

## USE YOUR VOTE!

I'm always going on about the unfair way in which the funding for the NHS in Mid Essex has been distributed by the morons and petty crooks who have been responsible for holding the purse-strings in the past – but a group of patients in SWF has taken the campaign a step further. They are looking at the bigger picture. They're concerned about the level of the funding throughout Mid-Essex – the fact that we get a great deal less than patients in surrounding areas (and elsewhere) often with no apparent justification. Dr Caroline Dollery estimates that we get £81 per patient per annum LESS than the average – and yet we are expected to provide the same level of service as elsewhere. Our Patients' Participation Group (PPG) has set up an e-petition and I would urge you to support it. No matter how good clinicians may be at papering over the cracks in the service there will inevitably be deficiencies when compared with more fortunate areas – the Postcode Lottery still reigns supreme within the NHS!

If you want a better deal for yourself and your family I would urge you to go online now and 'vote' for fairer funding for this area. The indefatigable Ian Gillard has written about it in this week's Focus – and the website (which contains a link to the e-petition) can be found at [www.fundingmenhs.simplesite.com](http://www.fundingmenhs.simplesite.com). This is an example of 'people power' – patients standing up for their own rights - and it's a welcome development!

## SAVE YOUR BACON

Sarah Boseley, writing in The Guardian, reports: "Bacon, ham and sausages rank alongside cigarettes as a major cause of cancer, the World Health Organisation has said, placing cured and processed meats in the same category as asbestos, alcohol, arsenic and tobacco. The report from the WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer said there was enough evidence to rank processed meats as group 1 carcinogens because of a causal link with bowel cancer. It places red meat in group 2A, as "probably carcinogenic to humans". Eating red meat is also linked to pancreatic and prostate cancer, the IARC says."

This is not news to Focus readers of course. Back in 2007 and subsequently I reported the World Cancer Research Fund's advice. This organisation enlisted the aid of literally hundreds of experts who looked at pretty much all the evidence and concluded that avoiding processed meat (including bacon – sorry!) is one of the 'Ten Commandments' which should be observed by those who want to keep their chances of succumbing to one of the preventable cancers to the bare minimum. Staying slim and avoiding alcohol (or minimising your intake) are also key to avoiding cancer. Breastfeeding too provides valuable protection. There is some welcome news, however – coveting one's neighbours oxen does NOT appear on the list of DO NOTs and you are therefore free to indulge in this activity without incurring the wrath of the medics.

My advice is – take heed of this guidance. If you want to indulge in 'the full English' that's OK so long as it's only once in a while – but DO specify that you want it served *without* asbestos, alcohol, arsenic and tobacco. There's no point in asking for trouble!

About 30 years or so ago Richard Doll and Richard Peto, having pointed the finger at cigarette smoking as a major cause of cancer, estimated that about one-third of cancers are attributable to diet – and since then the evidence has tended to support their view. Lifestyle is now known to play a major role in many if not most of the illnesses, disabilities and deaths that we see on a regular basis in general practice.

The controversial Sugar Tax report has finally been published and, as ever, Jamie Oliver is furious that but not more is being done to protect the public (and, particularly, the kids). Whilst admiring Jamie's crusades I think we should have the temerity to point out that a tax on celebrity chefs would also I do a great deal to help us avoid the sin of gluttony and keep us on the paths of righteousness.

The old song reminds us:

*"If it's something you enjoy you can be certain that,  
it's illegal, it's immoral, or it makes you fat."*

To that we can add *"And, by the way, it gives you cancer too"* ... even though it doesn't scan very well.

For more info, Google: *'processed meats cause cancer'* and *'NHS Choices Sugar Tax.'*

## **ONE IN FOUR GP APPOINTMENTS**

Is unnecessary, says Dr Chaand Nagpaul of the BMA. I've mentioned in the past the problem that we GPs have with patients who make appointments – and then (a) don't show up and (b) don't let us know. Each one thereby denies another patient a much-needed consultation. This worthy doctor, however, is aiming his wrath at an altogether different target. He says: "At a time when GPs are overwhelmed and cannot offer patients the access and time that they need, clearly any measures to reduce inappropriate and unnecessary demands on our time should be welcomed. An estimated 4.5% of GP appointments are taken up with simply rearranging hospital appointments, and it is scandalous that up to 15 million GP appointments annually are wasted in this way, denying other ill patients access to a GP for medical reasons."

Like pretty much everything else in the NHS, this situation is getting worse. One example – a patient came home from a fortnight's holiday to find a letter on the doormat telling him he'd missed the 'window of opportunity' for booking an appointment by one day. He rang the number given to explain he couldn't possibly have called them because he was out of the country when the letter arrived and was told: "You need to go back and see your GP and ask him to write another letter"

This is not a new phenomenon. For the past 25 years Broomfield hospital has employed a lady to respond to each and every enquiry with the simple instruction to "Go back and see your GP and ask him to write another letter." (I assumed it was 'a lady' but it may equally well have been a recording on a telephone answering machine. We've ruled out the possibility that it could be a trained parrot on 'health and safety' grounds – and, moreover, if it was a non-union parrot, there could be repercussions!)

Anyway, don't take my word for it, try it for yourself and see. Here are some examples of the questions you can ask and the answers you will receive:

"I've got diarrhoea and I'm due to be admitted tomorrow to have my piles banded. What should I do?"

**"Why don't you go back and see your GP and ask him to write another letter"**

Could you tell me where I can park so I don't have to walk too far to A&E?

**"Why don't you go back and see your GP and ask him to write another letter"**

"I'm afraid I'm stuck in traffic and I'm going to be at least 30 minutes late for my appointment for Mr Lugg's ENT clinic"

**"Why don't you go back and see your GP and ask him to write another letter"**

Sometimes I get so utterly sick of the system that I write back and ask: "What am I going to put in "another letter" that I didn't put in the first one?!?" There is never a reply ... because the 'lady' who gives out the standard advice has no idea what the answer to this question is.

Dr Nagpaul's colleague, Dr NagEverybody-ElseToo cautions: "This merry-go-round is an absolute waste of time for the patient, the GP and the hospital. It delays care and is costing the NHS dearly in bureaucracy and capacity." But is it "costing the NHS dearly". Presumably some little pen pusher has worked out that it's cheaper to employ an army of people to get in the way of referrals and endlessly waste GPs' and patients' time than it is to employ doctors and nurses to actually see the sick and needy and deal with their problems. Presumably a good proportion of those needing hospital care eventually get fed up and (a) decide to put up with their festering leg ulcers and/or prolapsing piles and/or the discharge they have pouring from at least 3 of their orifices at any given time ... and/or whatever else it is they've got ... or (b) decide to 'go private' ... or (3) they drop off the perch whilst they are waiting to be seen.

As if things weren't already bad enough, there's an extra tier of bureaucracy to contend with now – referral filtering – so (before your request for a second opinion gets anywhere near a consultant) we get letters back saying things like: "We note you have referred this patient to an orthopaedic surgeon. We are returning this referral letter to you because we were wondering if you had considered referring Mr Brown for physiotherapy first". Unfortunately they don't tell the patient they've blocked the referral – so you are left thinking that you are safely on your way to the Valhalla that is the consultant's clinic. Meanwhile we have to write yet another letter saying: "Not only did we consider it – we actually did it and it didn't do a blind bit of good – as you would have known if you'd taken the trouble to read the referral letter and the information we sent with it, you pillock!"

**Dr Choleric**