

# PCT agrees to review community GP hours

**EXCLUSIVE**  
**BY MIKE FOSTER**

FAMILY DOCTORS in Oxfordshire have forced a PCT to review medical cover at community hospitals after a new contract cut GP hours.

Oxfordshire GP Duncan Keeley told *BMA News* that local GPs and patients have been protesting against a decision by Buckinghamshire PCT to award a contract that provides only four hours of medical care a week for eight beds at Thame Community Hospital.

Dr Keeley, a GP partner at The Rycote Practice, which along with another local practice had submitted a bid to provide care for eight hours a week, has complained to the PCT and NHS South Central about unfairness in the tendering process and the lack of public consultation.

He told *BMA News* that he believed the tendering process was 'flawed' as the PCT had appeared to only accept bids to deliver care in four hours.

Dr Keeley said previously that the 12 beds at the hospital, now reduced to eight, had been covered with between 30 to 40 hours of

medical time. He concedes this was 'generous' but also included time for a GP trainee attached to his practice to learn while caring for patients.

Thame GPs, working with the League of Friends of

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Thame Community Hospital, have gathered a petition of 4,000 signatures against the changes and have received the backing of the Buckinghamshire PHOSC (public health overview and scrutiny committee).

The contract to provide GP cover at the Waterside Unit at Amersham Hospital and Thame, Marlow and Buckingham community hospitals was awarded to The Practice Plc in July. The company runs 13 walk-in centres and GP practices in England, three of which are in Buckinghamshire.

Buckinghamshire PCT director of strategy and planning Richard Mills, in a September briefing paper for the PHOSC, argues there was no significant change in service.

The paper says past

arrangements had not specified GP hours and the PCT had set new specifications after assessing the nursing and therapy staff available and the clinical dependency of patients in the beds.

However, Buckinghamshire PHOSC chair Mike Appleyard, in a letter to the PCT after the watchdog had heard presentations from all the parties, says the change is a substantial variation and the review 'should clarify whether the new proposed level of cover will impact detrimentally on the delivery of care to inpatients'.

A six-member review panel will assess the impact and report back to the PCT board by November 24.

A spokesperson for The Practice Plc told *BMA News*: 'We are confident that patients are receiving safe and high-quality care. We understand that as a result of local pressure, Buckinghamshire PCT has initiated a review of the service specification.

'We welcome this review and if a change to the service is considered appropriate we will be happy to work with the PCT to deliver the revised specification.'

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