

## **STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

In September this year, Abbey Meads Medical Group, Moredon, Taw Hill, Eldene, and Phoenix surgeries began working collaboratively as a primary care network with the support of Integral Medical Holdings (IMH). This collaboration was formed fundamentally to maintain the services provided by these surgeries and to look to develop new ways of working in line with the Government's plan for primary care - the 'General Practice Five Year Forward View'.

Practices across the country are struggling to sustain services, particularly in the wake of a national shortage of GPs that has made it extremely difficult to recruit new GPs to provide clinical services. This, coupled with the increasing workload in General Practice, has made it less attractive for GPs to take on the personal financial and managerial responsibility of becoming partners in GP surgeries. The inability to recruit partners for these surgeries combined with the rising cost of using temporary (locum) GPs to maintain services, meant that there is a widespread serious and imminent risk of bankruptcy and Practice closure across the country.

Had we as partners of these five practices not taken the steps we did and had this resultant collaboration not happened, there was a genuine risk that Practices would have closed, resulting in up to 54,000 patients being re-assigned to other local surgeries, potentially destabilising other services in the area.

What has happened in Swindon is not new; it is happening all over the UK. General Practice is facing a crisis in recruitment and funding. We seek to create a service that will ride this storm, maintain localised clinical services in communities, and develop new ways of providing care.

There have been a number of challenges in delivering this collaboration. Not least, introducing a new centralised telephone booking system. We continue to work to resolve technical and process issues with this system that will ultimately lead to a more effective and flexible service.

Local politicians have been invited to meet with the General Manager and CEO of IMH, who have facilitated the collaboration and supported the back-office functions of the practices. We continue to engage with other local stakeholders to examine how we can improve the service. There are no 'speedy solutions' to this or any of the issues facing the NHS. We would welcome constructive input from patients via the Patient Participation Groups to look at ways we can improve the service; but this must be constructive if we are going to create a service that is sustainable and effective in its delivery of health care to the people of Swindon.

We have a dedicated, committed and enthusiastic team of doctors, nurses, and administration staff who are working tirelessly to make this a success. We consider ourselves to be part of your community, which is why we want the people of Swindon to understand the reasons why these practices have come together. We would like to take this opportunity to not only thank all our staff, but all those patients who have been supportive, understanding and grateful.

Dr David Jones  
GP Partner