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MOTHER'S DIET AFFECTS BABY

The BBC reports that “Women who eat healthily before and during pregnancy may cut the risk of their baby developing a heart problem.” This is the conclusion of a US study involving 19,000 women. A healthy diet was deemed to be one containing lots of fresh fish, fruit, nuts and vegetables.

The Beeb reminds us that “Pregnant women and women trying to conceive are already advised to take certain supplements. Experts recommend folic acid to reduce the risk of other birth defects like spina bifida, and vitamin D for healthy bones and teeth. In England, the government's Healthy Start scheme provides vouchers for pregnant women that can be used to buy milk and vegetables.” Anyone in this situation should also cut down on or, preferably, stop anything known to be harmful – like smoking.

DEMENTIA (AGAIN)

“Dementia may not be the fast-growing epidemic it has been painted to be,” The Guardian reports. NHS Choices says: “Latest data from Europe shows the percentage of dementia cases have levelled off, rather than increased. However, as the elderly population is growing, the actual number of people with dementia will continue to rise, though perhaps not to the levels of a "dementia epidemic", as previously predicted.”

NHS Choices, looking at the evidence in the round, sums up as follows: “We should not take this study to mean that UK dementia prevalence rates are definitely in decline. The results tentatively suggest they might, as well as highlighting the need for more accurate and up-to-date information on dementia prevalence, and to constantly challenge the assumption that the prevalence of the disease is rising. Only good data will settle the debate.”

The conclusion is “It is important that we don't get complacent about the potential toll dementia could take on public health. While some risk factors, such as smoking, are in decline, others – particularly obesity – may lead to an upsurge in cases.”

THE PRACTICE

Before she moved on, Julie Bradshaw, an NHS England employee, announced that the APMS contract for The Practice in SWF would expire this year and it was, therefore, due to be put up for grabs and we'd be informed in July so that ‘local interests’ could prepare some sort of jointly agreed bid. July came and went – and so an email was sent to NHS England asking about the current position.

Cathy Galione, the Contracts Manager, replied as follows: “In line with the current APMS contract provisions, NHS England have (sic) recently extended the current APMS contract held by The Practice Plc to 31 March 2017. This contract extension will allow adequate time for the strategic APMSAA of future service in South Woodham Ferrers in conjunction with Mid Essex CCG. It will also allow time for the receipt and consideration of the Project Initiation Document (PID) in relation

to the proposed new SWF development. It is therefore anticipated that this APMS contract procurement project will commence during the Summer of 2016.”

It strikes me a feeble excuse – particularly given that the original selection process was mired in controversy. Perhaps the most bizarre aspect was that, after criticism from all quarters because the patients had not at any stage been consulted about the PCT’s plans, we were told that a ‘patient representative’ had been appointed – and s/he was to act on behalf of the patients (but not until all the local interests had been eliminated.) None of the patients ever knew his/her name, s/he never made any attempt whatsoever to ascertain their views, and, despite numerous promptings, the ‘representative’ has never come forward. Given the sleaze which was the hallmark of the PCT era, I think the only thing we can be sure of is that the ‘patient representative’ – if s/he existed at all - wasn’t a patient registered at the practice.

So, summing up, here we have yet another local example of a situation that has been mishandled by the NHS from beginning to end. The PCT dealt with the matter initially (making the decision to hand over the surgery to The Practice behind closed doors and without ANY meaningful dialogue with the patients ... as is usual in these cases.) NHS England has handled the extension of the contract in much the same way (making the decision behind closed doors and without ANY dialogue with the patients) ... so no change there then.

Indeed this time around, not only was a decision concerning SWF made in secrecy, there wasn’t even an announcement after the decision had been arrived at – it was left to us to find out what was going on. Clearly there should have been discussion with the SWF representatives – including ‘the locality’, the body representing all the practices in South Woodham – before coming to this decision. And shouldn’t the Patient’s Participation Group have been told? So much for the NHS mantra: ‘No decision about me without me.’ Given this new development and the decision to close the Clements House Practice without any meaningful discussion with the patients, it’s clearly been consigned to the bin.

Dr John