with related costs attached. The Executive Committee of the CCG sits on the 11th December 2013 to agree whether these funds are available to support the merger if it goes ahead.

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

6.1 The main theme from patient feedback is access and the ability to be able to see a GP and or a nurse quickly. NHS England has listened to patients concerns around access and the table below shows the most recent patient survey results for access for each practice. It identifies that there are elements where both practices are doing well but there are areas that could be improved. NHS England would be looking to negotiate key performance indicators into any new contract to ensure that the practice offers and maintains good access for all patients if the merger goes ahead.

	Medic House	Tilbury Surgery	Thurrock CCG	National
Is your GP surgery currently open at times that are convenient for you? (Yes)	74%	76%	74%	77%
Generally, how easy is it to get through to someone at your GP surgery on the phone?	87%	85%	80%	75%
How helpful do you find the receptionists at your GP surgery?	91%	94%	89%	88%
Overall, how would you describe your experience of making an appointment?	76%	86%	77%	76%
How often do you see or speak to the GP you prefer? (Always or almost always)	64%	N/A	38%	40%
Last time you saw or spoke to a GP from your GP surgery, how good was that GP at the following? Giving you enough time	81%	74%	82%	86%
Last time you saw or spoke to a GP from your GP surgery, how good was that GP at the following? Involving you in decisions about your care	56%	62%	67%	75%
How long after your appointment time do you normally wait to be seen?(Less than 5 minutes)	28%	14%	9%	10%
Did you have confidence and trust in the GP you saw or spoke to? (Definitely)	62%	44%	54%	64%
Would you recommend your GP surgery to someone who has just moved to your local area? (definitely)	38%	36%	42%	49%

This data taken from the period July 2012 – March 2013. Next available results available in December 2013

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Not applicable for this report.

7.2 Legal

Not applicable for this report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

A Equality and Impact Assessment was carried out in September 2013 by NHS England and the overall impact of the proposed merger was low.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

Not applicable for this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

Not applicable for this report.

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Appendix A – Location of Tilbury Surgery, Dr Saha and Partner, in relation to other surgeries in the area
- Appendix B – Tilbury Surgery patient consultation letter
- Appendix C – Medic House Surgery patient consultation letter

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