

**Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

**Report from Dudley PCT, Podiatry Services**

**Update and Progress Report on Podiatry Services**

**Purpose of Report**

To inform the Committee about the operation of the PCTs Podiatry service since the change in criteria for patient access to the Podiatry service in April 2006.

**Background**

In April 2006 the Trusts Podiatry service became a needs based service rather than following an age related criteria as had previously been the case. The change in the access to the service followed a period of consultation during 2005 which included all GP practices in Dudley, both the Dudley South and Dudley Beacon and Castle PCTs Professional Executive Committee's, Patient Forums and the Health Select Committee.

The Podiatry Service was prior to 2006 open to all women over the age of 60 years and men over 65 regardless of whether there was any medical need. This however, was not sustainable and waiting times for appointments were increasing to a level where the service was potentially not adequately meeting the needs of the patients. The service had a caseload of over 23,000 patients to which was being added approximately another 500 new referrals each month.

After wide consultation, it was agreed that the Podiatry Service should direct its resources at those patients with medical and foot conditions putting them at most risk. This brought the service into line with most other Podiatry services across the country.

**Progress of the podiatry service since April 2006**

The criteria has been applied to all new patients referred to the service since April 2006 however, there was insufficient capacity within the service at that time to safely re-assess the existing patients on the caseload to determine whether they met the criteria.

From January 2007 the podiatry department has been working in collaboration with the Access Partnership to transform the way the service operates. The Access Partnership work with organisations across the U.K to help improve access to services and to reduce waiting times.

It was further confirmed by the work with The Access Partnership that the podiatry service needed to increase the capacity of the service to address ongoing waiting time issues.

During the last six months there has been additional investment put into the service resulting in some additional clinical posts. The service is currently now able to provide 'return' appointments for all patients within a maximum of 12-14 weeks. This represents a considerable improvement for the majority of patients requiring ongoing treatment.

Treatment intervals are determined by the podiatrist at the time of treatment and appointments are automatically sent correspondingly. Telephone lines into the appointment office are also now open 9.00am-5.00pm Monday to Friday in the event of patient queries.

Other improvements completed or due for completion in the near future include:

- Successful establishment of a Podiatry User Forum.
- A new system of self-referral for patients
- Improved health education material
- Production of a service leaflet
- New and improved signage in clinics
- New referral forms for professionals

The extra investment within the service has also provided the capacity to enable the re-assessment of all existing patients against a ratified foot assessment pathway to determine their eligibility for the service. Patients identified as possibly no longer being eligible are assigned a 30-minute assessment-only appointment so that a safe discharge can be achieved. A decision to discharge any patient is made after careful assessment of both their medical and foot care needs by the podiatrist.

The Trust recognises that many of the patients currently being discharged have no medical need for the podiatry service but they do have a need for nail care. We are working together with Andrew Hindle (Commissioning Lead for Older People) to assist Age Concern to establish a nail cutting service.

### **Recommendation**

The Committee are asked to note the improvements to the podiatry service in terms of reduced waiting times, improved communication, and stakeholder involvement in the redesign of the service. The criteria for access to the service has been in place since April 2006 and applied to all new patient referrals, the service is now undertaking a re-assessment of patients on the caseload to confirm their eligibility against the criteria and discharging patients as appropriate.

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